

AVRAHAM WEINROTH

By the Light of the
Sefas Emes

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

Rabbi Yehudah
Aryeh Leib Alter

לאור
שפת אמת

 DISTRIBUTED BY
FELDHEIM

FRONT COVER PHOTO:

Beis Midrash of the Gur Chasidim, in Poland – from the website:

“Poland, Beyond Imagination,” courtesy of Adam Koren

<https://www.polin.co.il/gorakalwaria?lightbox=dataItem-kfcuf80b>

BACK COVER PHOTO (*vignetted and cropped from the original*):

Synagogue in Góra Kalwaria, Pijarska 10/12 – by Lysy –

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (CC BY-SA 3.0)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PL_G%C3%B3ra_Kalwaria_Synagogue_1.JPG

Cover design based on the original Hebrew edition

design by Hotam +972 77-308-8172

ISBN 978-1-68025-700-7

Copyright © 2025 by Avraham Weinroth

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be translated, reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
even for personal use, without written permission from the publisher.

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

www.lehmanns.co.uk

DISTRIBUTED IN AUSTRALIA BY:

Golds World of Judaica

+613 95278775

info@golds.com.au

www.golds.com.au

Printed in Israel

Dedicated with respect and awe
in loving memory of

my dear father

R' Moshe Aharon Weinroth *z"l*

ben R' Mordechai Eliezer Weinroth *z"l*

and my dear mother

Mrs. Dreizel Weinroth *a"b*

bas R' Aryeh Aftergut *z"l*

True *maaminim* with all their hearts



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
נלב"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
נלב"ע ו' באדר תשע"ח

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

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

מכתב ממורנו הרב הגאון רבי משה בצלאל אלטר שליט"א

בה"י, ב' אדר א' תשפ"ב
י"ד של כ"ק מרן ה"בית ישראל" זי"ע ועכי"א

למע"כ
מכובדי הדגול והנעלה
משנתו סדורה ובהירה
חריף ובקי, פה מפיק מרגליות
הרב אברהם וינרוט הי"ו לאוי"ט

שלום רב לאוהבי תורתך.

לאשר מע"כ עומד להוציא לאור את ספרו החשוב "לאור השפת אמת" המיוסד ובנוי על הספר הקדוש "שפת אמת" על התורה, מכ"ק זקני מרן אדמו"ר מגור זצוק"ל זי"ע, הנה תורת ה"שפת אמת" רחבה מני ים, אם אמרו חז"ל ע' פנים לתורה, הרי שכבבואה לכך ניתן לומר על הספה"ק "שפת אמת", וכבר אמר כ"ק זקני הרבי ה"אמרי אמת" מגור זי"ע לגאון הרב יעקב משה חרל"פ זצ"ל שביקש להוציא פירוש על ה"שפת אמת", כי כל יחיד יכול למצא פירושו הוא בספה"ק שפת אמת.

עברתי על עלים מספרו החשוב הנ"ל ונהנתי מאוד מדרך מחשבתו והבנתו העמוקה והבהירה המיוסדת על דברי ה"שפת אמת", וכהמשך לספרים החשובים שחיבר מע"כ על תורתם של המהר"ל, האור החיים הק', הקדושת לוי, ורבי צדוק מלובלין זצוק"ל זי"ע, בבחינת "אתמחי גברא וקמיע", המשיך כב' ביתר שאת בספרו הנוכחי "לאור השפת אמת", וזכה להעמיק חקר ולמצא לקח בדבריו המדודים של בעל ה"שפת אמת" זי"ע.

הנה מע"כ זוכה לקיים את דברי התנא באבות "טוב תורה עם דרך ארץ", מי אני כי אתן הסכמתי לספרו, אך מוצא אני לנכון לצטט את שכתב כ"ק זקני מרן האדמו"ר בעל ה"אמרי אמת" זצוק"ל זי"ע בהסכמתו לספר החשוב "פרדס יוסף" עה"ת, וז"ל במכתבו אל הרב הגאון והחסיד ר' יוסף פאצאנווסקי זצ"ל.... ואני שבע רצון ממה שכ"ת עוסק בתורה וגם עוסק במסחר ולכן הרשיתי לאחי.... להסכים גם בשמי על חיבורו....

אמינא אני ברכת הדיוט כי זכותו של בעל השמועה זי"ע תעמוד למע"כ לברכה והצלחה בכל מעשי ידיו ויזכה לדורות ישרים ומבורכים מתוך ברי אות וכט"ס.

ביקרא דאורייתא
משה ב. אלטר

מכתב ברכה מאת הגאון הגדול רבי **ברוך מרדכי אזרחי** זצ"ל
חבר מועצת גדולי התורה וראש ישיבת "עטרת ישראל"

בס"ד, שבת תשפ"ב

הנה ב"ה, ידידי הרב **אברהם וינרוט** הי"ו נ"י מצליח שוב להפתיענו ומעורר התפעלותנו
בספר חדש. הפעם "**לאור שפת אמת**".

הספר "שפת אמת" מפורסם כאוצר בלום של עמקות, חריפות, מבריקות ולמדנות בענייני
מחשבת התורה וביראת שמיים. "השפת אמת" הידוע והמפורסם כאחד מגדולי גאוני
הדורות "השקיע" בספרו הידוע את גאוניותו ולמדנותו גם בתורת היראת שמים ופרש
בפנינו יצירת-על של "שפת אמת על התורה".

והנה בא ב"ה ידידי רב **חביבי**, והשקיע כישרונותיו הברוכים והעילויים, עם כושר עיונו,
בקליטת אורותיו של ה"שפת אמת" להגישם באורם המיוחד, להנגיש אותם לדורשי תורת
ה"שפת אמת" בניצוצות אורם המאיר כאלומה זוהרת ובוהקת.

כבר הרבינו בשבחו של ידידי מחבר ה"לאור שפת אמת", אך דומה כי לא סיימנו לומר
שבחיו, ולא עוד אלא ששמו הטוב המיוחד והמצוי, בלי עין הרע, ביחוד שמו כמבהיר
ומלמד את תורת גדולי הדורות בתורה וביראת שמים עולה ומשתבח מספר לספר, כי
אמנם חיבוריו וספריו נפלאים המה.

מי יתן ויעזרהו הקב"ה בכל ענייניו, שלו ושל משפחתו, של ספריו ועיסוקיו וימלא הקב"ה
משאלות ליבו לטובה ולברכה כל הימים, ברוח ובגשם.

ביקרא דאורייתא
ברוך מרדכי אזרחי

בס"ד טבת תשפ"ב

מכתב ידידות

שמחתי מאוד לראות ספר נוסף בסדרת הספרים המופלאה של ידידי ותלמידי מאז, איש המעלה היקר והדגול, ת"ח מופלג המשקיע כוחות מרובים בעמלה של תורה ולירד לסוד רזיה, הרב פרופ' אברהם וינרוט שליט"א.

ספר "לאור שפת אמת" – שתכליתו להביא בפני המעיין את דרכו המופלאה והיחודית של רבן של ישראל, גאון התורה והמחשבה, ומגלה צפונותיה, מרנא בעל ה"שפת אמת" זיע"א, אשר הרבה מדבריו ומיסודותיו נכתבו בקוצר היריעה והרב המחבר שליט"א, ברוב עמל ויגיעה זכה לחשוף צפונותיו ולגלות את האור הגדול שבספריו בכל פרשה ופרשה. והוא תועלת גדולה לכל מבקשי ה' המשתוקקים לאור תורתו של בעל ה"שפת אמת" זיע"א.

והנה, הרב המחבר ידיו רב לו בהרבה מחלקי התורה, ומלבד ידיעותיו הרחבות הוא חוקר ומעמיק לירד לעומקן של דברים לגלות רזי תורה וטעמיה והוציא סדרת ספרים המאירים עיניים בתורתם של רבותינו גדולי הדורות של המהר"ל, של בעל ה"אור החיים" הקדוש, ובעל ה"קדושת לוי" וספרי מרנא גאון המחשבה הכהן הגדול מלובלין זיע"א, ועכשיו הוסיף נדבך נוסף להאיר עיניהם של המעיינים בדברי רבותינו להתרומם ברוממות התורה ועומק המחשבה, ויהיה בעז"ה לתועלת ולברכה למבקשי ה' הרוצים להתחמם באורה של תורה.

ותעמוד לרב המחבר זכותם של רבותינו, שזוכה להביא תורתם לפני הרבה מבקשי ה' וזכותו של מרנא בעל "שפת אמת" שהוא מביא היום את תורתו לפני המעיינים תעמוד לו, למען ימשיך בעבודתו הברוכה שהיא במסירות נפש גדולה להיכנס לכבשונו של עולם עם עומס עבודתו בתפקידיו החשובים, ויתן לו ה' יתברך בריאות נאמנה ומנוחת הנפש להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה.

המברך באהבה
דוד כהן

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

בס"ד, שבט ה'תשפ"ב

אחד מספרי המחשבה היסודיים של עולם החסידות בפרט ושל כלל ישראל בכלל, הוא הספר **"שפת אמת"**, אשר נדפס מרשימות כתי"ק של הגאון הקדוש רבי יהודה לייב אלתר האדמו"ר מגור **צוקללה"ה**, שהאיר בתורתו וקדושתו על פני תבל, ומסר נפשו למען כלל ישראל.

כידוע וכמפורסם, הספר **"שפת אמת"** כולל לא רק רעיונות וביאורים רבים, אלא יש בו מכלול שלם ובהיר של תורת החסידות בכל חלקי התורה"ק, זאת לצד רוח היראה הטהרה והקדושה החופפת עליו, וכל מי שיש לו עינים לראות ולב להבין רואה כי שכינה מדברת מגורנו של אותו צדיק, ודבריו עמוקים מאד רזין דרזין טמירין וגניזין.

וכמה קולע ומכוון הוא שם זה **"שפת אמת"**, אשר נבחר על ידי תלמידיו בהיותו הפסוק האחרון אשר כתב בכתבי קדשו, שהרי מדור לדור מתרבים ההוגים בדבריו הקדושים, בבחינת **"שפת אמת תיכון לעד"** (משלי יב, יט).

אמנם אין זה קל, כלל וכלל, להבין את עומק דברי ה"שפת אמת" אשר נהג לכתוב דברים עמוקים מאד בקיצור רב מאד, וכפי שהתבטא השפ"א עצמו במכתב שכתב, כי בהיות שגדול הקושי להכניס את עומק הכוונה אל הכתב, על כן מוטב לכתוב במלים קצרות (עיין בליקוטים - לחנוכה). ואם להבין את דבריו קשה, הרי שלהנגיש את דבריו לאחרים קשה הדבר אף יותר, לעתים כמעט בלתי אפשרי. ונוסיף עוד, שאף השפ"א עצמו מזכיר בכתביו את הענין שדיבור הצדיק גבוה מאד מאד עד שאין כמעט מי שיוכל להבינו, ועל כן קרא מרע"ה לעצמו **"ערל שפתים"**. (עיין שפ"א שמות, וארא תרל"ז).

• • •

אשר על כן כמה יקר וגדולה עלינו להכיר להאי גברא יקירא, איש האשכולות, סייפא וספרא, **הרב פרופ' אברהם וינרוט שליט"א**, איש חי רב פעלים, אשר מלבד מעשיו הטובים בצדקות ובחסדים נודע בשערים בזיכוי הרבים בחיבוריו היקרים והמאירים, וכעת הוציא מתחת ידו יצירת פאר משובחת נוספת **"לאור שפת אמת"**, ובה מערכות מתורת ה"שפת אמת" על פי סדרי הפרשיות והמועדים.

וכבר הוכר פעלו המבורך לציבור בספריו התורניים ובהם **"ביטחון והשתדלות"**, **"עיוני תפילה"**, **"עשות משפט"**, ובשנים האחרונות בסידרת ספרי ה"לאור", הלא המה **"לאור המהר"ל"**, **"לאור קדושת לוי"**, **"לאור רבי צדוק"**, **"לאור החיים"**, ורבים הם הנהנים מספריו. וכבר אמורה מילתי במכתביי הקודמים, כי ספריו של הרב המחבר שליט"א אינם אוסף של רעיונות וביאורים כמקובל בספרי מלקטים על התורה, אלא יש בהם חכמה ויצירה, באשר הוא צולל לעומק ורוחב הענין ומגיש בפני הלומדים את הסוגיה פרושה ומבוארת מכל צדדיה כשולחן הערוך מטעמים, בלשון צחה וברורה בשפת ימינו, בבחינת

קנקן חדש מלא ישן, מתוך דברי התורה העמוקים של מאורי ישראל הגדולים, עד שגם אנשים שאינם מצויים בספרים אלו מתחברים ומתדבקים בתורתם של גדולי עולם.

ועברתי על הספר הנוכחי "**לאור שפת אמת**", וראיתי כי אף בו הגדיל לעשות, ובעמל רב, ולא הביא הדברים כציטוט בעלמא אלא חתר להבין היטב את הענין כולו, ואין ספק שרבים אשר לא הורגלו לעיין בספר "**שפת אמת**", הנה כעת לנוכח הגילויים הנפלאים והמאירים שנחשפים בפניהם, יתענגו וישתוקקו להצטרף ללומדיו.

והיא שעמדה לו לידידנו המחבר הר"ר אברהם שליט"א, בהיותו כל השנים בבחינת "בן תורה", המחובר לתורה הקדושה, ובתורתו יהגה יומם ולילה, ומפעים את הלב לראות הכיצד אדם שטרוד בעניינים חובקי עולם הגשם מצליח לשקוד על התורה"ק בהתמדה, ולהצמיח פירות נפלאים כל כך, ולא אכלא שפתיי מלומר כי רבי אברהם שליט"א מחייב את כל בעלי האומנות כדוגמתו, ממנו ראו וכן תעשו, להיות איש הישראלי דבוק בתורה והיא משוש חייו למרות כל הטירדות והחשבונות הרבים אשר רבו כמו רבו על בני אדם בחלד.

ואין לי אלא לברך בכל לב את ידידי הרב המחבר שליט"א, שיזכה לסייעתא דשמיא להמשיך ללמוד וללמד, ולחבר עוד ספרים כאלו אשר יש בהם זיכוי הרבים גדול, מתוך שלווה ונחת, יחד עם רעייתו מרת שושנה תחי' מנב"ת וכל צאצאיהם, בבריאות הגוף והנפש, אושר ושמחה כל הימים, אכ"ר.

הכו"ח למען התו"ל

ישראל שניאור

[פה עיה"ת בני ברק]

אברהם אלימלך בידרמן

רח"ה ה'תשע"ו

בני ברק

בס"ד, יום ג' לסדר 'אשר כתבתי להורותם',

כ"ג לחודש ש'לום ב'רכה ט'ובה (שפ"א לקוטים לר"ח שבט) תשפ"ב

שלום ברכה וטובה, למעלה האי גברא יקירא הדגול מרבבה, אוהב את התורה, והיא לו עוז ואורה, מפז ומפנינים מייקרה, מסלסל ומעמיק בה למצוא לקח וסברה, חיכו ממתקים וכולו מחמדים, דורש טוב ליהודים, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים, **הרב אברהם ויינרוט שליט"א**

שמחה גדולה היא לראות מעשה ידי להתפאר, מערכי לב ומח בשפה ברורה ונעימה, לאור תורתו של הרה"ק ה'שפת אמת' זי"ע, אשר מי הוא שיעיד על אור השמש בצהריים, האי ספרא קדישא, אשר הינו עמוק מני עמוק, ובתיבות מדודות וספורות חובק זרועות עולם, אך זאת ידענו כי רבבות אלפי ישראל התייגעו בכל אות ואת מדבריו הק', ולמדו תיתי תילין של הלכות בכל קוץ וקוץ, ושפת אמת תיכון לעד להאיר נשמות ישראל וליישר להם דרכים בעבודתו ית'. ואשרי ואשרי חלקו אשר זכה לעשות 'צוהר' לחיבה, איבעית אימא 'חלון' ופתח ושער להיכנס על ידו לאורו הגדול של השפת אמת, ואיבעית אימא 'אבן טובה' – התלויה בצווארו של 'אברהם' בדבריו המאירים, ומים עמוקים ידלם איש תבונה, ומיגו דזכי לנפשיה זוכה נמי לאחרני, להרבות אורה בעולם, ובדברי רש"י בריש פרשתו 'אשר תשים לפנים – כשלחן הערוך ומוכן לאכול לפני האדם'.

והאמת אומר ולא אכחד, כי התפעלתי ביותר בראותי כיצד ממשיך הוא ביתר שאת במפעלו הגדול, בפתחת שערי אורה בספרי גדולי הדורות הגבורים אשר היו בארץ, לאחר שכבר הוציא לאור על תורתם של המהר"ל והאור החיים הק' והקדושת לוי והכהן הגדול הגה"ק רבי צדוק הכהן מלובלין זכותם יגן עלינו, ולא ישקוט האיש אלא מסמיך ברכה לחברתה בעשות ספרים הרבה.

והברכה אחת היא כי זכותו הגדולה של השפת אמת אשר מתניתא דמר קמתניתא ועסקת בבירור מקחו של אותו צדיק – תגן עליך ועל כל אשר לך, להצלחה גדולה בכל מעשי ידיך, ולמלאות כל משאלות לבבך לטובה, כי אורך ימים ושנות חיים יסיפו לך מתוך בריות גופא ונהורא מעליא באורה ושמחה וששון ויקר.

בכבוד וביקר

אברהם אלימלך בידרמן

הרב הגאון **שמאי קהת הכהן גרוס שליט"א**
מ"ץ דקהל מחזיקי הדת דחסידי בעלזא, בעל שו"ת "שבט הקהתי"

בס"ד

יום ה' לסדר ויקחו לי תרומה, אדר א תשפ"ב

שמחתי לראות את ספרו החשוב והמועיל של הרב אברהם וינרוט שליט"א, 'לאור השפת אמת', המבאר ומלבן את דבריו העמוקים של האי צדיק וקדוש רבינו בעל **השפת אמת** זכותו יגן עלינו.

כידוע, חשיבות רבה נודעת לספר קדוש זה, אשר אלפים מאחינו בני ישראל הוגים ומתעמקים בו. אולם כידוע, רבנו המחבר נהג לכתוב דיבוריו בקצרה ובעומק רב, עד שלא כל אחד זוכה לרדת לעומקם של דברים.

ועתה בא הרב אברהם וינרוט שליט"א, הידוע בחיבורים החשובים שהוציא לאור עולם בענייני תפילה, אמונה, חושן משפט ועוד, ובמיוחד ספריו 'לאור קדושת לוי', 'לאור רבי צדוק' הכהן, 'לאור המהר"ל', 'לאור החיים' הקדוש, ועתה זכה להתעמק בדברות קדשו של רבנו **השפת אמת**, העלה פנינים ומרגליות יקרים מתוך דבריו, לבאר ולהאיר צפונות דבריו כיז' ה' הטובה עליו, תוך הוספה מדברי קדשם של חז"ל בש"ס ומדרשים, דברי ראשונים ואחרונים, ודבריהם של גדולי ההשקפה השונים, באופן מאיר עיניים ושובה לב, הבנה עמוקה, באופן בהיר, מובן ושווה לכל נפש.

זכות גדולה היא לרבי אברהם וינרוט, אשר בזכות שקידתו ועמלו, רבים אשר לא הורגלו לעיין ולהגות בספר 'שפת אמת', יוכלו להחיות נפשם ולהצטרף ללומדיו, כשהדברים מאירים לפנייהם כספירים.

הנני מברכו ברכת כהן, כי יפוצו מעיינותיו חוצה, ויזכה לזכות את הרבים בחיבורים נוספים, ככל אות נפשו לכבוד ה' ותורתו, וזכותו של רבנו **השפת אמת** תעמוד לו ולזרעו לאורך ימים ושנים טובים, בבריות גופא ונהורא מעליא ובכל מילי דמיטב.

מכתבי ברכה לספרים קודמים

מכתב ברכה מכ"ק מרן אדמו"ר מבעלזא שליט"א

בס"ד, ו' כסלו תשפ"ב לפ"ק

עטרת של' ורב ברכות והצלחות,

אל מע"כ ידידנו היקר והחשוב,

מוה"ר ר' אברהם וינרוט שליט"א,

רמת גן יצ"ו.

אחדשה"ט בלו"נ חפצה!

הנני בזה לאשר קבלת ספרו החדש "לאור החיים" על התורה ומועדים.

הספר הובא אל הקודש פנימה, וכ"ק מרן אדמו"ר שליט"א האציל את ברכתו

הק' וציוה להשיב:

יישר כוח, ויזכה להמשיך להגות בתוה"ק כאוות נפשו, ולחדש חידו"ת לאמתה

של תורה בניקל, ולהצלחה רבה בכ"ע מתוך רו"נ וכט"ס.

הכו"ח בפקודת הקודש

א. וינד

משב"ק

בעה"י, כ"א בתמוז, לשנת "יהיה שפע חיים וברכה" תשפ"א לפ"ק

בימי בין המצרים, יזרח אור לישירים, וה' קרנו ירים,
למעלת כבוד ידידנו הנכבד איש חי ורב פעלים, שמו מפארים בהלולים,
פרו' הרב **אברהם וינרוט** שליט"א
רמת גן יצ"ו

תקדמנו ברכות טוב,

בנועם רב נתקבל לידי כ"ק מרן אדמו"ר שליט"א ספרו "**לאור החיים**" על פרשה ומועד, אשר כדאיתמחי גברא בחיבוריו הקודמים הולך מחיל אל חיל גם בספרו זה, בו פותח שערים להאיר עינים בתורת מרנא ורבנא בעל אור החיים הקדוש זי"ע ועכ"י.

ברכת הקודש שלוחה לו, יישר כוחו וחילו לאורייתא, ויה"ר שזכות התורה יחד עם זכותו הגדולה של האוה"ח הק' יעמדו לו במגן האלף להתברך מנותן התורה ית"ש לראות ברכה והצלחה בכל דרכיו, מתוך רוב נחת ושפע, אושר דלעילא, ומתוך הרווחת והרחבת הדעת אכיה"ר.

הכו"ח בפקודת הקודש שליט"א
שלום שטמר

מִרְנָה הַגָּאוֹן הַגְּדוֹל הָרַב אֶהֱרָן יְהוּדָה לֵיִב שְׁטֵינְמָן זצ"ל

בא לפני ספרו של הרב אברהם וינרוט שליט"א העוסק בנושא של "ביטחון והשתדלות".

מדובר בספר חשוב מאוד, בנושא שהינו מיסודות האמונה וההשקפה הנכונה, ובפרט בדורנו.

הספר מקיף את דעות הראשונים והאחרונים בבהירות רבה, מסכם את הסוגיות בשפה ברורה, ובכלל ערוך בטוב טעם ודעת, עדי כי כל מעיין עשוי להפיק ממנו תועלת רבה, ולהתבשם מדברים ישרים וברורים. ראוי הוא מאוד הספר הזה לבא על שולחן מלכים, מאן מלכי – רבנן. ואני מברך את הרב המחבר, ספרא וסיפא, הרב אברהם ב"ר משה אהרן וינרוט הי"ו, כי יזכה לברכה והצלחה בכל מעשיו, לנחת דקדושה מכל יוצאי חלציו, יפוצו מעיינותיו חוצה ויזכה לחבר חיבורים נוספים וטובים כחיבור הזה, לזכות את הרבים. אך טוב וחסד ירדפוהו כל ימי חייו, לאורך ימים ושנים.

הכותב וחותם לכבוד התורה ולומדיה

א.י.ל שטיינמן

ט' סיון תשע"ב לפ"ק

מרת הראשון לציון הגאון הגדול הרב **עובדיה יוסף זצ"ל**

הסכמה

הובאו לפניי גליונות הספר הנותן אמרי שפר "החיים בהלכה" סובב על ענייני קדושתם וערכם של החיים בהלכה, מעשה ידי אומן נטע נאמן, צנצנת המן, ומלבשתו ענוה ויראת חטא, ונוגה לו סביב, חכו ממתקים וכולו מחמדים, שוקד באהבה על דלתות התורה, הרה"ג **רבי אברהם וינוט שליט"א**, אשר נושא ונותן באמונה בדברי רבותינו הפוסקים, ראשונים ואחרונים, חדשים גם ישנים, ונחית לעומקא דדינא, ומסיק שמעתא אליבא דהלכתא. וכביר מצאה ידו לסדר הדברים בטוב טעם ודעת, בבקיאות רבה ובסברא ישרה, יפה דן יפה הורה, אשרי יולדתו צינה וסוחרה אמיתו, כאשר ה' אתו ירבו כמותו תרב גדולתו, ותנשא מלכותו, ולפעלא טבא אמינה איישר חיליה.

לא נצרכה אלא לברכה, יהי רצון שחפץ ה' בידו יצלח לברך על המוגמר ועוד יפוצו מעיינותיו חוצה להגדיל תורה להאדירה, ברבות הטובה גם עד זקנה ושיבה, וסיב ובלה בה, ומינה לא תזוע, שאין לך מדה טובה הימנה, ועוד יעלה מעלה מעלה ללמוד וללמוד ולעשות לגאון ולתפארת, והיה שמו כשם הגדולים אשר בארץ וכל אשר יעשה יצליח.

עובדיה יוסף

מרת הגאון הגדול רבי **חיים פינחס שיינברג זצ"ל**

הביאו בפניי ספר חשוב ויקר, אשר חיברו הרה"ג רבי **אברהם וינוט שליט"א**, העוסק בשאלות הנוגעות לקדושתם וטיב ערכם של **החיים בהלכה**, ולמקרים שבהם יש לבחור בין חיים לחיים, ובין חיים לערכים אחרים. חשיבותה של סוגיה זו ברורה על פניה מטבע הדברים, וקיים צורך ברור לרדת לשורשם של דברים, בעיון, בבקיאות, בסדר ובבהירות.

חיבור זה מבחיר סוגיות עמוקות אלו, בהבנה למדנית חריפה ובשפה ברורה ובהירה. הדברים מרהיבים עין ושובי לב, מבוארים בעיון גדול מסוגיות הגמרא, הראשונים עד לדברי האחרונים, ערוכים בטוב טעם ודעת בכל עניין ועניין, והכל מוגש לפי המעיין דבר דבור על אופניו. ניכרים בדברים העמל הרב, השקיה, ההבנה העמוקה של הרב המחבר בסוגיות הנ"ל, כשהמחבר נושא ונותן במלחמתה של תורה בכישרון רב ובידע בכל סוגיות ההלכה בעניינים הנ"ל.

ואף שזמן רב שאיני יוצא בהסכמות לספרים, מטעם שעמדי, מכל מקום לא אמנע טוב מעליו ועל כן אברך את הרב המחבר שיזכה ויעלה ספרו על שולחנם של מלכים, מאן מלכי רבנן, ויתקבל באהבה ובשמחה לפני הלומדים, ויזכה לחבר עוד חיבורים נפלאים כאלו בתורה הקדושה, ולשבת באהלה של תורה כל ימי חייו מתוך מנוחת הנפש והרחבת הדעת.

הכו"ח לכבוד התורה

חיים פינחס שיינברג

הגאון הגדול הרב **דוד כהן שליט"א**
ראש ישיבת "חברון - כנסת ישראל" וחבר מועצת גדולי התורה

י"ג תשרי תשס"ו

לידידי מכבר הימים, עו"ד הרב אברהם וינרוט שליט"א

שמחתי מאוד לראות את ספרו החדש בענייני הביטחון בבורא וחובת ההשתדלות, שכבר כתב מרנא גר"א בכמה מקומות, שזה היסוד הראשי לעבודת התורה והמצוות של האדם בעולם הזה, ואשריו שזכה להעמיד פרקי יסוד בעניינים אלו.

עוד זכורני ימים מקדם, כאשר חבש ידידי המחבר את ספסלי בית המדרש בישיבת "עטרת ישראל" והיה ככוכב המזהיר בכישרונות נדירים, ובהבנה מעמיקה וחודרת, ועוסק בתורה בביקוש ובצמאון גדול.

ותמיד היה זכור אצלי לטוב תקופה זו שבה מסרתי שיעור בישיבה לתלמידים מצטיינים, ובמיוחד כשמשתתף בשיעור תלמיד כמו ידידי ר' אברהם, החודר לעמקם של דברים בבהירות נפלאה ובהסברה ישרה.

וכאשר זכיתי, הרבה שנים אחר כך, לראות את ספרו של ידידי המחבר בענייני גניבה וגזלה, רחב ליבי, ועמדתי משתאה ומתפעל איך הצליח להוציא מתחת ידו יצירה נפלאה זו, ועם טרדותיו הרבים השכיל להעמיד העניינים הקשים והעמוקים ביותר בקרן אורה, והצליח להאיר בבהירות נפלאה ובשפה רהוטה מושגים קשים, שהיו לנחלת הרבים המתענגים על ספריו.

ועכשיו, ברכתי שנית ברכת הנהנין, על ספרו החדש שבו פרקי יסוד בהלכות דעות וחובת הלבבות, ולא הניח ידו גם מלעסוק בפרקי יסוד של עניינים אלו, שהם יסוד לכל הנהגת האדם ועבודתו בעולם הזה.

והספר מלא וגדוש בהיקף גדול, ובכישורן רב, נכתב בשפה בהירה, ומיוסד על מקורות נאמנים. והצליח להעמיד הדברים כשולחן ערוך, כדי השם הטובה עליו.

וברוך השם שזכה לכך, ואין לי אלא לברכו להמשיך במפעליו הגדולים, להיות משכיל בכל דרכיו, ולזכות הרבים בתורתו.

בידידות נאמנה ובברכת כהנים באהבה,

דוד כהן

הרב הגאון הצדיק רבי **דוד אבוחצירא שליט"א**

בעה"ת י"ד כסלו תשע"ד אז תצליח את דרכך וא"ז תשכ"ל לפ"ך

לכבוד מעלת ויקרת ידידי ומכובדי

יקר ונעלה לשם טוב ותהילה

כמוהר"ר דר' אברהם וינרוט שליט"א

רמת גן יע"א

שלום ירבה וכל טוב סלה.

יקרת מכתבו הגיעני במועדו ובתוכו רצוף אהבה רבה, ואתא ואייתי מתנייתא בידיה האי ספרא דנהר דעא, הספר החשוב והיקר המקיף כלול מכל, מלא וגדוש, דרוש וחינוך, והכל בטוב טעם ודעת. דבר דבור על אופניו. תפוחי זהב במשכיות כסף, דברי פי חכן חן, ישר חילו וכחו לאורייתא. כה יוסף ה' וכה יתן. וכבר אתמחה בברא בחבוריו היקרים המסולאים מפי רב ומתוקים מדבש ונופת צופים, ועוד לו בכתובים בעה"ת. חזק ואמץ רוב אונים ואמץ כח.

וברכות לראש משביר רב אחאי גאון רבי יעקב שליט"א ורבי צבי שליט"א וכל המשפחה הקדושה כל אחד לפי כבודו הטוב חיים עד העולם אמן ואמן.

בידידות ובהוקרה ובהערכה רבה,

דוד אבוחצירא

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	Plumbing the Depths	<i>xxiii</i>

❧ *Sefas Emes on the Torah* ❧

<i>Bereishis</i>	Human Intelligence: A Blessing That Can Also Be a Liability	3
<i>Noach</i>	Holding onto the Divine Image Is the Key to Man's Survival	12
<i>Lech Lecha</i>	The Quest That Pursues Man	23
<i>Vayeira</i>	"From My Flesh I Perceive Hashem" — The Essence of <i>Bris Milah</i>	33
<i>Chayei Sarah</i>	A Half Name and Ripples of Holiness	43
<i>Toldos</i>	"He Shall Give...and Continue Giving"	51
<i>Vayeitzei</i>	Spiritual Redemption amid Physical Exile	58
<i>Vayishlach</i>	The All-Encompassing Whole Is Spiritual, Whereas the Diverse Details Are Physical	66
<i>Vayeishev</i>	A Flaming Fire and Two Types of Tranquility	76
<i>Mikeitz</i>	High Tide and Low Tide	87
<i>Vayigash</i>	Encounter between the Plower and the Reaper	95
<i>Vayechi</i>	What Constitutes Life?	101
<i>Shemos</i>	The Names Went into Exile and Brought about the Redemption	111
<i>Va'era</i>	The Obligation Imposed by Redemption	120

<i>Bo</i>	Sanctity and Renewal in a World That Operates According to the Laws of Nature	127
<i>Beshalach</i>	The Song That Bursts Forth When Points Are Joined to Form a Line	134
<i>Yisro</i>	We Will Fulfill the Commands and Hear the Utterances	144
<i>Mishpatim</i>	“Judgment Is G-d’s”	151
<i>Terumah</i>	The Person Who Believes That “Hashem Is My Shepherd — Will Not Lack”	159
<i>Tetzaveh</i>	Mitzvos Make the Man	170
<i>Ki Sisa</i>	Shabbos and the <i>Mishkan</i> Are Portals for Accessing the Holiness within the Mundane	177
<i>Vayakhel</i>	Advancing and Withdrawing — Maintaining Worthy Intentions Necessitates Periodic Pauses	187
<i>Pekudei</i>	“The Man of Faith Channels Great Blessing”	194
<i>Vayikra</i>	The Call That Preceded the Sacrifices	205
<i>Tzav</i>	“For a Mitzvah Is a Lamp, and Torah Is Light”	212
<i>Shemini</i>	Sacrificing Our Personal Autonomy	220
<i>Tazria</i>	“You Have Formed Me Last and First”	228
<i>Metzora</i>	Life and Death Hinge upon Speech	235
<i>Acharei Mos</i>	Fulfilling the Mitzvos	243
<i>Kedoshim</i>	G-d Desires Man’s Holiness	250
<i>Emor</i>	<i>Hakadosh Baruch Hu</i> Purifies Yisrael	256
<i>Behar</i>	Fanning a Coal into a Flame	263
<i>Bechukosai</i>	Moving Beyond the Bounds of the Intellect’s Grasp	271
<i>Bamidbar</i>	There is Nothing Besides the Creator, and There Is Nothing Besides the Torah	278

<i>Naso</i>	The Wondrous Phenomenon of the <i>Nazir</i>	287
<i>Behaalosecha</i>	The Western Lamp and the Western Wall	293
<i>Shelach</i>	Mitzvah Emissaries Come to No Harm	303
<i>Korach</i>	Discord Heralds the Abandonment of Mankind's Mission	311
<i>Chukas</i>	Establishing Contact with Hashem's Word Within	321
<i>Balak</i>	A Hall That Leads into a Corridor	330
<i>Pinchas</i>	He Deserves to Take His Reward	341
<i>Matos</i>	Practice Is the Root of Understanding, Not Vice Versa	349
<i>Masei</i>	What Doesn't Destroy You Makes You Stronger	357
<i>Devarim</i>	Who Has Exalted Us above Other Languages	365
<i>Va'eschanan</i>	"Hashem, Open My Lips" — The Privilege of Standing before Hashem in Prayer	375
<i>Eikev</i>	The Person Who Comes to Listen Is thereafter Drawn to Hear More	384
<i>Re'eih</i>	"Who Imparts Understanding to the Rooster"	392
<i>Shoftim</i>	Two Keys to the Gates of Understanding	399
<i>Ki Seitzei</i>	Binding and Release — From the Shackles of the <i>Yetzer Hara</i>	406
<i>Ki Savo</i>	What Constitutes True Renewal?	416
<i>Nitzavim</i>	The Natural Inclination to "Choose Life!"	427
<i>Vayelech</i>	A True Elucidation of Chazal's Teaching: "To Confer Reward upon Those Who Bring Them" ...	434
<i>Haazinu</i>	"He Has Implanted Everlasting Life within Us"	443
<i>V'zos Haberachah</i>	Breaking the Time Barrier	454

❧ *Sefas Emes on the Moadim* ❧

<i>Elul</i>	Finding Strength and Focusing as the Finish Line Approaches	465
<i>Rosh Hashanah</i>	A Sign Has Significance	474
<i>Yom Kippur</i>	“A Day of Bringing about Love and Friendship” . . .	482
<i>Sukkos</i>	Love of Hashem Intensifies Faith, Replacing Worry with Joy	492
<i>Hoshana Rabbah</i>	The Willow Branch as an Empty Receptacle Ready to Be Filled	499
<i>Shemini Atzeres/ Simchas Torah</i>	“Bring Us Back, Our Father, to Your Torah”	508
<i>Chanukah</i>	“These Lights Are Holy”	514
<i>Parshas Shekalim</i>	The Last Lap before the Renewal of the “Heart Year”	523
<i>Parshas Zachor</i>	Renewing Our Fervor	531
<i>Purim</i>	The Day of Lots	539
<i>Parshas Parah</i>	Ash That Is Earth	546
<i>Parshas Hachodesh</i>	“Create for Me a Pure Heart, G-d, and Place within Me an Upright Spirit”	552
<i>Shabbos Hagadol</i>	“Greatness Is Yours, Hashem”	562
<i>Pesach</i>	The Role of the Individual in Recounting the Departure from Egypt	569

<i>Shevii Shel Peasch</i>	Splitting the Heart's <i>Yam Suf</i>	579
<i>Lag B'Omer</i>	Fear of Heaven — Glory within Glory	588
<i>Shavuos</i>	<i>Bikkurim</i> , Shavuos, and Torah's Life-Giving Power	596

Introduction

Plumbing the Depths

“The designs in a man’s mind are deep waters,
but a man of understanding can draw them out.”

*(from the poem Keil Mistateir,
sung at the Third Shabbos Meal)*

☞ Line by Line

STUDYING *SEFAS EMES AL HATORAH* is a little bit like encountering a dot-to-dot picture: a series of simple dots connect to each other with lines, one at a time and following a specific order, and then suddenly, an overall picture emerges. In many pieces of *Sefas Emes al HaTorah*, he first poses an incisive question on the simple meaning of the *pesukim* and/or their message. Then, a Midrash is quoted that doesn’t seem to have any connection with the topic at hand. The Midrash is then elucidated with a profound and beautiful idea, usually originating with the *Chiddushei HaRim*.

After this idea has been presented, further, more subtle ideas are advanced linking the various points and suddenly — as though by waving a magic wand — an all-encompassing panorama emerges. Some fundament of our faith or religious outlook is presented in stark clarity, illuminated in a new and fascinating light. All the various sources, *pesukim*, and teachings of Chazal dovetail beautifully. “The convoluted becomes straight” (*Yeshayah* 40:4), and all the earlier difficulties disappear.

☛ A Profound Grasp Facilitates Generalization

WHAT IS THE secret of this masterpiece? The following personal recollection illustrates the kind of approach that can lead to these spectacular results.

One of the leading Torah sages of our generation used to deliver a *shiur* in which he would identify lines of reasoning that he showed were distinctive to individual *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im*, reflected in their opinions in several different discussions throughout *Shas*. He explained how each of them was following his own particular “approach” regarding some fundamental point that was raised in the context of one topic but applied elsewhere as well. These expositions were breathtaking.

On one occasion, after my initial excitement had subsided, I found the courage to ask him, “How do you do it?”

I was only a young *bachur* at the time, yet this venerable sage responded simply: Look, from your experience as a yeshiva student you already know that a certain kind of question is typical of R. Akiva Eiger, whereas a different kind of question is suited to the *Ketzos Hachoshen*, and yet another kind to the Pnei Yehoshua or the Maharsha, to R. Chaim Soloveitchik or R. Shimon Shkop. When you have been learning for another few years, you will somehow sense that a particular angle is typical of R. Yochanan and a different angle of Reish Lakish; that this approach is typical of Rava (“Rava-dik,” as he expressed it) and that a different approach suits Abaye (“Abaye-dik”). It then becomes a simple matter to discern which points lie along which common lines of thought and from there to arrive at an overall picture.

I found this response even more stunning than his wonderful *shiur*. In time, I came to understand what he was trying to convey.

The key to accessing this ability lies in the depth of one’s grasp. The more fundamental one’s understanding, the more apparent it becomes that a topic’s numerous details are all consequences of one basic feature, stemming from the same point. When learning practical halachah, for example, the person who just studies a series of

rulings without being shown their underlying logic will see a mass of details whose relationship to one another is unclear. However, once he grasps the rationale behind the rulings, he will appreciate that many of these details are outgrowths of a single principle and united by a common underlying logic.

The same holds true for the detailed twists and turns of profound Talmudic discussion as well as topics of faith and outlook. Superficially, many of these details seem disparate and unrelated, but the scholar who is capable of abstract thought and can uncover their deeper levels will divine the common logic uniting them. The deeper one is able to delve, the clearer it becomes that they are all based upon a few common principles. The extent of a scholar's ability to generalize and unite is directly proportional to the depth of his study and his capacity for abstraction; he will be able to line up many details beneath the headings of a few principles and show how many paths lead to one place. This kind of profound grasp makes it possible to fill in connecting lines between various different points, bringing them together as part of a clear overall picture.

☛ The Capacity for Renewal

AS AN EXAMPLE of the above, I would like to present the Sefas Emes's beautiful exposition of the human capacity for spiritual renewal (found in *Likutim* to *parshas Bereishis*). The Sefas Emes poses a fundamental question: Why does the Torah make a point of listing what was created on each of the six days of creation? Why is it important that we know what was created on the third day or the fourth day, etc.?

The Sefas Emes prefaces his response to this question by first posing another one: Why did the *levi'im* in the Beis Hamikdash sing a different song each day of the week? Why was it important that each day's song differ from that of the previous day? To this, the Sefas Emes responds:

Chazal (*Berachos* 40a) comment on the *pasuk*, "Bless Hashem day by day" (*Tehillim* 68:20): "Do we bless Hashem only by day and

not at night? Rather, this comes to teach us: ‘Give each and every day its relevant blessings.’” In other words, each day has some unique feature that should be acknowledged in a blessing of its own.

The Torah tells us that something different was created on each of the six days of creation in order to convey that the Divine life-giving force creates something new on each day that subsequently endures.

The world’s creation was not a one-time event. Hashem’s word that created substance *ex nihilo* continues sustaining it each day anew. Each day we praise Hashem, “Who in His goodness, each day constantly, renews the act of creation” (*Birkas Yotzer*, Shacharis).

Thus, every single day, from the world’s creation until such time as it ceases to exist, a life-force is renewed for that particular day; this is the unique feature of each new day.

Chazal teach us (*Avos* 5:1) that “The world was created through ten utterances.” In other words, the world was brought into being through words and letters. Each day sees a new illumination of the letters that sustain creation.

Thus, rather than being like a cistern that holds a static supply of water, the world is akin to a fresh spring that is constantly being replenished, for a new flow of life-force is infused each day.

Man is therefore expected to access and draw upon this fresh life-force, not living each day solely because he was alive yesterday. Man doesn’t live by virtue of having acquired permanence. Rather, he is nourished by each day’s renewed Divine illumination that didn’t exist previously. Each day’s good deeds must therefore relate to that renewed day. This is the meaning of Chazal’s teaching, “Bless Hashem day by day’ — Give each and every day its relevant blessings.”

A person is able to connect his deeds directly to each day’s renewed Divine creative force. He is able to draw upon the wellspring of holiness and Divine vitality that is replenished on that day.

Every day, a person sings a new song that relates to and fits the novelty of that particular day and is sourced in the Divine force that revitalizes those parts of creation that are renewed that day.

The root of the word *shir* (song), consisting of the two letters *shin* and *reish*, is found in two things that represent the concept of being sourced at the very beginning and leading from there to the ultimate destination:

- *Shir* is related to *shurah*, meaning a line that joins a number of points.
- *Shir* is related to *shur*, meaning a wall, as we find in the *pasuk* (*Bereishis* 49:22), “Girls would climb on the wall.” Rashi explains: “The Egyptian girls would climb onto the wall to glimpse [Yosef’s] beauty.” A wall is an unbroken line of bricks or stones extending from one point to another.

A person experiences novelty every day, drawing nourishment from today’s source of creation that did not exist yesterday and drawing a line connecting it to this new day’s reality. The *levi’im* would therefore sing a different song in the Beis Hamikdash every day, relating to the unique spiritual illumination of that day.

This obligation to tap into the novelty of each day is not confined to the *levi’im*; it is incumbent upon each and every Jew. A Jew is supposed to develop novel Torah insights on a daily basis that match that day’s renewed Divine illumination.

This idea can be used to resolve a question that some might find troubling. If every person’s novel insights are valid, why were they not formulated in the past by others? Why didn’t the *Rishonim* arrive at these insights centuries ago? The answer is that past generations were unable to develop insights whose inspiration comes from the new illumination of each new day.

Each day possesses its own uniqueness, conferred by the Divine illumination radiating at that time. Only the person who is alive on that day can draw upon the spiritual flow conveyed by the Divine emanation renewed on that day to create something that didn’t exist previously in the realm of Torah insights, or, for that matter, in any other mundane realm of human endeavor. This is why the *Rishonim* could not arrive at the Torah insights of contemporary generations.

Continuing this line of thought (in *Likutim, Ahavah*) the Sefas Emes explains Chazal's comment (*Sifrei, Va'eschanan* 33) on the *pasuk*, "that I am commanding you **today**" (*Devarim* 6:7) — "Every day you shall regard them as new." How are we to understand the idea of a person finding novelty each day in Torah teachings that have existed unchanged for thousands of years? The answer is that while these teachings themselves have endured since ancient times, we who have received the Torah and study it are imbued with a tremendous capacity for creativity. Each day's new spiritual light reaches us, connecting to the Divine creative drive that is renewed daily. The admonition to regard the Torah's teachings every day as new enjoins a person to work on feeling that his relationship today with Torah isn't a matter of rote — simply a continuation of the previous day — but taps into the world's renewed life force that is created anew, once again, today.

A person's power of novelty and originality thus reaches him through connecting to the Divine creative power that is renewed daily. However, accessing this power of novelty is contingent upon him rising above a life of routine and rote through nullifying himself to the Divine force of renewal.

In this connection, the Sefas Emes cites a novel idea that he heard from his grandfather, the *Chiddushei HaRim*, regarding Chazal's maxim, "Learning as a child is comparable to ink written on new paper, whereas learning as an elder is like ink written on erased paper" (*Avos* 4:20).

This Mishnah is usually understood as referring to the faculty of memory. A child retains things well, and whatever he is taught becomes deeply engraved upon his mind, whereas an older person's mind is already filled with old memories, and new information is not absorbed well or clearly. According to the *Chiddushei HaRim*, however, the difference between the two goes far beyond this. The Mishnah is distinguishing between the young and the elderly on the basis of their capacity for originality.

To explain this, the Sefas Emes cites Chazal's comments (*Koheles*

Rabbah 4:1) on the *pasuk*, “The poor but wise child is better than the old and foolish king” (*Koheles* 4:13):

“The poor but wise child is better” — this refers to the *yetzer hatov*. Why is it referred to as a child? Because it only joins a person from the age of thirteen onwards. And why is it referred to as poor? Because not everybody heeds it. And why is it referred to as wise? Because it teaches people the right path.

“Than the old and foolish king” — this refers to the *yetzer hara*. Why is it referred to as a king? Because everyone obeys it; and why is it referred to as old? Because it is attached to a person from childhood until old age. And why is it called foolish? Because it teaches a person to take an evil path.

The Sefas Emes explains that what distinguishes the person who is controlled by his *yetzer hatov* from the person who is controlled by his *yetzer hara* is the degree of his submissiveness.

The *yetzer hara* is called a king because it does not submit to the yoke of Heaven’s rule. Its lack of submissiveness is also the reason why it is called old; it defers to no one and expects to receive honor from others, not to honor them (the old are indeed most prone to a craving for honor). The person who is dominated by his *yetzer hara* therefore exhibits this trait. By contrast, the *yetzer hatov* is always humble and submissive, aware that all life flows from Hashem and that its role in all its accomplishments is merely that of the axe in the hand of the hewer. An ax on its own doesn’t hew anything; the person who wields it is the true actor, and the implement itself is insignificant. The person who realizes this knows that the effectiveness of his deeds is wholly attributable to the Divine force throbbing within him. The Sefas Emes explains that the *yetzer hatov* is therefore called a child, “because it is attached to the root and to the origin of vitality (as a child is close to the beginning of life). This also explains why it is called wise, for the most basic wisdom is to align all of one’s deeds with the Origin of power.” This idea is alluded to by the word for wisdom (*chochmah*), which is composed of the two words “*ko’ach*” (power) and “*mah*” (what). In other words,

true wisdom is realizing that a person's power is "what," i.e., it lacks independent significance.

The person who learns Torah as an "elder," i.e., who craves honor, is thus detached from the power of Divine creativity. He is likened to writing with ink upon erased paper, for he lacks the ability to attain novel insights. Only by submitting oneself to the Divine creative power that is renewed daily is it possible to draw upon this power and develop new Torah insights that were concealed hitherto.

This is just one example of how the Sefas Emes brings together an array of varied sources to form a spectacular mosaic, each component of which is connected to the others by lines of thought springing from his perception of the fundament of faith underlying them all.

☞ Fundamentals of Faith and Comprehension

THE SEFAS EMES regards all realms of Torah not as isolated disciplines, but as constantly marching hand-in-hand in concert with one another: the plain meaning together with Chazal's expositions; *agaddah* along with halachah; incisive, scholarly insight coupled with breadth of knowledge. All of them flow from the same transcendent Source, and all of them equally convey lessons that bear upon the fundamentals of Jewish outlook.

Here is just one example: the Torah writes, "You shall make a copper basin for washing and its copper stand and place it between the Tent of Meeting and the Altar, and place water in it. Aharon and his sons shall wash their hands and feet from it" (*Shemos* 30:18–19). Every *kohen* who was about to enter the Mishkan or the Beis Hamikdash had to wash his hands and feet, which Chazal refer to as "sanctifying" them. The Rambam rules (*Hilchos Bi'as Mikdash* 5:3) that a *kohen* who slept within the Beis Hamikdash compound had to wash upon waking even though he never left the Beis Hamikdash. Many *Acharonim* wonder what the Rambam's source is for this ruling and what the rationale is behind it.

In his commentary to *Zevachim* (20b), the Sefas Emes presents

the following explanation: “The reason might be that it is considered as though he went outside, since a person’s soul leaves him while he sleeps.” The Sefas Emes thus equates the person who leaves the Beis Hamikdash with the person whose soul leaves his body while he sleeps. In both cases, the soul’s return to the Beis Hamikdash after a leave of absence necessitates washing the hands and feet.

It is said that one of the great contemporary Torah scholars expressed his unease at employing this type of “spiritual concept” as the rationale for a halachic ruling, but the Sefas Emes definitely adopted this approach. He sees the simple interpretation as being fully consistent with the profound meaning. Both issue from a single source, namely, a fundamental Torah principle.

Indeed, *Sefas Emes al HaTorah* doesn’t merely elucidate the weekly *parshah*: the *parshah* serves as a springboard for bringing to light fundamental spiritual principles. Following this in-depth study, the *parshah* appears in an altogether new light, studded with important lessons in faith and in understanding life.

☛ Truth Is Conveyed Succinctly

ONE OF THE salient characteristics of the truth is that to be convincing, it doesn’t require many words. The soul recognizes and absorbs truth immediately. The *sefer* entitled *Sefas Emes* — which means “true speech” or “language of truth” — is, appropriately, a concise work. Its ideas are presented succinctly and its language is terse. Worlds of wisdom are conveyed in a few short words.

The Mishnah (*Menachos* 5:8) explains the difference between the *minchas machavas* and the *minchas marcheshes*, two types of meal offering (named for the differently shaped pans in which they were prepared) that were brought in the Beis Hamikdash: “R. Chananiah ben Gamliel says, ‘The *marcheshes* is deep and its product quivers.’” In other words, whereas the *machavas* was a wide, flat, and shallow pan, the *marcheshes* had the three opposite characteristics: it was deep, its mouth was narrow, and the dough that was deep-fried

inside it consequently did not set, but quivered and wobbled. I think that the *marcheshes* serves as the most fitting analogy for conveying the nature of *Sefas Emes al HaTorah*:

It is extremely deep, conveying the profoundest ideas. Studying it demands real toil to properly fathom its meaning.

The difficulty is compounded by the *sefer*'s 'narrow mouth' i.e., its terse language. Every word is laden with meaning. A few brief lines convey a wealth of content. It seems evident that it was formulated with the assumption that those studying it would be scholars, for whom the briefest allusion suffices. It is written in the language of truth, and it necessitates searching and digging for the truth.

Its lessons are dynamic, touching upon every facet of life. Repeated study will reveal new insight, depth, grandeur, and all manner of hidden ideas. Any seasoned scholar will be amazed by the genius evident in the work. All that can be said are the words from the *piyyut* of *Keil Mistateir*: "Waters run deep for one with understanding."

What Is My Role?

THE TRUTH SPEAKS for itself; it doesn't need lengthy explanations. Since the *sefer* is written as concisely as possible, what further room or need is there to add anything? I have nevertheless seen fit to present readers with select gems, rendered accessible and explained fully, because the *sefer*'s tremendous depth along with its terse language can make learning it very difficult for those who are unused to this type of study.

To this end, I have selected one fundamental idea on each *parshah* and each Yom Tov and expand and elucidate it for ease of understanding. I try to simplify these tremendously profound ideas and present them in an accessible format so as to give everyone the opportunity to experience their sweetness. I therefore offer a sincere prayer from the depths of my heart that the merit of the public, the holy Torah, and the Sefas Emes should stand me in good stead in the course of my study and writing. I pray that I have understood the

words of the Sefas Emes correctly, and I pray that my written words will be correctly understood.

☛ A Yearning, Seeking Soul

I DEDICATE THIS *sefer* as a merit for the soul of my father, R. Moshe Aharon ben R. Mordechai Eliezer Weinroth ז"ל, who would yearn to hear the Torah thoughts of the Sefas Emes, from which he derived so much pleasure. My father reverently purchased the Sefas Emes for me before I reached bar mitzvah age and instilled in me the motivation to fathom its depths and get into the habit of studying it.

To mark my bar mitzvah, my father took me to see the Gerrer Rebbe, the *Beis Yisrael* — a grandson of the Sefas Emes — who asked to hear me repeat the Torah discourse that I was to deliver at my bar mitzvah celebration. Within seconds of me starting, the Rebbe זת"ל realized what my conclusions would be, offered his own profound comments and observations, and bestowed his blessing upon me. The smile of pleasure that was on my father's lips in those exalted moments accompanies me to this day.

I pray that study of the Sefas Emes brings my father ז"ל pleasure and elevates his soul.

The *sefer* is also dedicated as a merit for the soul of my mother, Maras Dreizel bas R. Aryeh (Aptergut) Weinroth א"ה, who sacrificed herself for the sake of her children's Torah education and who demonstrated to us with all the fire in her heart that this is the holiest cause of all. We drew love of Torah from her wellspring that continues flowing to this day. As R. Akiva said, "Whatever is mine is hers."

I also dedicate the *sefer* in memory of my older brother, who surpassed me in every way: Yaakov ben R. Moshe Aharon Weinroth ז"ל, who embodied all the following qualities:

- tremendous depth
- an extraordinary gift for seeing the broader picture and sensing how to correctly connect the dots and lines to yield a complete image

- an exceptional ability for conceptualizing and engaging in abstract thought
- a yen for the truth
- a knack for expressing himself in clear, smooth, and flowing language — *sefas emes*, the language of truth

The *sefer* is also dedicated in memory of my brother Tzvi Yitzchak ben R. Moshe Aharon Weinroth ז"ל, who possessed great analytical skills, was a deep thinker, expressed himself clearly and concisely, and had a good and generous heart, and a refined character and pure soul.

How I miss them all!

It is my prayer, dear reader, that the Torah you learn from this *sefer* and all the ongoing spiritual benefits that result from learning the fundamental principles of faith and Torah outlook that are conveyed within the Sefas Emes's breathtaking ideas should be a source of merit for my departed kin.

☞ Thanks and Acknowledgments

“PROPER CONDUCT IS a prerequisite for Torah” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:3), and acknowledging indebtedness is indeed one of the foundations of interpersonal relations.

Therefore, I would like to thank all those who have helped me with this project. When the *sheliach tzibbur* reaches the words *Modim anachnu Lach* (We thank You...) in his repetition of the *amidah*, we do not make do with listening to his recitation, but offer a separate prayer of thanks of our own. Thanks must be tendered by the beneficiary himself, not through an emissary.

My sincere gratitude to: Rabbi David Kahn, for overseeing the entire project; Rabbi Dovid Goldblum, for his accurate and clear translation; Rabbi Aviyam Levinson, for his meticulous editing; Mrs. Tziporah Frankel, for her professional proofreading; Mrs. Eden Chachamtzedek, for her beautiful typesetting; and Michael Silverstein, for his stunning cover.

My heartfelt thanks to my family, who are my protective bubble making it possible for me to exercise my creativity and devote time to writing. They provide me with immediate and honest feedback on my material as it is being written. I want to particularly thank the individual whose keen eye closely reviewed my work and greatly enlightened me. May Hashem always shine His countenance toward him. There are no words — and even if there were, words alone do not suffice — to thank him for this.

☞ At the Shabbos Table

LIKE ITS COMPANION volumes (*L’or Kedushas Levi*, *L’or HaMaharal*, *L’or Rabbi Tzadok HaCohen MiLublin*, and *L’or Hachaim*), this *sefer* is meant to uplift the Shabbos meals, elevating them to the highest spiritual peaks.

“Who can ascend Hashem’s mountain?” (*Tehillim* 24:3). Scaling spiritual heights is an onerous task. But once a person reaches the top, he can breathe in the pure mountain air and take in spectacular views, encompassing the entire surroundings. Such is the experience of studying *Sefas Emes al HaTorah*: magnificent fundamentals of our faith lie revealed before the student, who will be forever enchanted with how so many disparate details originate with the same set of fundamental ideas.

Studying *Sefas Emes al HaTorah* is sublimely pleasurable. Add this to the existing pleasures of your Shabbos table, and you will experience pure and sublime *oneg Shabbos*. I hope the scholarly community finds the fruits of our labor pleasing and enjoyable — “and may Hashem’s pleasantness be upon us” (*ibid.* 90:17).

Avraham Weinroth

5 Shevat 5785

(120th Yahrzeit of the Sefas Emes)

Sefas Emes
on the
Torah

Bereishis



Human Intelligence: A Blessing That Can Also Be a Liability

☞ The Earth: Covered by Water, Exposed, Then Submerged Again

ON THE THIRD day of creation, the water that was covering the newly created earth receded, and dry land emerged, as the Torah tells us: “G-d said, ‘Let the water beneath the heavens collect in one place, and let the dry land become visible’” (*Bereishis* 1:9).

Several generations later, though, Hashem flooded the world, and water again covered the entire earth.

In the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 5:1), Chazal employ a parable to explain this sequence of events:

A king built a palace and populated it with mutes. Being mutes, they only inquired about the king's welfare with signs, not speech. The king said, “If the palace were peopled by articulate folk, they would certainly concern themselves with my welfare and my honor.” The king therefore put articulate people in the palace. However, those articulate folk took no interest in the king's welfare. What's more, they said that the palace didn't belong to the king, but to them. The king therefore said that the palace should revert to its former state.

Similarly, from the beginning of creation, Hashem's praises arose solely from the water, as it says, “From the sounds of the great,

mighty, crashing waters” (*Tehillim* 93:4). And what was the water saying? “Hashem is mighty on high” (*ibid.*). Hashem said, “If the waters that have no mouth, no utterance, and no speech nonetheless praise Me, then certainly, when I create man, he will praise Me.” The generation of the flood came and rebelled against Him; the generation of Enosh came and rebelled against Him [by worshipping idols]; the generation of the dispersion came and rebelled against Him. Hashem said, “Let these vacate their place, and let those others (i.e., the waters) whose original place was upon the earth return, as it says, ‘And the rain was upon the earth for forty days and forty nights’ (*Bereishis* 7:12).”

Because of Hashem’s ongoing disappointment in mankind’s performance, the water that had originally covered the entire earth returned to cover it. Man’s creation was intended as an improvement on the state of creation that preceded him, to increase Heaven’s glory. However, instead of praising his Creator, man rebelled against Him, and the world therefore regressed to its former state.

☞ A Process of Straying and Returning

ALTHOUGH THE MIDRASH refers to man being created to articulate Heaven’s praises — as opposed to the mute praises rendered by creation hitherto — the Sefas Emes understands that this doesn’t refer narrowly to man’s capacity for verbal communication. Rather, it refers to his overall endowment with intelligence that renders him capable of discernment and inference. Mankind’s lapse therefore lay not simply in failing to communicate Heaven’s praise — to the point of outright rebellion — but in the misappropriation of the intelligence that had been implanted within him to make that communication possible. The Sefas Emes’s treatment of this topic touches upon the purpose of man’s creation and of human intelligence, the implication of man’s sin and his path to repentance — forming a breathtaking panorama that we shall now examine more closely.

☞ The Universe Was Created in Order to Testify to the Creator's Existence

IT IS APPARENT from the Midrash that Hashem created the world with the intention that His creations praise Him.

This is stated clearly in the Mishnah (*Avos* 6:12), “Everything that Hashem created in His world, He created solely for His glory, as it says, ‘Everything with which My Name is associated and that is created for My glory I have created, formed, and also made’ (*Yeshayah* 43:7).”

The world was created to attest to its Creator's existence, for any intelligent person who contemplates a world of such beauty, intricacy, and sophistication realizes immediately that it cannot have come about by itself, but was preceded by a Creator Who created it. If a visitor to a desert island comes across a sophisticated watch, he understands that it did not come into being spontaneously; rather, a master watchmaker must have constructed and assembled it. This is the sentiment expressed by David HaMelech in the *pesukim*, “The heavens relate G-d's glory, and the firmament tells of His handiwork; day after day they utter and convey, night after night they impart knowledge; without speaking and without words, without their voice being heard” (*Tehillim* 19:2–4).

☞ Man Interprets the Picture

THE HEAVENS INDEED relate G-d's glory but they do so mutely, wordlessly. Without speaking and without words, the heavens yield a majestic panorama, but there is no accompanying, explanatory soundtrack. Our conclusions about their origins are inferred and are in fact self-evident to anyone who bothers to pause and reflect. Hashem created man to interpret the spectacle that reveals itself to him and to extract the lessons contained therein. A picture doesn't yield its message until an observer interprets it and articulates what it conveys. Man was therefore endowed with intelligence superior to all other creatures — namely, his ability to analyze, draw conclusions,

and articulate — in order to serve as a mouthpiece for the testimony conveyed silently by the rest of creation. The Creator endowed man with intelligence with which to infer His existence and testify to it. This is the why the waters originally receded from the earth to make room for man, the pinnacle of creation.

☞ The Tool Whose Function Improves When Put to the Correct Use

ANY PERSON WHO works to fulfill the purpose for which he was created — deciphering creation's testimony to its Creator's existence — receives the tools he requires for so doing. Hashem grants a person insight and understanding to the extent that he uses them for reaching correct conclusions about His existence. In other words, the deeper he delves into the Creator's existence, the greater the intellectual gifts the Creator bestows upon him with which to arrive at the correct conclusions.

The Sefas Emes likens this to the Gemara's observation (*Sotah* 35a) that "The Aron carried those who carried it." The means by which the Aron was to be serviced and carried — the *levi'im* of the family of Kehas who held up the poles at its sides — were themselves supported and held up by the Aron. Similarly, man, who is tasked with raising G-d's Name aloft and proclaiming His existence, is "carried by the Aron," endowed by G-d with the necessary gifts of understanding for fulfilling his mission. The Sefas Emes accordingly lays down the principle whereby the effectiveness of the means for achieving a goal increases along with the goal's realization: "And his deeds provide him with greater power to understand how to perform them."

☞ "Hashem's Testimony Is Reliable, Imparting Wisdom to the Fool"

IN LIGHT OF the above, we can discern four stages in the process of the world's creation:

1. The creation of a world whose content yields silent but clear testimony to its Creator's existence.
2. The creation of man, endowed with the intelligence necessary for interpreting the panorama that lies before him.
3. Man applying his intellect to ponder the meaning of creation and arrive at the correct conclusion in the form of an unequivocal, verbal declaration of G-d's glory.
4. The more man applies his faculty for abstract thought to extracting accurate conclusions about creation's testimony to the Creator's existence, the broader and deeper Hashem renders his comprehension, enriching his thought process and ability to articulate his growing awareness.

The Sefas Emes uses this idea to explain the *pasuk*, "Hashem's testimony is reliable, imparting wisdom to the fool" (*Tehillim* 19:8) as follows: "Hashem's testimony," meaning man's testimony regarding Hashem's existence, "imparts wisdom to the fool," strengthening his intellect and comprehension. Even if a person starts out with a feeble mind, endeavoring to comprehend the Creator will empower his intellect, increasing his capacity for abstract thought and clarity of articulation. His development — his own personal "creation" — will advance to the point where he attains his goal of providing testimony by interpreting the world's workings as clear evidence of the Creator's existence.

☞ The Debacle of the *Eitz HaDaas*

HOWEVER, THE MISSION that man was created to fulfill was aborted due to his sin with the *eitz hadaas*.

Daas, denoting deep and intimate knowledge, is a means of forging connection, for a person feels bound to and identifies with that which he understands. Man used his faculty for attaining *daas* to forge a connection with evil. The very tool he had been given with which to raise himself to sublime heights now brought him down to the lowest depths. He was endowed with intellect for the purpose

of comprehending his Creator and testifying about His creation of the world, the corollary of which is that the purpose of the world — man included — is to serve Hashem. In his arrogance and intellectual superiority over the rest of creation, however, man believed that he could dominate all of creation and that the world had been made to serve none other than man himself.

The serpent enticed Adam and Chavah into eating from the *eitz hadaas* by telling them, “For G-d knows that on the day you eat from it, you will become enlightened, and you will become like G-d, knowing how to distinguish between good and evil” (*Bereishis* 3:5). The Sefas Emes explains that the serpent tempted Adam to use his intellect to rule over the other creatures that were all inferior to him, leading him to believe that he enjoyed an independent existence and to deny his dependence upon his Maker. Instead, the serpent claimed, the world had been created to serve man, rather than man having been created to serve the Creator.

☞ Sin Originates in Arrogance

IN THIS CONTEXT, the remarks of the *Shelah*, R. Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz (*Shnei Luchos HaBris, Toldos Adam, Remazei Osiyos L'chasimas Hahakdamah*, 15) are relevant: “Submission is the root of all [positive] traits, and it is the basis of repentance. In *maseches Avos* (4:21), it says, ‘Jealousy, lust, and honor remove a person from the world.’ Because of these traits, Adam HaRishon left the world. He was penalized with his own death and the deaths of all his future descendants.” The *Shelah* explains that the Serpent enticed Adam to become proud upon eating from the *eitz hadaas*, telling him, “You will become like G-d.”

☞ Humility Is the Path to Rectifying Sin

A PERSON WHO wants to contribute to the world’s rectification must train himself in humility, realizing that he is not the ultimate

purpose of creation and that man is in fact infinitesimal compared to the huge forces and wondrous phenomena contained within creation. Man's role is to contemplate the greatness of creation and his own puniness and to realize that the former's purpose is to attest to the Creator's existence. Once man acknowledges the Creator's existence and His greatness, he will come to acknowledge that his purpose in the world is to serve his Creator. David HaMelech's conclusion upon reflecting on the wonders of creation was, "How multitudinous are Your works, Hashem" (*Tehillim* 104:24) and, "The world is filled with Your acquisitions" (ibid.).

The Rambam (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2) likewise writes, "And what is the path to loving and fearing G-d? When a person contemplates His wondrous, great works and creatures and perceives in them His immeasurable, infinite wisdom, he is immediately moved to love, praise, and glorify, and he experiences a vast desire to know Hashem the Great, as David said, 'My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living G-d' (ibid. 42:3). And when he considers these very things, he immediately recoils, is afraid, and realizes that compared to the Perfect Knowledge he is a tiny, lowly, and obscure creature with shallow and limited understanding, as David said, 'When I see the heavens, Your handiwork... what is man that You should remember him?' (ibid. 8:4).

☞ From Humility to Partnership in Creation

THE SEFAS EMES posits that when a person acknowledges his smallness in the huge scheme of creation and applies himself to filling his role of testifying to the Creator's existence, he actually becomes *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s partner in creation. After all, he is now fulfilling the purpose for which G-d created the world.

The Sefas Emes uses this idea to explain Chazal's comment on the *pasuk*, "I placed My words in your mouth and covered you with the shade of My hand... to say to Tziyon, 'You are My people'" (*Yeshayah* 51:16). The *Zohar* (Vol. I, 5a) comments that the words

“*ami atah* (you are My people)” are to be read “*imi atah* (you are together with Me),” as though *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is telling Yisrael, “You are My partners in creating the world.” Through their testimony to the Creator’s existence — the purpose for which the world was created — the Jews become partners in fulfilling the goal of creation.

We find a similar comment in the Gemara (*Shabbos* 119b): “One who says ‘*Vayechulu hashamayim v’haaretz* (heaven and earth were completed)’ (*Bereishis* 1:26) on Friday night, thereby testifying to the completion of creation at the end of six days, is tantamount to becoming *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s partner in creation” — for by testifying to the Creator’s existence, he is fulfilling the purpose of creation.

☞ We Were Given the Torah to Rectify the Sin of the *Eitz Hadaas*

UPON BEING GIVEN the Torah, Yisrael corrected the sin of the *eitz hadaas*, as it says, “You have been shown [G-d’s might] in order that you should know that it is Hashem Who is G-d there is none other besides Him” (*Devarim* 4:35). The ultimate goal of Yisrael serving Hashem is to employ the understanding instilled in them for testifying that Hashem created heaven and earth and that the purpose of creation is to serve the Creator, not man. This is the purpose for which we exist and about which it is written, “I have formed this nation for Myself that they should relate My praises” (*Yeshayah* 43:21).

SUMMARY

Man’s intelligence and awareness, his capacity for abstract thought and logical deduction, and his ability to clearly formulate, articulate, and assert his ideas with conviction elevate

him beyond every other creature. However, these intellectual gifts can become liabilities; man's intellect can raise up the humble, self-effacing person while bringing down the arrogant and proud individual.

If a person imagines that he himself is exalted and that the world around him was created to serve him, he brings the world down and is surpassed by the silent waters, whose very existence yields mute testimony to the Creator's existence. The person with a conceited mind and inflated sense of self is responsible for taking the world back to its original state of desolation and disorder, causing flood and destruction.

By contrast, the person who uses his intellect for recognizing the meagerness of his own strength, the world's exaltedness, and the existence of the Creator Who calls everything into being testifies to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s creation of the world and acknowledges that his purpose is to serve Him. He thereby exalts himself and is considered a partner of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in creation.

The human mind is indeed a wonderful tool, but the question is how its individual owner uses it: "Your deeds can bring you closer, and your deeds can distance you" (*Eiduyos* 5:7).

Noach

Holding onto the Divine Image Is the Key to Man's Survival

☛ Is Favoring the Person Who “Finds Favor” Really Favoritism?

THE CLOSING *PESUKIM* of *parshas Bereishis* record *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s decision to remove every living creature from the earth, sparing only Noach: “Hashem saw that man's wickedness on earth was increasing and that the whole day, the urge of his heart's imaginings was solely for evil. Hashem reconsidered having made man on the earth, and it troubled Him. Hashem said, ‘I shall obliterate mankind that I have created from the face of the earth — man, as well as animals, reptiles, and birds of the heavens, for I have second thoughts about having made them. Noach, however, found favor in Hashem's eyes” (*Bereishis* 6:5–8).

Noach thus remained alive due to a single characteristic: he found favor.

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 108a) make this point very clearly: “Even Noach who remained from them was [originally] included in the decree [of annihilation], but he found favor.” What is the meaning of finding favor, and how did it enable Noach to survive?

We are familiar with the idea of Divine reward and punishment in which Hashem uses His attribute of judgment to determine who lives and who dies in light of the individual's deeds. How are we

to understand a person deemed unworthy of living yet being given preferential treatment above all his fellow men simply because he has “found favor” in the eyes of the Judge?

Is this justice? Isn't it arbitrary to prefer one party in defiance of the principles of reward and punishment simply because he finds favor? What exactly is this “favor”?

☞ Why Was the Attribute of Justice Modified in Noach's Case?

THE DILEMMA BECOMES even more pronounced in light of the Rambam's comments in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (3:2):

A country whose sins outnumber [its merits] is destroyed immediately, as it says, “The cries from Sodom and Amorah have become very great” (*Bereishis* 18:20). Similarly, if the sins of the [population of] entire world were to outnumber its merits, they would be exterminated immediately, as it says, “Hashem saw that man's wickedness on earth was increasing and that the whole day, the urge of his heart's imaginings was solely for evil.”

Thus, if the deeds of a region's population are mostly sinful, even if there is a righteous person there, the entire population perishes, including the righteous person, because of their misdeeds. How did Noach merit an exception to the fate of the rest of the world? What was different about him that won him preferential treatment, enabling him to escape being caught up in their demise?

☞ Finding Favor Is a Function of a Person's Divine Image

THE SEFAS EMES employs a three-step approach in explaining the favor that Noach found in Hashem's eyes:

1. Immediately after telling us that Noach found favor in Hashem's eyes, the Torah says, “Noach was a righteous man,

- perfect in his generations” (ibid. 6:9). This favor was thus a consequence of his righteousness.
2. “The explanation of the matter is that only when a person’s soul is refined and clean of any sin and blemish does the Divine image with which he was created associate with him.” Righteousness thus results in bearing the Divine image.
 3. Hashem favors the Divine image which He bestows on man. Therefore, a tzaddik, who bears the Divine image, is favored by Hashem.

The Mishnah (*Avos* 3:18) indeed says, “Man is beloved because he was created in the Divine image; as an extra measure of love, it was made known to him that he was created in the Divine image, as it says, ‘He made man in G-d’s image’ (*Bereishis* 9:6).”

The Sefas Emes elucidates the logic underlying this equation, pointing out that a person feels favorably disposed toward that which is similar to him. Therefore, a person who merits bearing the Divine image understandably finds favor in G-d’s eyes.

☞ The Divine Image Is Not Simply a Function of Being Human, but of an Individual’s Deeds

THE OBVIOUS QUESTION at this point is that since Adam was created in the Divine image, it follows that his descendents — all of mankind — bear the same likeness, as the above Mishnah in *Avos* explicitly states. How did Noach differ from everyone else?

The Sefas Emes answers that while man was indeed created in this way, the Divine image only remains with a person until he sins and thereby forfeits it. When the generation of the flood sinned, lapsing into rampant immorality, the Divine likeness departed from them, whereas Noach, who maintained his righteousness, retained it. It is thus not enough to have been created by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and to have been imbued with a lofty soul; holding onto the Divine image is contingent upon keeping to a certain level of conduct that renders its adherents worthy of possessing that gift.

If, on the one hand, the Divine image is part of every human being's physical/spiritual makeup but at the same time can also be lost, and thus cannot be an inseparable feature of humanity, how are we to understand its nature?

☞ The Divine Image Resembles a Protective Shadow

IN HIS COMMENTARY *Midrash Shmuel* on *Avos* 3:18, R. Shmuel di Ozeda writes:

The image referred to [by the Mishnah] is not the [physical] image of the human likeness, in which human beings differ from all other creatures and that is common to all of mankind, non-Jews included. The image referred to here is an image of holiness that is special to the Jewish nation alone, for the word *tzelem* (image) is derived from *tzeil* (shadow); it is akin to a shadow over his head, shading him. Of this image it is written, "Only with the image shall a man proceed" (*Tehillim* 39:7), for this [Divine] image is the sole source of a person's vitality, enabling him to go forward and to live.

☞ The Divine Image: Spiritual Radiance Illumining a Person and Enabling Him to Control His Physicality

IN HIS WORK *Derech Chaim* (*Avos* 3:16), the Maharal explains that since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is incorporeal, without any likeness whatsoever, it is self-evident that man's "Divine image" does not denote any kind of physical similarity. Rather, he writes, this image is an "abstract, Divine light and radiance attached to a person." Despite its non-physical origin, though, this light can be comprehended by the human senses. The *pasuk*, "For a mitzvah is like a lamp and the Torah is like light" (*Mishlei* 6:23) refers to an abstract, non-physical light, which, says the Maharal, "is the same as the image to which Scripture refers [in connection with man's creation], whereby something completely abstract and non-physical attaches itself to a physical

person — this is the radiance of his [Divine] image.” A person thus has an abstract, spiritual component that allows him to control his physical urges and desires. This spiritual element illumines his essence; it is this that constitutes his superiority over the animal kingdom.

☞ Divorced from Physicality, Not Wallowing in It

ELSEWHERE (*NETZACH YISRAEL*, Chapter 14), the Maharal supplements this idea by explaining that creation can be classified in terms of different creatures’ varying capacity for controlling their physicality.

Man is distinct from animals, which are wholly physical, whereas man comprises both a physical component and a spiritual one, for man possesses intelligence and awareness. He is an intelligent creature, capable of modifying his behavior according to the dictates of his intellect.

Jews are distinct from all the other nations, as Chazal say, “You are referred to as *adam*, whereas the nations are not referred to as *adam*” (*Yevamos* 61a). The Maharal explains that while the nations of the world are certainly intelligent human beings like Yisrael, “Yisrael’s level is such that they are separate from physicality and do not wallow in it.”

☞ “Horse and Rider”

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the human body is likened to a horse and the soul to its rider.

A person whose body is subordinate to his soul is not dominated by his passions, but is in control of them; he is self-disciplined and careful with his every action. His soul rides his body, as it were, conveying its directives and having the body do its bidding. The soul is thus characterized as “a rider.”

By contrast, the person whose intellect, instead of charting his

path, functions as a tool of his passions which rule him, is like a wild horse whose rider has no control over the beast that carries him. Though such a person possesses intellect, he amounts to “a horse,” because it is his physicality that drives and defines him.

This is the essential difference between Yisrael and the nations of the world.

“In Yisrael’s case,” writes the Maharal, “physicality is secondary to the soul; the former is a carrier upon which the soul ‘rides;’ this physicality is subordinate to its rider just as a donkey is subordinate to the person riding on it. Such are Yisrael when they are fulfilling G-d’s will. They then comprise a solely spiritual form (i.e., divorced from physicality). In the case of the nations, however, it is the opposite, almost as though the soul is subordinate to the body, as though they were entirely body and physicality.”

The Sefas Emes explains accordingly that the Divine image with which man was created remained with Bnei Yisrael, while it was removed from the other nations. A person who cannot control his urges lacks the Divine image, for the image with which he was created has left him entirely.

☞ Without Spirituality Controlling Physicality, Man Has No Superiority over an Animal

ALTHOUGH A PERSON who is controlled by his physical desires possesses intelligence, spirituality, and awareness, he has very little advantage over an animal. He amounts to a horse rather than a rider, because his intellect doesn’t control his body and doesn’t define his essence.

The Sefas Emes notes that when the generation of the flood suffered the fate of all sinners and lost their Divine image, they became legitimate prey for all the wild creatures and animals. Following the flood, it was therefore necessary to tell the survivors, “Fear and dread of you will be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the heavens, in everything that creeps on the ground and in all the

fish of the sea, for they have been placed in your control” (*Bereishis* 9:2). Rashi (ibid. 9:5) explains, “Man does not slumber [in the grave] with his wealth; he is dominated [by an animal only] when he is similar to an animal (*Tehillim* 49:13), it was necessary to warn the animals about [not harming] them.”

Hakadosh Baruch Hu had to again demand that the animal kingdom acknowledge mankind’s superiority after man squandered his natural superiority, which was his by virtue of bearing the Divine image.

The Divine image thus reflects man’s spirituality and his ability to exert control over his physical drives. An individual who fails to do so loses his Divine image and becomes akin to an animal.

☞ Man Rules over the Animal World

When He Subordinates the Animal within Him

THE GEMARA (*SHABBOS* 151b) tells us, “A live, day-old baby needs no protection from rats or mice, but a dead body, even [the size] of Og, king of Bashan (i.e., a giant), needs to be protected from rats and mice.” Based on the aforementioned *pasuk* in *Tehillim* — “Man does not slumber [in the grave] with his wealth; he is dominated [by an animal only] when he is similar to an animal” — the Gemara concludes that an animal will not overwhelm a human unless it first perceives him as an animal.

The underlying logic is straightforward. If a person doesn’t dominate the “animal” within himself, how can he hope to dominate the animals around him?

In this context, Rabbeinu Yonah writes (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:10), “The Creator instilled in me a life-giving soul, wisdom of heart, and a capable mind in order to recognize G-d, fear Him, and rule over the body and all its issues, just as He made it dominant over all other living creatures that do not speak, honoring it with that which is precious in His eyes. And since I was created for this but have done the opposite, why should I live?”

☞ The Person Who Controls His Urges Reflects the Creator's Likeness and Is the Crown of Creation

THE *ZOHAR* STATES that only when a person is in control of his desires and devotes himself to serving Hashem is his essence defined by his spiritual component. Only then does he bear the shadow and radiance that reflects the likeness of his Creator. This likeness makes him the pinnacle of creation and instills fear into all living creatures; this is how Daniel was saved when he was cast into the lion's den. Attaining this standing and ruling over the animal kingdom depends on bearing the Divine image that comes from controlling his own desires.

In the *Zohar's* words:

Come and see how careful people have to be to serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, for the fear of every person who endeavors to study Torah and serve Hashem is upon all, for when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world, He bestowed upon every creature in the world its fitting likeness, and He then created man with His sublime likeness and gave him dominion over everything else by virtue of this likeness. So long as man endures in the world, all those creatures raise their heads and look upon man's sublime likeness, and they then all fear and quake before him, as it says, "Fear and dread of you will be upon all the beasts of the earth and the birds of the heavens." Daniel's appearance did not change when he was cast into the lions' den, and he was thereby saved. However, when a person doesn't follow the Torah's ways, this holy likeness changes, and wild animals and birds of the skies [no longer fear him and] can then dominate him.

☞ Jealousy, Lust, and Honor Banish the Divine Likeness

THE SEFAS EMES records a wonderful idea that his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim* told him he had heard from the Kozhnitzer Maggid. The Torah tells us about the sin of Kayin, who killed his brother Hevel, and about the sins of the generations of the flood

and the dispersion. Its goal in doing so is to teach us that in every person, there lurks an inner beast that he must subdue, bringing it under the control of the Divine image within him. The Torah is not a historical record; it is a book of instruction. It tells us about various people's sins because each and every individual is capable of repeating their misdeeds; nobody is immune to the *yetzer hara*. We must endeavor to have our "rider" firmly in place atop our "horse," with our spiritual awareness exerting control over our physical urges. This is the starting point for studying the Torah's account of these episodes, which deal with age-old impulses that reappear in one way or another in all subsequent generations.

More specifically, Kayin's sin resulted from an impulse born of jealousy; he killed his brother because he envied the fact that Heaven had found Hevel's offering pleasing but not his. His name — Kayin — is derived from the same two-letter root (*kuf-nun*) as *kinah* (jealousy).

The generation of the flood was steeped in immorality; their deeds were born of lust, man's insatiable desire for physical pleasure.

The generation of the dispersion sinned with pride and arrogance, which led them to attempt to wage war on Heaven. This was born of the craving for honor.

The Sefas Emes notes further that this is the meaning of the Mishnah's statement (*Avos* 4:21) that "Jealousy, lust, and honor remove a man from the world." Succumbing to these drives deprives a person of his humanity. This is why the Mishnah refers to a person as *adam* ("...*motzi'in es ha'adam min ha'olam*, remove the man from the world"). These failings cause a person to lose the Divine image with which man is created and that makes him distinct as *adam*. And forfeiting this Divine image means forfeiting the privilege of living.

☞ The Divine Image Is the Key to Man's Survival

WE CAN NOW appreciate just why Noach was saved from the destruction that overtook the rest of his generation. He differed from them

in one vital area, the key to man's survival and the purpose for which he was created. Noach alone preserved his inner, Divine image which the rest of his generation lost. All of mankind had been instilled with *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah*, the three tiers of the soul common to all people; they too had been gifted with intelligence. However, they failed to control their inner beast. Rather than employing their wisdom to restrain and constructively channel their physical drives, they utilized it in the service of the body, to enable them to indulge their desires. They were therefore doomed to complete destruction, because such an existence was not the purpose for which they had been created. Noach, on the other hand, found favor in G-d's eyes, because the Divine likeness that manifests as the Divine image was still discernible upon him. The bearer of this image justifies his own creation, and it serves as the key to his survival. This is the defining feature that set Noach apart from the rest of his generation.

It is fascinating to note that in the *Siddur Kavanos HaRashash* (*Seder Pidyon Nefesh*), we find that for an ill person who is at death's door, "A *pidyon nefesh* should be performed (i.e., his life should be redeemed/ransomed) with one hundred and sixty *perutos* (a coin of small denomination), which is the numerical equivalent of *tzelem* (image) — *tzadi* (90) + *lamed* (30) + *mem* (40) = 160 — and the *perutos* also need to be *kesef* (silver), which also has the numerical value of one hundred and sixty — *kaf* (20) + *samech* (60) + *peih* (80) = 160."

In other words, a person's life is rooted in the Divine image within him, which leads him to find favor in his Creator's eyes.

SUMMARY

Hakadosh Baruch Hu created man with intelligence. Man is not merely a body; he is endowed with comprehension, awareness, abstract thought, spirituality, and inspiration. However,

man only retains his distinction as the crown of creation if his spirit remains in control of his body. He retains his Divine image, reflecting his Creator's likeness and emitting spiritual radiance, only if he remains in control of his desires. By putting his spiritual component in control of his physical component, man resembles his Creator and finds favor in His eyes, thus fulfilling the purpose of his creation and ensuring his survival. This was the way in which Noah differed from the rest of his generation, who lost the Divine image; this explains why he merited to live on after complete destruction had been decreed upon them.

The Divine likeness is also responsible for man's superiority over the animal kingdom and fellow humans who are slaves to such "human" drives as jealousy, lust, and honor. The Divine likeness is not awarded automatically to every bearer of a human soul, but only to individuals whose souls rule over their inner beast. They are referred to as *adam*, while others are referred to by other terms employed for human beings. We thus find in the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 48a) that of the various terms used to refer to humans, such as *enosh*, *adam*, *gever*, and *ish*, *adam* is the highest, for it alone is associated with the Divine image, as it is written, "G-d created *adam* in His image" (*Bereishis* 1:27) and, "For in G-d's image, He made *adam*" (*ibid.* 9:6). Only the person who controls his desires finds favor in G-d's eyes and is referred to by the term *adam*.

Lech Lecha

The Quest That Pursues Man

☞ Was the Idea to Move Away from His Origins or Proceed to His Destination?

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU instructed Avraham, “Go, for your own good, from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (*Bereishis* 12:1). What did Hashem mean that Avraham should leave his land? After all, he had already left his land years earlier. As we learn from the penultimate *pasuk* in *parshas Noach*: “Terach took Avram, his son; Lot, son of Haran, his grandson; and Sarai, his daughter-in-law, wife of Avram his son; and he left Ur Kasdim with them en route to the land of Canaan, and they arrived in Charan and settled there” (*ibid.* 11:31). Apparently, then, Avraham already had left his land of origin. So why did Hashem tell him to leave his land?

Rashi explains: “This was what He told him, ‘Move further away from there (i.e., your birthplace of Ur Kasdim) and leave your father’s house.’” However, this raises another difficulty. What was the purpose of focusing on Avraham moving further away from his birthplace and leaving his paternal home? Surely, Hashem’s goal in instructing him to resume the journey was that he should arrive at his original destination — the Land of Canaan — not simply that he should leave his father’s home.

☞ What Is the Difference between Concealing a Future Destination and a Future Action?

THE FORMULATION OF *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s command to Avraham raises a further difficulty. Rashi explains why Hashem didn't tell him explicitly to go to the Land of Canaan, directing him instead to "the land that I will show you." "He didn't reveal the land to him straight away," Rashi explains, "so as to make it more precious to him, and in order to give him reward for each and every utterance." In other words, for his readiness to go wherever *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* would eventually indicate to him, Avraham was entitled to reward even for traveling to the ends of the earth. But this itself is puzzling. Why specifically in regard to reaching the Land of Canaan was the ultimate goal concealed in order to increase the reward? We don't encounter this approach regarding any other Divine command. The exact nature of any mitzvah could theoretically be concealed and then revealed at a later time in order to increase the reward for being ready to comply. For example, when instructing Avraham about the *akeidah*, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* could have told him, "Take your son, your only one, whom you love, and do to him as I shall command you," not specifying that the intent was to offer him as a sacrifice. But Hashem didn't do so. Why do we only find a destination being concealed but never a command about what to do?

☞ A Place of Holiness Must Be Sought

A SIMILAR QUESTION arises regarding the Torah's command to build the Beis Hamikdash. The Torah doesn't specify where the Beis Hamikdash is to be built, writing instead, "Rather, only in the place that Hashem, your G-d, chooses from all your tribes to rest His Divine Presence, You shall seek out His dwelling and come there" (*Devarim* 12:5). Why isn't the location specified?

The Rambam poses this question (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:45) and offers several resolutions. For example, if the location were known

in advance, the tribes would quarrel over which of them would take possession of it; or perhaps the gentile nations would quarrel over it and in the meantime would defile it.

Taking a different approach, the Ramban (*Devarim* 12:5) explains that there is benefit in a person's constant searching and inquiring about the path leading to Hashem. In his words, "The reason for [writing], 'You shall seek out His dwelling' is to have you make your way to Him from distant lands and [be compelled to] ask, 'Where is the path to the House of G-d?'"

Once again, we find ourselves wondering why the location of a holy place is concealed, thus necessitating seeking it out. We find no parallel phenomenon regarding any other of the Torah's mitzvos.

☛ A Person Entrenched in Materialism Cannot Unlock His Spiritual Destiny

THE SEFAS EMES elucidates this topic in a highly original manner. It is impossible, he writes, to reveal a person's spiritual destination to him in advance, because it is only possible for him to discover it after he steps outside of himself and is no longer immersed in his material and egoistical desires.

Accordingly, *lech lecha mei'artzecha* — go from your land (lit. "earth") — constitutes an instruction to abandon the inner inertia of one's earthiness. A person must leave behind his "self" that identifies with his material desires — all the various material indulgences and goals that he pursues — in order to seek out his sublime, spiritual "self" with its lofty aspirations and goals. To elevate himself, it is imperative that he detach himself from the weights pulling him down, shaking off the earthiness of the ground from which he originated and shedding his ambition to satisfy his physical desires and senses. Instead, he must refine his goals such that they focus solely on fulfilling *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* wishes and on comprehending Him. Only once this has become a person's main goal can "the land that I will show you" be revealed to him.

In other words, a person's spiritual destiny cannot be revealed to him so long as he remains immersed up to his eyes in materialism. Only after fulfilling the command "Go from your land" — leave behind your earthiness — and becoming spiritually oriented, elevated, and sublime is it possible for Hashem to disclose his spiritual destiny to him.

Therefore, there was indeed a purpose to Avraham's distancing himself from his earthly past and origins.

Clearly, only after Avraham had left his earthiness behind and abandoned all his personal desires was it revealed to him that Hashem wanted him to go to Eretz Yisrael. His destination could not be revealed to him so long as he had not yet completely abandoned his previous existence.

Demolition and Construction in the Spiritual Realm

THE SEFAS EMES reveals to us yet a deeper dimension of this topic. Not only must a person detach himself from worldliness in order to connect to his spiritual destiny and strive for it, he must even be capable of detaching from whatever is his current spiritual level in order to discover and attain his next goal.

In the Sefas Emes's own words: "He must be constantly looking out and listening [in readiness] to receive that which lies beyond his [present] grasp by suspending his current intellectual reach and knowledge." Nobody can progress to a level above his present one without first detaching from his current state of existence; one cannot remain rooted at one level and try to attain the one above it. Thus, whatever a person's current level, he must first dismantle his present moorings in order to construct a new foundation to build higher. This is the same process denoted by the command, "Leave behind your earthiness... [in order to proceed] to the land that I will show you," except that yesterday's spiritual attainment has now become today's earthly shackle. This may seem counterintuitive, but when a person achieves a spiritual goal, he must realize that his new

level is merely the lower level of a towering edifice with many higher floors. He cannot allow himself to become fixed where he is, because maintaining one's current level is actually a form of deterioration. He must therefore uproot himself from his newly acquired level and progress to the next one.

☞ Each Day's Mission Presents a New Challenge

R. SAADYAH GAON explains that a person must always be progressing further in serving Hashem because his emotional and spiritual comprehension improves from day to day, leading him to an ever-deepening awareness of G-d's existence. He is thus obligated to serve Hashem according to the current capacity of his ever-developing awareness. He cannot discharge today's duty by serving on yesterday's spiritual and intellectual level; he must adjust his service to today's higher and more complete level of awareness of Hashem.

R. Chaim Tyrer* (*Sidduro Shel Shabbos*, Vol. V, Discourse 3, Chap. 3) relates:

A disciple of R. Saadyah Gaon once saw his teacher afflicting himself by rolling in the snow. "My teacher," exclaimed the shocked disciple, "can it be that you need to repent by undergoing such severe mortification?" R. Saadyah responded, "I know full well that I have committed no sin that requires me to afflict myself thus; rather, I am rolling in the snow because of something I learned from a certain person who once hosted me. This man was unaware of my identity, and he accorded me the respect that one accords any other Jew. Word later passed through town that I was the guest who was lodging in his home, and my host began to honor me greatly. When the time came for me to set out on my way, my host fell at my feet and wept that I should forgive him. "What should I forgive you for?" I asked him. "You showed me proper respect." He replied

* R. Tyrer served as the Rav of Tschernowitz, Poland, and is the author of *Be'er Mayim Chaim*.

that he wanted me to forgive him for the initial period I spent in his home before he became aware of who I was, when he had only shown me the respect one shows regular folk. His words penetrated my heart, and I said to myself that if he could fall in tears before a fellow human being, beseeching me to forgive him for the past, all the more so is this applicable to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Every day, my intellect better acquaints me with the Creator's greatness, and every day, I regret and sincerely repent for not having accorded Him the proper respect yesterday based on what I know today. Therefore, as my service, love, and awe of Hashem grow greater every day according to the scope of my awareness, I beg and beseech Him and afflict myself with these mortifications that He should forgive me for my paltry service and the inferiority of the love and awe I showed in past days.

In other words, a person's awareness develops every day, requiring him to improve his deeds and his conduct. It is thus obvious that a person must be constantly progressing and advancing in serving Hashem, growing ever stronger, and his service cannot remain at the level that suited his spiritual level yesterday.

☞ One Must Constantly Aspire Because the Goal Is Infinite

IT FOLLOWS THAT since there is no upper limit to knowledge of G-d and properly comprehending His existence, a person's spiritual quest and service of Hashem are infinite. Throughout life, a person must strive to submit before G-d to an ever-greater degree, every day attempting to elevate himself further. A person must not rest on his laurels. His heart should be aglow with a constant desire and yearning to listen, understand, accept, and comprehend whatever he doesn't yet know and hasn't yet attained. The *Shelah* (*parshas Eikev, Torah Ohr* 1) sees the trait of humility that we are supposed to cultivate as a consequence of our growing realization — with our ongoing advance in comprehending G-d — of how far we remain

from our ultimate goal and how paltry our attainments have been thus far.

In the *Shelah*'s words:

The greater a person's understanding and grasp of Hashem's greatness, the greater is his fear of Hashem, and there is no end or limit to this process... the more of Hashem's greatness a person appreciates, the more he realizes his own lowliness — for what is his worth? For the more a person grasps, the more he realizes that he is [ultimately] incapable of grasping, as they have said, "The goal of knowledge is that we should know that it is impossible to [truly] know."

☞ "The Land That I Will Show You" Is an Ever-Receding Horizon

FULFILLING ONE'S SPIRITUAL destiny is thus not a one-time achievement, but a never-ending process with a new and further destination every day. The reason why Hashem didn't reveal Avraham's destination to him — and why, in regard to Eretz Yisrel and the site of the Beis Hamikdash, it is necessary to be in a perpetual state of seeking "the way to Hashem's House" — should now be abundantly clear. The location for which we strive cannot be revealed at the outset, because wherever it is, it is always situated upon the horizon, out of a person's reach.

Thus, "the land that I will show you" doesn't represent a fixed point, but one that recedes the closer a person gets to it. It is a dynamic goal, changing and developing every day.

"The land that *I will* show you" always lies in the future, because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* designates a person's destination anew each day according to his ever-advancing level.

Hashem's directive to Avraham thus represents a guiding principle concerning every person's spiritual service. It establishes the need for constant striving to reach one's own, personal Promised Land and for constant effort to ascend higher and higher.

☞ Spiritual Gravity

SINCE OUR GOAL moves away from us the nearer we get to it, from where are we to draw the strength to keep moving forward? After all, we will never actually reach our goal.

The Sefas Emes provides the answer. Man's infinite yearning for ever-greater spiritual attainment is fueled by a spiritual "gravity" drawing him towards it.

In the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 39:1), Chazal portray Avraham Avinu's spiritual journey that culminated in Hashem's revelation to him:

This can be likened to a wandering traveler who saw a *birah dolekes* (a lit-up mansion). He said, "Is it possible that the mansion has nobody in charge of it?" [Whereupon] the mansion's owner peeked out at him and said, "I am the mansion's owner." Avraham Avinu said similarly, "Is it possible that this world has nobody in charge of it?" *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* looked out on him and told him, "I am the Owner of the world."

Birah denotes a large house or mansion, while *dolekes* means burning; thus, *birah dolekes* refers to a mansion in which there are lights burning, a sure indication that the owner is present. The Sefas Emes proposes an alternative understanding of the phrase *birah dolekes* that he heard from his grandfather the Chiddushei HaRim. The Midrash uses the word *dolekes* in the same sense it is used in the *pasuk*, "Yaakov responded and told Lavan, 'What is my crime and how have I sinned *ki dalakta acharay* (that you have pursued me)'" (*Bereishis* 31:36).^{*} In this context, *dolekes* means pursuing.

Accordingly, *birah dolekes* means, "the mansion (i.e., the world) pursues a single point."

The Sefas Emes accordingly explains the meaning of the Midrash.

^{*} The word *dolekes* thus denotes swift movement, common to both the spread of a fire that ignites a flammable material and to the pursuit given by a hunter intent on catching his prey.

Avraham noticed that the entire world is drawn after some inner content. In the same way that a pursuer chases his prey, the world is drawn towards its inner, spiritual content, which constitutes the source of its vitality and survival. In other words, everything is drawn towards its life source — the world's life source being Hashem's word. Anyone seeking to understand the phenomena he witnesses taking place around him thus benefits from a natural attraction toward the sublime, Divine reckonings that are concealed within them.

Avraham Avinu wanted to see and understand just how this inner spiritual kernel bestows life on every creature in the world. He tried to fathom the phenomenon that all creatures maintain their connection with the Root of holiness while inhabiting a physical world. He therefore subsumed his material identity entirely to Hashem's will, and by fulfilling the command to "Go from your land" — by leaving behind his earthiness — he merited to perceive and grasp this.

☞ G-d Seeks the Individual Who Yearns for Him

TRUTH SEEKS TO be revealed; a person who seeks truth is in turn sought out by truth and pursued by it. In view of the natural gravitation of man's soul to the sublime, Divine kernel concealed within him, all he needs to do to experience this pull is release his grip on his physical comfort and perception and allow himself to be drawn by this spiritual "attraction" that draws everything towards its profound, spiritual Source. G-d thus seeks out the person who yearns for Him.

SUMMARY

Here, the Sefas Emes reveals a cyclical process, demonstrating that at the same time that a person seeks G-d and strives to grasp the infinite, the "mansion" is also pursuing him. *Hakadosh*

Baruch Hu gives a person new goals every day, drawing him ever upward in His service. Thus, whoever seeks the truth is also sought out by the truth and is pursued by it.

“Loosen your grip, and know that I am G-d” (*Tehillim* 46:11). Man must release his grip not only on his worldly desires (“Go, for your own good, from your earthiness”), but also on his limited spiritual perceptions, first moving his foot off of the rung of the ladder upon which he currently stands in order to advance to the next level. The pull of spiritual “gravity” automatically carries him towards the core of the furnace of the inner Truth.

If a person lives up to the directive to “Go from your land; leave behind your earthiness,” he will arrive at “the land that I will show you,” because the mansion’s Owner will reveal Himself and declare to him, “Here I am!”

Uveyira

“From My Flesh I Perceive Hashem” — The Essence of *Bris Milah*

☞ Unhindered Prophecy after the Physical *Bris*

AFTER REMOVING HIS foreskin, Avraham experienced a revelation of the *Shechinah*: “Hashem appeared to him in the plain of Mamrei while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day” (*Bereishis* 18:1). The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 48:2) connects this *pasuk* to the *pasuk* in *Iyov*, “After cutting my [fore]skin, from my flesh, I perceive G-d” (19:26). The Midrash expounds this *pasuk* as follows: “Avraham said, ‘After I circumcised myself, many converts came to attach themselves to this covenant. “And from my flesh I perceive G-d” — had I not done so, how would *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* have revealed Himself to me?’”

Chazal evidently understood that the revelation following the *bris* was more sublime than any communication from Heaven that Avraham had received thus far. The *Zohar* (Vol. I, 91b) echoes this idea, pointing out that before his *bris*, Hashem revealed Himself to Avraham in a vision. Following the *bris bein habesarim*, the Torah tells us, “After these matters, Hashem’s word was [addressed] to Avraham in a vision, saying...” (*Bereishis* 15:1), whereas after his circumcision, it says, “Hashem appeared to him.” This denotes a clearer, more explicit perception than that afforded by a vision, whereby the *Shechinah* communicated with him, in the *Zohar*’s words, “properly and fully.”

It is implicit in these sources that it wasn't simply the merit of fulfilling G-d's command to circumcise Himself that facilitated Avraham's elevated level of prophecy. Rather, the physical change that the *bris* wrought in him was the catalyst — “*From my flesh*, I perceive G-d.”

How does removal of the flesh of the foreskin influence a person's level of prophecy? We would expect a person's prophetic experience to be determined solely by factors such as his mind's grasp, character refinement, and personal holiness.

☞ Creating the *Bris* vs. Revealing the *Bris*

WE USUALLY THINK of the foreskin's removal as the act that represents the entry into the covenant of Avraham Avinu. The *Zohar* (Vol. II, 181b), however, regards *milah* as the removal of the skin that covers the *bris*, speaking of “the foreskin covering the *bris*.” In Chazal's view, removing the foreskin reveals the *bris* that existed beforehand but was obstructed and hidden.

☞ The *Bris* Uncovers a Person's Inner World

THE SEFAS EMES explains that within everything in existence lies a Divine spark that is its source of life. G-d's word not only created the world, but also continues to sustain it from one moment to the next. The physical world has no independent existence without this ongoing Divine input. The *Zohar* (Vol. III, 225a) states that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* determines the trajectories of all the worlds in existence, His presence fills them all, and He sustains them all.

In the *Zohar*'s words, “**He navigates all the worlds**, and there is no other who moves them in every direction — up, down, and in all four directions — besides Him. And none is able to step out of His jurisdiction and leave (i.e., there is no place devoid of His presence). **He fills all the worlds**, and there is no other who fills them. **He sustains them**, and there is no other deity. It is up to Him to bestow

life upon it (i.e., the world), as it says, ‘And You sustain them all’ (*Nechemiah* 9:6).”

Man’s sight is “eye deep,” extending only to the externality of a physical being. His perception cannot penetrate to its inner essence, namely, the Divine spark sustaining every physical entity. The outer, physical covering — referred to as the *orlah*, the foreskin that covers the *bris*, as the *Zohar* states — must therefore be removed, revealing the inner, concealed spark. The *bris* therefore isn’t just the removal of a layer of skin but of an outer cover, enabling the Divine inner content to be perceived.

How are we to understand all this?

☞ The Foreskin’s Presence Represents the Abrogation of a Spiritual Covenant

STUDYING THE MAHARAL’S comments in his work *Chiddushei Agados* (*Sanhedrin* 38b) yields the key to understanding the matter. The Gemara cites several opinions regarding Adam HaRishon:

- R. Yehudah says in Rav’s name that Adam HaRishon was a heretic, as it says, “Hashem, G-d, called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (*Bereishis* 3:9), meaning “To where has your heart strayed?”
- R. Nachman says that Adam HaRishon denied G-d’s existence, as it says, “Like Adam, they have transgressed the covenant” (*Hoshei’a* 6:7), “And they said, ‘Because they abandoned the covenant of Hashem, their G-d’” (*Yirmeyahu* 22:9).
- R. Yitzchak says that Adam HaRishon stretched his foreskin, for to Avraham it was said of a person who does not undergo circumcision, “He has abrogated My covenant” (*Bereishis* 17:14), and in the book of *Hoshei’a* it says, “Like Adam, they have transgressed the covenant.”

The individual who fails to circumcise his physical foreskin is thus equated with the person who abrogates the spiritual covenant

between himself and his Creator. In *Avodas Hakodesh* (Vol. II, Chap. 21), the Chida explains that the Gemara's statements about Adam HaRishon are not in disagreement with one another. "Both are true, for Adam HaRishon extended the foreskin and [thereby spread] impurity over the world, covering and obscuring the holy covenant, which is [tantamount] to denying G-d altogether." How are we to understand Adam "stretching his foreskin?" What did he seek to achieve with this physical act?

And why do we regard failure to remove the physical foreskin as an abrogation of the covenant with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*?

☞ *Milah* as a Directive to Perceive the Providence Hidden beneath the "Canopy of Concealment"

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that nature is a cloak. When viewed superficially, the world seems to run automatically. In fact, however, Divine Providence controls the world's working from start to finish. The kabbalists note that the *gematria* of both Hashem's Name *Elokim* (*alef-lamed-hei-yud-mem*) and the word *hateva* (*hei-tes-beis-ayin*, meaning nature) is 86, because it is actually G-d carrying out every phenomenon that we regard as part of nature. In fact, then, every single natural phenomenon, process, and cycle presents to us an external mantle concealing its inner essence. We need to pause, think, and reflect to perceive the truth. Nature is superimposed upon this inner content that remains concealed, and we can and are expected to uncover it. Man's task is to raise existence to a higher level by accessing its inner content. The world is sustained by Divine Providence and by Hashem's word that declared, "Hashem saw all He had made and behold, it was very good" (*Bereishis* 1:31). However, the world runs in a hidden manner, with nature obscuring Divine Providence for the purpose of allowing man the freedom to choose between belief and denial.

Man is also born with a covering that he must remove; this is the meaning of the term *orlah*.

An *orlah* denotes some covering, blockage, or barrier. Thus, for example, any fruit a tree yields during its first three years of growth is termed *orlah*, and no benefit may be derived from it. The Torah tells us of such a tree, “You shall seal off its fruit as sealed off (i.e., as forbidden produce)” (*Vayikra* 19:23). Rashi explains, “You shall block its blocked [produce]; it shall remain blocked off and closed off [to you] from benefitting from it.” Rashi (*Shemos* 6:12) explains the term “*arel sefasayim*” (suffering from a speech impediment) similarly: “*Arel sefasayim* — closed lips; I explain every term containing the word *orlah* to mean blocked... such as *orlas basar* (the *orlah* of flesh), because the organ is blocked and covered by it.”

Due to the sin of the *eitz hadaas*, Adam HaRishon believed that the world operated according to the laws of nature, not Divine Providence. The inner content of existence was concealed from him, and he was captivated by the evidence of his eyes. The Torah tells us of the *eitz hadaas*, “The woman *saw* that the tree was good to eat and that it was *desirable for the eyes*” (*Bereishis* 3:6). Creation’s inner essence was concealed from man. Adam’s denial of Divine Providence and his extension of his foreskin are thus manifestations of the same phenomenon: his conviction that the world runs on its own and that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* no longer operates it under His close supervision, with everything calculated from start to finish. Any individual who accepts the world around him at face value, cloaked in its mantle of nature, and makes no effort to access its inner content is essentially an *arel* (uncircumcised). It was therefore appropriate that Adam HaRishon should also be physically uncircumcised, meaning that he should retain some physical vestige of his superficial and obstructed perception of the world. From Adam HaRishon onwards, people were thus born with a foreskin.

While the mitzvah of *milah* that Avraham Avinu and his offspring were commanded is fulfilled by the physical excision of the foreskin, it does not end there. It encompasses removing the mantle from the world around us and revealing its inner content and essence, understanding that every external phenomenon has a cause

and that a Divine Being activates them all, sustains them at every moment, and determines what will happen to them. Nature is that external reality. Its purpose is to allow man to live with freedom of choice, enabling him to believe, if he so chooses, that there is no Divine Providence and that the world runs according to a fixed pattern. Our covenant with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* takes effect when man removes the mantle and perceives the Divine Providence beneath the external covering.

This is why the Torah instructs us to perform *bris milah* on the eighth day of life, for the number eight represents the level above nature. The “natural” world was created in seven days, representing the regular, external order of existence. The eighth day represents that which is above nature, that which lies within and beneath the surface. Therefore, *bris milah*, whose goal is to give expression to the Divine, concealed, inner dimension of existence that reaches beyond nature, must be performed on the eighth day of the child’s life.

☞ The Connection between Circumcision and Clearing Away the Obstruction to Faith

IN LIGHT OF this explanation, the Sefas Emes’s assertion that after the removal of his *orlah*, Hashem appeared to Avraham in a new, clearer revelation without any cloak or covering is readily understood. The *milah* removed the covering from the Divine, inner spark that sustains everything that exists in our world.

We thus find in the *Zohar* (Vol. I, 98b), “Before Avraham underwent circumcision, he was blocked. Once he was circumcised, everything was revealed, and the *Shechinah* rested upon him fully and properly. Come and see, ‘And he was sitting at the tent’s entrance’ (*Bereishis* 18:1). ‘And he’ — this refers to the Upper World that rests upon this Lower World.”

However, we still need to understand what the physical act of circumcision achieved for Avraham. Hadn’t he already been accessing creation’s inner content and perceiving Divine Providence? And

in general, why should the removal of the physical *orlah* from the reproductive organ exert any effect upon a person's belief that Divine Providence lies behind all natural phenomena?

☛ The *Orlah* Covers the Source of Abundance

THE SEFAS EMES reveals a further level of depth by pointing out a parallel between two words which share the same root and spelling: *vayeira* ("he appeared," as in "Hashem *appeared* to him" following Avraham's *bris*) and *vayar* ("he saw," as in "G-d *saw* everything He had made and behold, it was very good"). In other words, the heightened clarity of prophetic vision resulting from the *bris milah* and the Divine abundance that sustains the world parallel one another.

Studying the comments of R. Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir in his *Ohr Hameir* on *Shir HaShirim* will shed light upon this connection.

Man is referred to as "*olam katan* (a world in miniature)." This term is used by Chazal in the Midrash (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 3) — "...the formation of man, who is a world in miniature" — and also in the *Zohar* (*Raaya Meheimna*, Vol. III, 157b) — "For man is called *alma ze'ira*, a world in miniature." The *Zohar* (Vol. I, 90b) further states, "The design of creation and the design of man are one and the same," meaning that the same Divine craftsmanship was employed in creating the world and in making man.

This parallel between man and the world does not relate to the physical realm. The implication of man being a world in miniature is that he was created with a means of containing Divine illumination here in this physical world, which he does by virtue of his feet being planted on the ground. He inhabits a physical body and lives as part of the material world while he has the spiritual capacity to reach heaven, as he is endowed with a soul that can transcend his physicality and attain sublime spiritual levels. Man is thus the focus of the creation of the entire world, and it is by virtue of his deeds that Divine bounty from all the upper worlds and the sublime *sefiros* reach this world.

A person's physical actions thus exert an effect upon the world's spiritual state and determine the extent of the Divine illumination in the world.

The one realm in which man has an opportunity to partner with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in creation is reproduction. The font of procreation is a physical limb by means of which man transmits his essence and all of his characteristics to future generations. This limb is thus a source of life and of abundance, enabling man to multiply and to enhance the significance of his life. The foreskin that is attached to the reproductive organ thus covers man's primary font of abundance, and its removal represents uncovering this font, corresponding to the removal of the covering over the font of abundance that is channeled into this world from the upper worlds.

Since man's physical actions affect the entire world's spiritual situation, it is straightforward that a step as significant as the *orlah's* removal draws Divine illumination from heaven and abundance to the entire world. This explains the spiritual implications of *bris milah*.

☞ The *Orlah's* Removal Opens a Path for Divine Illumination

THIS IDEA ENABLES us to understand the connection between extending the physical foreskin and denying the existence of a Divine Presence concealed beneath the mantle of nature. Adam HaRishon "stretched his foreskin," thereby intensifying the darkness of denial arising from the mindset that "the world operates according to its fixed pattern." When man's perception of active Divine Providence dims, and his belief in the constant flow of Heavenly abundance falters, the channel of abundance ceases its flow, and the Divine illumination weakens, for man is "a world in miniature." The world was created for his sake, and his actions exert far-reaching influence upon all the worlds.

Avraham Avinu, on the other hand, staunchly believed that the world is supervised and operated by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He was

therefore commanded to carry out circumcision, the act of removing the covering from a physical entity's spiritual essence. *Bris milah* removes the cover from man's foremost channel of abundance, along which the very essence of his being advances. By virtue of Avraham circumcising himself, Divine illumination and abundance once again began to flow to the entire world, and he merited greater illumination and a higher level of Divine communication. All of this is conveyed by the words, "Hashem appeared to him."

☞ The Vitality of All the Worlds Flows from Divine Providence

THE SEFAS EMES'S observation that the light through which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bestows abundance upon the world stems from His utterance, "G-d saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good" can now be easily understood. This light doesn't radiate when man fails to acknowledge Divine Providence and that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is the sole Source of existence and sustenance. It only reasserts itself when man removes the physical covering over his spiritual essence. With Avraham's removal of the foreskin, the entire world experienced a new intensity of illumination, and Avraham merited perceiving it — "Hashem appeared to him."

As the Sefas Emes explains: "This 'appearance' (i.e., revelation) endures forever, giving creation permanence and stability and attaching particularly to whoever knows that the vitality of all the worlds flows from Hashem's Providence, as it says, 'Hashem, your G-d, keeps a constant eye on it' (*Devarim* 11:12)."

SUMMARY

Bris milah is thus not merely a physical procedure. Rather than establishing a new covenant, it reveals and reaffirms a

preexisting covenant, representing removal of the cover from man's and the world's channels of abundance. The *orlah*'s removal signifies man's acknowledgment of the concealed, spiritual dimension of existence and thereby the removal of the cover concealing the flow of Heavenly abundance. Man's minor procedure is thus replete with significance for the entire world, for man's actions influence all the worlds. By removing his own covering, he removes the mantle obstructing the Divine illumination that sustains the entire world. The *pasuk*'s words, "From my flesh I perceive Hashem" are thus particularly apt in regard to *milah*.

Chayei Sarah

A Half-Name and Ripples of Holiness

☞ Why Are the Sons of Keturah Mentioned Together with Yitzchak?

THE TORAH TELLS us what happened after Yitzchak married Rivkah and brought her to the tent that Sarah, his mother, had occupied:

Avraham married a woman named Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Yakshan, Medan, Midyan, Yishbak, and Shuach. Yakshan begat Sheva and Dedan, and Dedan's sons were Ashurim, Letushim, and Le'umim. Midyan's descendants were Eifah, Eifer, Chanoch, Avida, and Eldaah; all these were Keturah's descendants. Avraham gave all that he possessed to Yitzchak. And to the sons of Avraham's concubines, Avraham gave gifts, and he sent them away from his son Yitzchak during his lifetime, eastward, to the land of the East. (*Bereishis* 25:1–6)

Chazal praise Avraham for siring Keturah's sons, considering this a success on his part. In the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 61:1), Chazal expound the *pasuk* from *Tehillim* (1:3), "He shall be like a tree planted upon streams of water that yields its fruit in season; its leaves do not wither, and he is successful in everything he does" as follows:

"He shall be like a tree planted" — *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* planted him in Eretz Yisrael;

“That yields its fruit in season” — this refers to Yishmael;
 “Its leaves do not wither” — this refers to Yitzchak;
 “And he is successful in everything he does” — these are the sons
 of Keturah.

What praise of Avraham is implied in his being the progenitor of the sons of Keturah? Why do Chazal count Yishmael and the sons of Keturah as examples of Avraham’s success in the same breath as Yitzchak?

And why did Avraham make a point of siring further descendants whom he then drove away?

☛ The Gifts That Avraham Received and Gave Away

THESE *PESUKIM* PRESENT an additional difficulty. On one hand, we are told, “Avraham gave *all* that he possessed to Yitzchak,” implying that none of his other sons received anything. Yet the very next *pasuk* states, “And to the sons of Avraham’s concubines, Avraham gave gifts,” so he apparently gave part of his property away to the sons of Keturah. How are we to reconcile this with the previous *pasuk*’s assertion?

Rashi provides an answer to this question, explaining that these “gifts” consisted of “that which he had been given on Sarah’s account as well as the other gifts he had been given — he gave it all to them, because he wanted no benefit from [these gifts].”

This refers to the gifts Avraham received from Pharaoh to curry favor with Avraham, believing that he was not Sarah’s husband but her brother (*Bereishis* 12:15). Avraham had no interest in benefitting from these gifts, so he gave them to the sons of Keturah. Avraham thus indeed gave “*all* that *he* possessed” to Yitzchak, giving none of his own possessions to the sons of Keturah; he gave them only things that were extraneous to him.

We need to understand, though, why he was interested in receiving these gifts in the first place if he had no intention of benefitting from them. As the *pasuk* tells us, Avraham instructed Sarah to tell any inquirers that he was her brother “so that I may be treated well

on your account” (ibid. 12:13), which Rashi there explains to mean, “They will give me gifts.”

☞ “I Shall Add to All Your Praises”

THE SEFAS EMES explains that every person is active in two spheres.

One sphere encompasses the spiritual activities he engages in to serve Hashem: he studies Torah, prays, and fulfills other mitzvos. He discharges his obligations, and by their very nature, these activities are suffused with holiness.

A second sphere he engages in consists of mundane, physical activities which are not intrinsically holy but which he can infuse with holiness. Man’s capacity to inject holiness into the mundane realm is a novelty, enabling him to extend the realm of holiness.

In fact, the extent of a *tzaddik*’s achievements is measured by how much he is able to draw the mundane towards holiness, bringing holiness not only to where it already exists, but even beyond, into the surrounding realm of the ordinary.

David Hamelech says in *Tehillim*, “I shall add to all Your praises” (71:14). It is a virtue to broaden the realm of holiness, which a *tzaddik* does by extending Heaven’s praises beyond the confines of what is obligatory.

☞ Bringing Shabbos to Weekdays

TO ILLUSTRATE THIS idea, the Sefas Emes cites the example of Shabbos and *Tosefes Shabbos* (adding on to Shabbos), i.e., mundane time that is infused with the holiness of Shabbos.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 81b) tells us, “Part of the weekday should be appended to Shabbos,” both prior to Shabbos’s commencement and following its departure. Man thereby infuses part of the week with the holiness of Shabbos.

While upholding Shabbos’s sanctity belongs within a person’s first sphere, he can extend its holiness beyond it to the second sphere,

imbuing an ordinary weekday with holiness. Although the holiness of the Shabbos day is fixed and unchanging ever since the first Shabbos on the seventh day of creation, it is within man's power to draw its holiness out and infuse the adjacent weekdays with it. This ability of man to create Shabbos at a time that is not Shabbos, introducing holiness into the mundane, is an astounding phenomenon.

☞ The Six Weekdays Are in Preparation for Shabbos

IT SHOULD BE noted that wherever the Torah mentions the command not to work on Shabbos, it is preceded by an injunction about the six weekdays. Consider the following examples:

- In the *Aseres Hadibros*, we find, “Six days shall you labor and do all your work, and the seventh day is Shabbos for Hashem, your G-d” (*Shemos* 20:9–10).
- In *parshas Mishpatim*, “Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day, you shall desist...” (ibid. 23:12).
- In *parshas Ki Sisa*, “Work may be done for six days, but on the seventh, there shall be a complete cessation of work which is holy for Hashem; whoever does work on the Shabbos day must be put to death” (ibid. 31:15).
- “Six days you shall work, and on the seventh day, you shall desist; you shall desist from plowing and reaping” (ibid. 34:21).
- “Work shall be done for six days, and on the seventh day, it shall be holy for you: a complete cessation of work for Hashem” (ibid. 35:2).

The obligation to confine all work to the six weekdays repeatedly precedes the command to sanctify Shabbos because man is expected to imbue all that he does with something of Shabbos's holiness. Shabbos should be the focus of all his activity, thereby infusing the entire week with holiness. The six weekdays are thereby transformed from ordinary, mundane days into days of preparation for Shabbos, imbued with Shabbos's holiness.

☞ The Exertions of Erev Shabbos Are to Prepare for the Day's Holiness

THE GEMARA (*AVODAH ZARAH* 3A) tells us that in the future, the nations of the world will come requesting a share in the World to Come. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* response will be, "You utter fools, he who exerts himself on *erev Shabbos* shall eat on Shabbos, but he who doesn't exert himself on *erev Shabbos*, from where will he have what to eat on Shabbos?"

The message to the nations is that toiling to amass mitzvos in this world is akin to toiling during the week in anticipation of Shabbos, which entitles a person to his reward. Toiling during the week is not incidental, something we do simply because there happens to be nothing special about regular weekdays. A person *must* toil during the weekdays in order to create a continuum of material achievement that is focused upon the holiness at its center. This transforms ordinary weekdays into preparatory stages for receiving Shabbos's holiness, resulting in the spread of Shabbos's intrinsic holiness to all the surrounding weekdays.

☞ Ripples of Holiness

ACCORDINGLY, THE SEFAS Emes explains that "There was no novelty in regard to the principal lineage of Yisrael that was destined to issue from Avraham; the novel achievement of the *tzaddik* lies in that which he adds." In other words, Avraham producing Yitzchak it is nothing out of the ordinary, for it is to be expected that the offspring of a holy individual will resemble his parent in this respect. This relates to a person's first sphere, within which he maintains the holiness of that which is already designated as holy. The *tzaddik's* original contribution lies in his success in sanctifying his ordinary, mundane surroundings, drawing and attaching to holiness even those whose place ordinarily lies beyond his inner sphere of holy activity.

Therefore, just as there is an obligation to append mundane time to Shabbos both before and after, Avraham appended mundane offspring to his own holiness, siring both Yishmael before Yitzchak's birth and the sons of Keturah afterward. While Yitzchak was the focus of Avraham's holiness, that holiness spread outward in widening ripples, sanctifying those who were born adjacent — both before and after — to his primary offspring.

☞ Sanctifying the Ordinary That Surrounds the Nucleus of Holiness

WE NOW UNDERSTAND Avraham's purpose in accepting gifts from Pharaoh. He was seeking to sanctify the ordinary world surrounding him, specifically through the elevation that these new acquisitions underwent by passing into his ownership. To this end, he didn't limit his efforts to his own property which Hashem had bestowed on him directly by virtue of being His loyal servant and His "ambassador" to mankind. However, Avraham had no interest in benefiting from these gifts, for they were not rooted in a holy source and were thus unable to serve as full extensions of his holiness. He thereby fulfilled the *pasuk's* counsel, "A hater of gifts shall live" (*Mishlei* 15:27), assigning them to the sons of Keturah who were on an equal footing with this property as appendages to Avraham's holiness rather than fully continuing it.

Avraham thus created holiness in his environs, and upon its mundane elements he conferred spiritual radiance through their connection to the holy, inner core of his own activities. Similarly, the times immediately adjacent to Shabbos are neither altogether mundane nor fully holy; rather, they are appendages to Shabbos and extensions of it. Those items that lay alongside — although apart from — Avraham's property were not altogether mundane, but were "gifts" that had become imbued with holiness, just as Yitzchak's half-siblings were not regular non-Jews, but additional offspring of Avraham's with "mundane-yet-sanctified" status.

☞ A Half Name

IN LIGHT OF the above, it is fascinating to note the *Shelah's* comments (*parshas Chayei Sarah, Torah Ohr* 2) on the spelling of the word *hapilagshim* (the concubines; *Bereishis* 25:6), which is written in the Torah without a *yud* such that *pilagshim* can be divided and read as two words: *plag-sheim*, meaning “a half name.” The term “half name” denotes a partial conference of Hashem’s Name upon something or someone that is intrinsically distant from holiness. In other words, a certain degree of holiness was nonetheless associated even with these “sons of the concubines,” the sons of Keturah, who can be thought of as “satellites” of Avraham — in his orbit but at a distance — who were connected to him by virtue of being his offspring but who did not fully assimilate his teachings and values.

Instilling this rudimentary degree of holiness is vital for both the realms of the holy and the mundane.

Its contribution to the former is that that which lies beyond its confines is no longer wholly mundane, but bears at least a “half name.”

Its contribution to the latter lies in there now being a basis for conferring more intense holiness. In the *Shelah's* words: “In the future, the ‘half name’ will be rectified, for impurity will cease to exist, and the remainder will be invested with [a full measure of] holiness.”

☞ Incense Binds to Holiness

IN KEEPING WITH this approach, the Sefas Emes explains Chazal’s statement (*Tanchuma, Chayei Sarah* 8), “Why [here] is she (i.e., Hagar) named Keturah? Because her deeds were as becoming as incense.” The *Zohar* (Vol. I, 176b) writes that the word *ketores* (incense) is derived from the Aramaic word *kutra*, which is the translation of the Hebrew word *kesher* (knot or bunch). Blending various spices in the form of incense creates a connection between the ingredients, harnessing the unique properties of each so that together, they instill

an atmosphere of holiness. Chazal note (*Kerisos* 6b) that one of the ingredients of the *ketores* that was burned in the Beis Hamikdash was *chelbanah* (galbanum), which is malodorous. This plant resin symbolizes the sinners of Klal Yisrael who are nevertheless part of the community as a whole. *Ketores* thus also serves the function of binding to and investing with holiness an ingredient that on its own lies outside that sphere. In marrying a woman named Keturah, Avraham's intention was thus to diffuse the aroma of incense imbued with holiness into the area beyond the holy, inner core that would henceforth be bound to the core in a single continuum.

SUMMARY

A genuine *tzaddik* invests not only his spiritual activities with holiness, but even his mundane pursuits. He takes the intrinsic holiness of Shabbos and instills it into the adjacent, ordinary days. Whatever parts of the mundane world connect to him also become imbued with holiness. No longer is his wider environment antagonistic to holiness; it now has a foundation and is prepared for greater holiness.

Indeed, "The heavens are heavens for G-d, while He gave the earth to men" (*Tehillim* 115:16) — for them to transform the earth, too, into heaven.

Toldos

“He Shall Give... and Continue Giving”

☛ Why Bestow an Incomplete Gift?

THE OPENING WORDS of the wonderful blessings that Yitzchak bestowed on Yaakov are, “And G-d shall give you from the dew of the heavens and from the fat of the land and much grain and wine” (*Bereishis* 27:28). The first letter of the *pasuk*’s first word, *v’yitein* (and He should give), is a *vav hachibur* (a connecting *vav*), linking the verb to some previous clause that is implied but unwritten. What are we to infer from this? Since this was the very first word of Yitzchak’s blessing, to what could it be adding?

Rashi explains that there must be an earlier “giving” upon which this one adds, as though it had been written *yitein* — *v’yachzor v’yitein* (He shall give you and then give again). In other words, Heaven’s bounty should be ongoing, with repeated gifts.

The Sefas Emes asks a simple but penetrating question. If a second gift is necessary, the first one is apparently insufficient. Why not bestow bounty in a quantity equal to both gifts to begin with? Why give to begin with in a manner that requires further bestowal?

☛ No Free Lunches

TO ADDRESS THIS question, the Sefas Emes first establishes a principle that “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bestows bounty upon this world

solely in order that He Himself should thereby derive satisfaction from people being able to serve Him while furnished with all their needs.” In other words, the purpose for which Heaven supplies a person’s needs is that he should have the wherewithal to serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This applies equally to the material blessings that the Creator bestows on man and the spiritual assistance that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* extends to him in his spiritual endeavors. All these benefits are given so that a person should be able to occupy himself with Torah study and fulfilling mitzvos, bringing satisfaction to his Creator.

☞ Reward Is Bestowed in the Next World; Abundance in This World Is to Facilitate Fulfilling the Torah

THE SOURCE FOR this idea is the Rambam’s comment in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (9:1), where he poses the following question: Since the reward for fulfilling mitzvos is received in the World to Come, why does the Torah promise that depending upon whether or not we obey Hashem’s commands, we will be subjected to varying circumstances such as “plenty and famine, war and peace, dominion and being downtrodden, dwelling in the Land and being exiled from it, success in our endeavors and failure, and everything else that is included in the covenant?”

The Rambam answers, “Those benefits are not the ultimate reward for the mitzvos.” Reward for spiritual attainments of infinite worth is not payable in the limited, physical currency of this world. For fulfilling the Torah, a person merits life in the World to Come, “according to the magnitude of his deeds and the extent of his wisdom.” However, apart from the reward in the next world, the Torah promises that if we fulfill its directives happily and with a glad heart and occupy our minds constantly with its wisdom, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will remove every circumstance that might prevent us from fulfilling it, such as sickness, war, and hunger, and will bestow on us every circumstance that is conducive to fulfilling it, such as

plenty, peace, and wealth. The purpose, says the Rambam, is “that we shouldn’t spend all our time preoccupied with physical needs, but should be free to pursue wisdom and fulfill the mitzvos so that we merit life in the World to Come.”

☞ Means Are Bestowed According to the Extent They Are Used for Attaining the Desired End

THERE IS THUS a linkage between the extent of the bounty a person receives and that of his spiritual attainments.

Failing to use the material abundance that Heaven has bestowed towards spiritual growth not only invalidates for which it was given, but also prevents its continued bestowal, because the recipient is not fulfilling the purpose for which it was provided in the first place. From this, the Sefas Emes draws the conclusion that the only way to merit material abundance that won’t be “wasted” through the recipient’s failure to yield commensurate spiritual gains is by bestowing it in installments that match each recipient’s capacity while constantly examining him, expecting him to show how he has used the bounty he received hitherto to better himself spiritually and advance in Torah and mitzvos. If he passes this test, he will receive more and more from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s generous and open Hand. Since spiritual advance is by definition a gradual process, with a person constantly improving his spiritual profile and his Torah attainment, the material means he requires will be adjusted to his various needs, reaching him in gradual, measured packages.

☞ Though the Cow Wants to Nurse, the Calf Must Be Able to Suckle

THIS CONCEPT IS mentioned in several *sefarim*.

- R. Chaim of Volozhin (*Nefesh Hachaim* 4:5) uses this idea in pointing out the necessity of fearing Heaven in order to receive heavenly assistance with one’s Torah study. He writes,

“A father who apportions grain to his son gives the son an amount of grain that the son’s granary — that he prepared in advance — can hold. Even if the father is feeling generous and wants to give his son a large amount — more than the son can accept, because his granary isn’t big enough to hold any extra — he is unable to give him more at present.”

- The kabbalist R. Eliyahu de Vides writes (*Reishis Chochmah, Shaar HaAhavah* 6):

The nature of the love that G-d bears towards man, by virtue of which He bestows on him life, abundance, blessing, and every good thing, is certainly that of a father towards his son, for every cause desires to bestow upon that which results from it, [as] Chazal say (*Pesachim* 112a), “Greater than the calf’s urge to suckle is the cow’s urge to provide.” However, on occasion, a cow or a mother may refrain from nursing her offspring if it is sick and unable to suckle milk. Similarly, heavenly abundance may sometimes be withheld from a person not upon G-d’s instigation — for He always wants to bestow it, in the manner of a loving father towards his son — but due to the son being unprepared to receive it. If the son rectifies his soul and is ready to receive the sublime radiance, he will find that the reality of this love [extends] from the first levels all the way to the ultimate ones.

☞ Further Gifts to the Person Who Shows He Has the Capacity for Receiving Them

THE SEFAS EMES explains accordingly that when a person uses his material bounty for fulfilling Hashem’s will, he brings Him satisfaction, for the abundance bestowed on him has achieved its goal and filled its purpose. This recipient has demonstrated that he is worthy of receiving further abundance and that he is able to use it to continue his spiritual development and advancement. Receiving Heaven’s bounty and using it to fulfill Hashem’s will thus engenders Heaven’s renewed desire to bestow further abundance on him, according to the capacity he has already shown he possesses for receiving it. This

person will therefore receive a further gift from Hashem. This is the rationale behind Chazal's interpretation of "And G-d should give you" as, "He shall give you and then give again."

☞ "One Depth Calls to the Other, to the Sound of [Their Flow in] Your Channel"

THIS IDEA PROVIDES a key to understanding a basic concept in the teachings of the Arizal (*Eitz Chaim, Shaar 39, Discourse 2*) that the bestowal of heavenly abundance is conditioned upon people's deeds. In R. Chaim Vital's words, a heavenly arousal (*isarusa d'l'eila*) depends upon a prior arousal down below (*isarusa d'l'sata*) that engenders the descent of the heavenly bounty. In the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah 13:13*), we similarly encounter the concepts of *mayin nukvin* ("female waters"), which denotes the readiness of the receiving vessels and is a precondition for the downward flow of *mayin de-churin* ("male waters") from the heavenly channels. As the Midrash expresses it, "Not a single drop descends from Above without the earth rising two *tefachim* towards it, as it says, 'One depth calls to the other, to the sound of [their flow in] Your channel' (*Tehillim 42:8*) — the upper waters are 'male' and the lower ones 'female,' and they tell each other, 'Receive us.'"

The exception to this rule was the period of the world's creation, when Heaven bestowed abundance upon the world in the absence of prior preparation on the part of man, who had not yet been created.

Similarly, the very first occasion when heavenly bounty is bestowed on a person is initiated by the trait of Divine mercy. This is known as *raava d'raavin* ("the desire of desires," i.e., the supreme, overarching Divine desire), Hashem's desire to bestow abundance irrespective of the recipient's deeds.

This initial gift is limited to the recipient's initial capacity, and thereafter, the regular rule comes into effect whereby no abundance is bestowed from Above unless a person has initiated it through his deeds below by using what he previously received for fulfilling his

Creator's mitzvos so that He derives satisfaction from His gift. Only after a person has done so will the gift be renewed.

☞ The Parable of the Sea and the Cave

THIS IDEA IS used by the Sefas Emes to elucidate a passage in the Midrash. "You find that it says, 'Hashem spoke to Moshe,' [or] 'Hashem said to Moshe' (i.e., Hashem speaks and Moshe listens), and on the other hand, you find that it says, 'Moshe said to Hashem' and 'Moshe spoke to Hashem' (i.e., Moshe speaks and Hashem listens). This can be likened to a cave on the seashore: the water rises and fills it. Thereafter, the sea gives to the cave, and the cave to the sea."

The Sefas Emes wonders what the significance is of the cave spilling water into the sea and, likewise, of Moshe speaking to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Was there anything that Moshe could give *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* or bestow upon Him?

He explains the comparison as follows. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* initially bestowed great abundance upon Moshe, which Moshe then used to serve Hashem, elevating it in return back to its Source, as it were. Moshe thereby showed *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that he was able to receive further bounty. The "sea" then filled the "cave" again, with a further release of Heavenly bounty. Moshe then demonstrated again that he was using the bounty he had received to bring his Creator satisfaction. This movement from Moshe to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is symbolized by the cave spilling its waters into the sea. Heavenly bounty was then heaped upon Moshe once again, with "the sea filling the cave" and so on, following the pattern of, "He shall give you and then give again."

☞ There Is Novelty above the Sun

THE SEFAS EMES explains further that although man cannot create anything new, for everything is bestowed from Above, he can certainly utilize the material bounty he has received for sublime

spiritual purposes, thereby renewing his capacity for receiving abundance from Heaven. He uses this idea to explain the *pasuk* that says, “There is nothing novel beneath the sun” (*Koheles* 1:9), whereupon the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 115b) observes that there is novelty above the sun. This refers, says the Sefas Emes, to the Jewish nation’s ability to elevate the material bounty that descends to this world by using it in Hashem’s service, transforming it into spiritual attainments that return it to its Source, having fulfilled the purpose of its creation. Thus, he writes, “By elevating the bounty to its Source, Yisrael merits receiving new abundance.”

SUMMARY

We encounter a cyclical process. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s Hand is open wide, ready to bestow infinite abundance upon man. However, the purpose of this gift is that man should use his material resources to make spiritual gains. Heaven’s gifts are therefore bestowed incrementally, corresponding each time to the recipient’s spiritual capacity. Continued doses of bounty depend on man; if he is wise enough to use that which he has been given for bringing his Creator satisfaction, the gift of bounty will be renewed and will be heaped upon him repeatedly. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will “give him and give him again.”

Uvayeitzei

Spiritual Redemption amid Physical Exile

☛ Conveying Glory and Splendor from One Place to Another

YAAKOV FLED FROM his brother Esav, who wanted to kill him, hoping to reach the home of his uncle Lavan in Charan. The Torah tells us, “Yaakov left Be’er Sheva and went to Charan.” Rashi wonders why it is necessary to inform us that Yaakov left Be’er Sheva — leaving his former domicile in Be’er Sheva is surely implicit in having set out for Charan.

Rashi’s response to this question is: “However, this teaches us that a *tzaddik*’s departure from a place makes an impression. When the *tzaddik* is in the city, he is its splendor; he is its radiance; he is its beauty. When he leaves, gone is its splendor; gone is its radiance; gone is its beauty.”

Yaakov’s intention was to move elsewhere; he didn’t return to Be’er Sheva as soon as the circumstances that compelled his departure changed. This is clear from the Torah’s choice of words: “he left” and “he set out for,” rather than, “he fled” or “he absconded.”

The Sefas Emes explains that Yaakov willingly undertook this journey in order to introduce holiness into the places he would pass through. Thus, in contrast to the voluntary journeys undertaken by the other *avos* whose purpose was to move inward, closer to the

source of holiness, the purpose of this journey was Yaakov's exile from a place where Hashem's glory was open and apparent to places where it was concealed and hidden.

Here, the Torah is conveying a message regarding how a person can transcend the constraints of his surroundings and maintain his holy service even after departing from a spiritually elevated point of origin, spreading holiness outward and extending it into a harsher spiritual environment.

☛ Preparing to Go into Exile

CHAZAL SAW YAAKOV Avinu's departure from Be'er Sheva for Charan — from Eretz Yisrael to *chutz la'aretz* — as a prototype for his descendants' preparation for the bitter day when they would be exiled from their land. We thus find R. Yehoshua ben Levi (*Bereishis Rabbah* 68:13) interpreting this *pasuk* as a reference to the various exiles to which Yaakov's descendants were subjected:

“*Vayeitzei Yaakov*...Yaakov left Be'er Sheva” — corresponds to “Send them away from Me *v'yeitzei'u*, and they should leave (i.e., Eretz Yisrael)” (*Yirmeyah* 15:1)

“and went to **Charan**” — corresponds to “that Hashem afflicted [me] *b'yom charon apo*, on the day His anger flared” (*Eichah* 1:12) [and He exiled Yisrael].

Similarly, the Ramban (in his commentary to *Bereishis* 28:12) cites here the principle that “The deeds of the ancestors indicate what will befall their descendants,” mentioning Chazal's statement (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 35) that [during the vision of the ladder,] *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* showed Yaakov Avinu “the four empires [that would dominate Yisrael]; their dominion and their disappearance.”

Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, says the Sefas Emes, “in order to extend the glory of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s Name there [in exile] as well.” He thereby taught all future generations how to serve Hashem independent of their location and surroundings and how to rectify themselves not only while living in Eretz Yisrael, but in exile too.

☞ “Yaakov Left Be’er Sheva”

WHAT DOES THE *pasuk*, “Yaakov left Be’er Sheva...” teach us about how to handle life in exile?

The Sefas Emes explains that the first preparation a person needs to make prior to going into exile is to ensure that when he leaves, he does so from his own, personal “Be’er Sheva.” He explains this as follows: “Be’er Sheva represents Shabbos, which is the [inner] point that channels life to everything that is encompassed by the seven parameters.”

The key to understanding this somewhat cryptic statement seemingly lies in the Maharal’s comments in his *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 69). The Maharal explains that although all physical existence is contained within six dimensions (i.e., the four directions of the compass, plus above and below), there exists a seventh dimension which can be understood as the inner essence of every thing, its life source that enables it to exist. While the parameters of the six spatial dimensions delineate an object’s shape and boundaries, its nature and character cannot be grasped without glimpsing its essence, its seventh dimension and defining center. A person can look at an object and apprehend all six of its physical dimensions — its size, shape, and structure — without grasping what it is that he is actually seeing. Or another example: putting together various limbs and features will yield a human figure, but only if the viewer understands how the body works can he appreciate each individual limb’s role. This seventh dimension thus provides each thing with its finishing touch; it is its spiritual, defining core.

In his commentary on *Avos* (*Derech Chaim* 5:15), the Maharal identifies this seventh dimension with the spirit that permeates all matter and adds:

You will therefore find everywhere that the number seven represents six mundane dimensions plus a seventh, holy one:

In regard to days — the seven days of the week consist of six weekdays, and the seventh day is holy: Shabbos.

In regard to months — the seventh month [counting from Nisan, which is “the first of the months of the year” (*Shemos* 12:2)] is holy: Tishrei.

In regard to years — the land is worked for six years, and the seventh year is holy: *shemittah*.

This is all because that which numbers six is mundane, corresponding to the six extremities of the physical world, which is mundane, whereas the seventh corresponds to the holy palace, which is seventh and is in the center. This matter is well known.

Accordingly, when the Sefas Emes writes that Be’er Sheva represents Shabbos, he means that this name symbolizes the spiritual source (*be’er* refers to “a well”) that exists wherever we encounter a seventh (*sheva*, meaning seven) unit, corresponding to the seventh, spiritual dimension that sustains and gives meaning and content to the six physical dimensions.

☞ Leaving the Confines of the Six Physical Dimensions to Focus Solely on the Seventh Dimension

THE SEFAS EMES explains that in telling us that Yaakov’s departure was from Be’er Sheva, the wellspring of spiritual content, the Torah conveys that he didn’t relate to the six external, physical dimensions of his place and location, but only to the seventh inner, spiritual dimension of reality. He did not relate to the physicality of his environment, but to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, who is the central, inner core of all existence and its life Source.

Therefore, when Yaakov moved from one place to another and exchanged one social setting for another, he himself felt no change, for even before his move, his roots were not a function of his fixture in any particular place or surroundings, but of his attachment to the seventh dimension, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who transcends any specific time or place.

Accordingly, explains the Sefas Emes, when the Torah tells us that “Yaakov left” and adds that his departure was from “Be’er

Sheva,” we are to understand that on Yaakov’s part, the wellspring of Divine inspiration flows everywhere, associated as it is with the seventh dimension and thus unhindered by the constraints of the six physical dimensions. The *pasuk* is thus informing us that Yaakov’s departure specifically from “Be’er Sheva,” i.e., attuned solely to the seventh dimension, enabled him to leave Eretz Yisrael — the source of holiness — for places that were distant from any emanation of Divine radiance without experiencing any change whatsoever in his own level.

☛ Exile and Redemption

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 1), the Maharal presents another fundamental idea: whether a person is in a state of exile or redemption depends not upon where he is, but upon whether he is focused on his physical situation or his spiritual vista.

To explain:

The root of the Hebrew word for exile — *galus* — is *gimel-lamed-hei*.

The root of the Hebrew word for redemption — *ge’ulah* — is *gimel-alef-lamed*.

The difference between the two thus amounts to the difference between the letters *alef* and *hei*.

The letter *alef* (whose *gematria* is one) symbolizes unity and the center to which all the extremities are connected.

The letter *hei* (*gematria* five) symbolizes the center along with its dispersion to all four directions.

If a person wants to experience redemption despite being in physical exile, he can do so by drawing any and all extremities towards the center and focusing on the unifying, spiritual core — the holy essence and Divine spark — which is the purpose for which every thing exists. When he does so, he will leave exile and experience redemption, going from *gimel-lamed-hei* to *gimel-alef-lamed*.

☛ Leaving Exile and Experiencing Redemption, on Both the Individual and the National Level

THE SEFAS EMES maintains that the lesson this episode conveys is relevant not only on a national level — relating to the Jewish nation's exile from its land — but also to every individual seeking relief and redemption from the constraints of his own, personal exile. “The aforementioned Midrash,” he writes, “provides worthy advice, [namely,] that prior to conducting any activity in the material realm, a person should surrender his soul to the One G-d, thereby attaching himself to the inner vitality that comes solely from Hashem and imbuing even a mundane activity with holiness.”

In other words, so long as a person remains immersed in his material existence, he is subject to the constraints imposed by his location and by the surrounding society. He is defined in terms of his physical and social environment, and he has difficulty accessing his spiritual identity. Such a person is “like wind-tossed chaff” (*Tehillim* 1:4), for any change in his environment interferes with the flow of his character and upsets his equilibrium. The way to avoid this is by focusing on the source of the flow of Divine inspiration, on holiness, on his personal “Be’er Sheva” — the spiritual dimension of his situation — so that he is no longer dependent on his physical and social environment. He will then discover that even when he finds himself in “Charan” — in a spiritually parched, hostile environment — he need not experience any change. He will be “like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season, whose leaves do not wither, and who will succeed in all that he does” (*ibid. pasuk* 3). For the wellsprings that nourish him are independent of his location and environment; his roots are planted firmly in the substrate of spirituality and holiness.

☛ A Person Is Where His Thoughts Are

THE RATIONALE FOR the Sefas Emes's assertion is that by maintaining a spiritually focused outlook, a person is capable of rising

above the limitations of his location and environment. This idea is borne out by the Maharal's elucidation (*Gur Aryeh*, *Bereishis* 2:15) of Chazal's consistent interpretation of the verb "taking" when applied in Scripture to people as meaning "taking through words," i.e., persuasion. The Maharal explains that a wholly physical object remains wherever it was last put down, whereas a person, whose essence is spiritual, is independent of his physical location. Although it is possible to physically confine a person to one place, thereby determining where he will remain, his spirit cannot be shackled. A person's essence is not confined to where he physically is located; his essence is wherever his thoughts are. If his thoughts are in a certain place, *he* cannot be "taken" elsewhere, for he will always be in the place where his thoughts are. The only way to "take" someone is therefore "with words" that persuade him (i.e., his spirit) to identify and affiliate with a different place and environment.

☞ A *Tzaddik's* Departure Makes an Impression on Souls

IT IS THE seventh, spiritual dimension of reality that affects a person's soul.

The Sefas Emes explains Rashi's comments that so long as "the *tzaddik* is in the city, he is its splendor; he is its radiance; he is its beauty" to mean that the *tzaddik* draws out the radiance, illumination, and beauty of the spirituality and holiness of wherever he finds himself. Revealing these qualities "makes an impression," deeply affecting his soul and preparing him for inevitable changes of his location and environment. Whereas he may find himself in "Charan," a spiritually barren environment, the holiness he has brought to the fore will remain constant and unchanging.

Rashi's comment that a *tzaddik's* departure from a place leaves an impression is true in the opposite sense as well, meaning that prior to his departure, he should redouble his attachment [to his spiritual dimension] so that it will remain attached to him, creating an

indelible impression so that this core will not be forgotten, even in Charan.”

Anyone seeking to fortify himself spiritually and cultivate the ability to rise above the influence of changing location and surroundings should therefore ignite his soul with the holiness that he possesses due to his attachment to the source of Divine inspiration and the spiritual core within every physical thing — his own, personal “Be’er Sheva.” To do so, he must make his “departure,” leaving the limitations of the six physical dimensions of reality so that his soul can absorb the full power of his own spiritual essence.

SUMMARY

The Torah teaches us that a person can prepare his spirit prior to his departure for exile so that he remains constantly suffused with holiness no matter where he finds himself, so long as he trains himself to focus on reality’s seventh, spiritual dimension rather than its six physical ones.

Although a person can be exiled — he can be bodily imprisoned in a particular location and physically suppressed by his external environment — his spirit always remains free, and *he* will always be wherever it is. A person is attached to sublime, lofty, spiritual moorings from whence he can draw inspiration, irrespective of his physical location and social environment. He can thus experience redemption even amid physical exile by training his focus upon his spiritual source and “leaving from Be’er Sheva” — by locating the wellspring of the seventh dimension of existence that spiritually nourishes him and provides his stabilizing, spiritual center of gravity. The Torah is telling us, “No matter where you go, so long as you leave from your personal ‘Be’er Sheva,’ you will always be in a state of redemption.”

Uayishlach



The All-Encompassing Whole Is Spiritual, Whereas the Diverse Details Are Physical

☞ Who Is the Person Who Has Everything?

YAAKOV SOUGHT TO appease his brother Eisav prior to their anticipated meeting by sending him gifts. At their meeting, these gifts were the subject of a dialogue between them which the Torah records as follows:

[Eisav] said, “For what was all this camp of yours that I met?” [Yaakov] replied, “To please my master.” Eisav said, “*I have plenty* — my brother, you keep what is yours.” Yaakov replied, “Please do not [tell me so]. If you now regard me favorably, you should accept my gift, since I have seen you — [which is to me] like encountering G-d — and you have become reconciled to me. Please accept my gift of greeting which was brought to you, for G-d has been kind to me, and *I have everything*.” [Yaakov] urged him, and he accepted [the gift]. (*Bereishis* 33:8–11)

Whereas Eisav bragged that he had plenty, Yaakov said that he everything that he needed.

This is Rashi’s interpretation of the exchange, contrasting Yaakov’s, “I have everything’ — everything I need” with “Eisav’s boastful, ‘I have plenty’ — much more than what I need.”

The Sefas Emes points out, however, that Yaakov’s declaration

seems to be less than accurate, “for there were several things that he didn’t have.” Every regular person has unfulfilled hopes and aspirations, both material and spiritual. How could Yaakov then declare, “I have everything”? Does any person exist who can honestly say that he has everything he needs?

☛ “Everything” Denotes Holiness That Fills a Material Lack

TO ELUCIDATE THIS, the Sefas Emes cites the *Ohr Hachaim*’s comments (ibid. *pasuk* 11) explaining Yaakov’s words. The *Ohr Hachaim* writes that Yaakov meant to convey that even after giving away these presents to Eisav, he was missing nothing, because “holiness is referred to as ‘*kol* (everything),” and when a person attains this perception, no loss is felt. Anything missing is automatically made up, in keeping with the blessing that Yisrael are like sand (ibid. 22:17; see also 28:14), any of which that is taken away is automatically replenished, this being the blessing of *kol*... and this now nicely explains his statement, “For G-d has been kind to me, and I have *kol*” — and any loss [I sustain] is automatically made up.

The person who has attained holiness dwells upon a wellspring of blessing. When praying in advance of his meeting Eisav that their encounter not be a violent one, Yaakov mentioned, “And You have said [to me], ‘I will surely treat you well and make your descendants like the sand of the seashore, too numerous to be counted’ (ibid. 32:13).” It is impossible to create a hole in sand, because it refills immediately. Similarly, a person who dwells “by streams of water” (*Tehillim* 1:3) does not suffer any loss. Removing a cup of water from a wellspring takes nothing away from it, because it flows continuously, replenishing itself such that “anything missing is automatically made up.”

The *Ohr Hachaim* explains that “this is the blessing of *kol* and the deeper significance of ‘the jar of flour did not empty’ (*Melachim I* 17:16).” The blessing whereby “anything missing is automatically made up” is rooted in a level of spiritual holiness known as *kol*.

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 17a) tells us that this trait prevailed in the lives of all the *avos*. “There were three people over whom the *yetzer hara* had no dominion: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, of whom it is said, ‘*bakol*,’ ‘*mikol*,’ and ‘*kol*.’” Rashi explains, “About Avraham, it is said, ‘And Hashem blessed Avraham *bakol* (with everything)’ (*Bereishis* 24:1); regarding Yitzchak, it is said, ‘I ate *mikol* (from everything),’ (ibid. 27:33); and concerning Yaakov, it says, ‘for I have *kol* (everything)’ (ibid. 33:11). In other words, they lacked nothing.”

We now understand that Yaakov was inviting Eisav to accept the multiple gifts he had sent him, responding to Eisav’s unwillingness by declaring that he had been blessed with *kol*, spiritual bounty, whereby “any loss is automatically replenished,” and that Eisav should take everything on the table because Yaakov wouldn’t lose anything thereby.

☞ Each and Every Thing Contains a Core of Vitality from Hashem

HOW ARE WE to understand the *Ohr Hachaim*’s contention that a consequence of holiness is the automatic replenishment of any material loss? How does this miracle happen? Is enjoying material bounty a corollary of being a holy and spiritual person? Our own experience suggests otherwise.

The Sefas Emes presents a profound and beautiful idea to elucidate this concept, explaining that “a person who is attached to the Sublime Root — whatever he has is *kol*, for each and every thing contains a core of vitality from Hashem, and this core encompasses everything.” We shall now elaborate on what this means.

☞ The Whole Contains All Its Parts

LET US FIRST distinguish between a whole and its components. These terms do not necessarily denote two equally revealing perceptions of the very same thing.

All the components are included within the whole. However, the converse is not true: the components do not necessarily yield the whole, because understanding and defining the whole might require insight that must be gleaned from numerous additional sources.

For example, while one can study a community by becoming acquainted with each of its current members, this alone will not necessarily afford understanding of how the community functions, which could require knowledge of its history, location, previous members, etc.

Thus, if a person possesses the whole, he has everything, whereas even if he has many or even all of the individual components, he doesn't necessarily have everything.

At its source, a beam of light is concentrated and only occupies a small area. The farther it travels from its source, the more the light diffuses; the beam's diameter increases, and its intensity diminishes. While the person who wields the light source is holding onto something that doesn't occupy a large area, he nevertheless has everything, whereas a person farther away may be able to catch a much larger area of the beam, but he doesn't have all of it.

The word *kol* thus denotes a focused, confined core that nevertheless contains within it everything that radiates outward.

☞ The Whole Is Spiritual, Whereas Diversity Is Physical

THE CORE OF a variety of components is rooted in the source that provides their vitality. The source of everything that exists in this world is Divine, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created all physical matter, and He supports and sustains it every moment anew. The core of everything physical is thus spiritual; every mundane object owes its existence to a Holy Source.

Shabbos and the weekdays are one example of this idea, as we shall now explain.

☞ Shabbos Is Holy and Is the Source of Material Blessing during the Weekdays

THE TORAH TELLS us, “G-d blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (ibid. 2:3). How is Shabbos blessed?

Rashi explains:

He blessed it through the *mann*, for on each weekday, a single *omer* [measure] descended for each individual, whereas on the sixth day, a double portion of *mann* [descended]. And He sanctified [Shabbos] through the *mann*, for no *mann* whatsoever descended on Shabbos. And this *pasuk* (i.e., the blessing and sanctification mentioned here) refers to the future (i.e., the forty years in the desert, when Bnei Yisrael were sustained by the *mann* that descended daily from heaven).

In other words, the blessing of Shabbos is evident in the double portion of *mann* that descended each Friday.

However, it doesn’t seem entirely straightforward to attribute this blessing to Shabbos, when on Shabbos itself no *mann* fell whatsoever. The *Zohar* (Vol. II, 88a) indeed asks how it can be said that Shabbos was blessed when the Torah states explicitly, “You shall gather it [daily] for six days, and on the seventh day — Shabbos — there will be none” (*Shemos* 16:26). In what sense is Shabbos itself blessed?

The *Zohar* answers, “Thus, we have learned: all blessings, of above and of below, are dependent on Shabbos.” In other words, the source of all blessing and abundance that descend to our world during the weekdays is the preceding Shabbos, which constitutes a store of bounty upon which we draw throughout the ensuing week. But how can an apparently “empty” source — the only day on which no *mann* whatsoever descended — function as a store of bounty?

The answer is that the root of all abundance in this world is spiritual, and it is this spiritual abundance that we receive on the holy day of Shabbos. However, something wholly spiritual cannot be divided

into components, for it is abstract, having no physical substance; it represents the core, the wholeness of everything. Upon Shabbos's departure, we mark its distinction from the ensuing weekdays. As we delineate Shabbos's holiness from the mundane days ahead, its ethereal spirituality "condenses,"* assuming physical character — in precisely the same way that moisture in a cloud condenses, becoming raindrops that fall to earth — taking the form of distinct, diverse "drops" of material bounty.

Shabbos is a holy day. A person who lives life centered upon Shabbos becomes imbued with its holiness and tranquility. He need not channel his energy into pursuing material attainments, for their spiritual core and source, which encompasses everything, are already in his possession. Chazal therefore say (*Mechilta, Yisro, Masechta D'bachodesh*, 7) that on Shabbos, a person must regard all his material pursuits as having being completed "and himself as lacking nothing whatsoever, for it [Shabbos] constitutes the perfection of every thing."

The source of all abundance is thus spiritual and holy, and from it, a person draws all the material bounty that break down into discrete physical units throughout the weekdays.

☞ "Who Created Everything for His Honor"

IN *TIKKUNEI ZOHAR* (17a), Chazal explain the reason for this process of condensation of spiritual spheres into physical terms:

And You created heaven and earth, and You brought forth from them the sun, moon, stars, and constellations. And on earth, trees,

* The term "condensation" is used here guardedly, for although the process by which tiny particles of cloud moisture coalesce into raindrops heavy enough to fall to earth is very helpful for understanding the process to which we refer, the two are fundamentally dissimilar. Condensation describes a physical process whereby vapor becomes liquid, whereas we are referring here to a complete transformation whereby something wholly spiritual becomes coarser and assumes physical character.

greenery, Gan Eden, grasses, wild creatures, birds, fish, animals and people so that through them (i.e., all these), they should recognize the worlds and how the upper and lower spheres operate in them and how the [existence of the] upper spheres can be inferred from the lower spheres.

In other words, since physical, crude man is unable to directly perceive the spiritual roots of the world he sees around him, he is presented with a complex, highly detailed material panorama that has developed from and parallels its parent spiritual reality. From observing this diversity, he is supposed to grasp the existence of its spiritual Source. A person sees only a human's body, not his soul, but ought to understand that a person's essence is the living soul with which the Creator endowed him. Similarly, although man sees only the physical world surrounding him, from contemplating it, he is expected to conclude that there exists a spiritual Source from which all physical reality derives.

The myriad details of physical creation thus represent the crystallization of the spiritual reality that gives them all existence. The purpose of their creation is to serve as the means by which we acknowledge their Source.

☞ The *Tzaddik* Sustains Everything but for Himself Needs Nothing

THE MORE SPIRITUALLY attuned a person is, the less he requires that spirituality assume physical form for him to perceive its inner content.

We therefore find that individuals who lead wholly spiritual lives and have accessed the all-encompassing, spiritual core serve as sources of abundance for others despite their own dearth of material means. They themselves do not have material abundance bestowed on them because they don't need it to serve as a pointer to its source.

We thus find the Gemara (*Berachos* 17a) telling us, "A heavenly voice goes forth daily from Mount Chorev saying, 'The entire world

is sustained for the sake of Chanina, My son (i.e., R. Chanina ben Dosa), yet Chanina, My son, makes do with a *kav* (a small measure) of carobs from *erev Shabbos* to *erev Shabbos*.” This conveys two lessons:

1. “The entire world is sustained for the sake of Chanina” — a spiritual person serves as a burgeoning wellspring and source of physical abundance.

In his *Toldos Yaakov Yosef* (*parshas Tzav*), R. Yaakov Yosef of Polna writes, “I heard from my teacher (the Baal Shem Tov) that ‘The entire world is sustained for the sake of Chanina, My son’ means that he opened up the channel and pathway along which material abundance flows to the world.

The source of this idea is the *Zohar* (Vol. I, 195a):

When there are *tzaddikim* in the world, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* brings His level down toward the lower world to supervise the world to benefit them. For when there are no *tzaddikim* in the world, He removes Himself and conceals His countenance from them and does not supervise them, for the *tzaddikim* are the world’s foundation and enable it to endure, as it says, “And a *tzaddik* is the world’s foundation” (*Mishlei* 10:25).

2. “Chanina, My son, makes do with a *kav* of carobs” — the *tzaddik* is a highly spiritual individual.

He serves as a source of material abundance for the world, for its inhabitants need physical bounty in order to acknowledge its Divine source.

For himself, though, R. Chanina had no need for anything beyond the very minimum necessary for subsistence. He lived a wholly spiritual life, serving as a source from which abundance flows to others but which needs no physical parts as a means of acknowledging its Divine Source.

☞ Open Your Eyes and Look Around You

WE SOMETIMES MISS seeing the forest for the trees. A person who is rooted in materialism and cannot rise above the immediate experience

of his senses to contemplate abstract ideas can be involved in multiple pursuits without perceiving their common spiritual root. He is liable to observe the variety of material abundance in the world without realizing that its purpose is to lead men to recognize the Divine Source of it all. Such people need not only the abundance, but also “eyeglasses” to provide them with perspective. They need to realize the significance of that which they see all the time. They need Hashem to open their eyes to what lies beyond the ever-changing scenes of their daily lives and instill in them comprehension of the physical world’s all-encompassing spiritual Source. They need the “owner of the mansion,” as it were, to look out at them and inform them, “I dwell in this house, and everything you receive here comes to you by virtue of your host’s boundless generosity.”

This is how the Sefas Emes understands Chazal’s comment (*Bereishis Rabbah* 53:14) on the *pasuk* describing Hagar’s discovery of the well in the desert — “G-d opened her eyes and she saw a well-spring of water” (*Bereishis* 21:19): “R. Binyamin said, ‘Every person is presumed blind [to what lies before him] until *Hakdosh Baruch Hu* enlightens him.’”

The Sefas Emes explains that “In every place, literally everything [already] exists by virtue of the vitality with which Hashem has imbued it; this is why it is referred to as *shalom* (whole or complete), because through Hashem, every point contains everything.”

Within every thing lies a spiritual, life-giving spark. This is the source from whence the full diversity of physical matter derives, and it is the common denominator shared by every part of physical existence. This point is therefore referred to as *shalom*, which Chazal (*Shabbos* 10b) say denotes connection.

☞ Looking Clearly Ahead

OPENING OUR EYES and observing the world around us with a clear, undistorted view yields the following conclusions:

1. The starting point from which material abundance flows is spiritual and holy, divorced from physicality, for the life-source of every thing is G-d's word that sustains it and enables it to endure. This is the all-encompassing core. Material abundance thus flows from a spiritual source, a diversified array of physical details deriving from an abstract, spiritual whole.
2. The purpose of these details' diversity is that the whole — their Divine Source — can be perceived and acknowledged.
3. A spiritual individual who grasps the all-encompassing core has no personal need for the array of physical matter in order to perceive its Source. The spiritual bounty with which he is suffused encompasses all his needs, and he feels no urge to pursue physical acquisitions, which are mere derivatives of the bounty that he already possesses.

SUMMARY

Eisav's life centered upon physicality, and he therefore declared, "I have plenty." The physical world is composed of endless diverse parts, and the ambition of a materialist is to amass as many of these as possible. If he manages to collect a million of these pieces, he feels like a millionaire. Yaakov, on the other hand, was a spiritual person who held onto just one thing: the spiritual core from which all else flows and that encompasses everything. Yaakov therefore said, "I have everything" — not because he had everything he could possibly amass, but because he had no need for it. On the spiritual plane, the goal is unity rather than size — perceiving the single, spiritual, abstract source from which all else flows.

As the Sefas Emes puts it, "Yaakov therefore said, 'I have everything' — understand [what] this [implies]."

Uvayeishev

A Flaming Fire and Two Types of Tranquility

👁️ What's Wrong with Wanting Peace and Quiet?

THE TORAH PREFACES its account of the story of Yosef and his brothers by telling us, “Yaakov lived in the land of his father’s sojourning, in the Land of Canaan” (*Bereishis* 37:1). What is the Torah communicating by telling us that Yaakov was living in Eretz Yisrael, and what is the significance of this information in regard to what subsequently transpired among his sons?

Chazal’s response to these questions is that the words “Yaakov lived in the land of his father’s sojourning” indicate that, “Yaakov wanted to dwell in tranquility,” which led to his trouble with Yosef.

In Chazal’s words (*Bereishis Rabbah* 84:3), “When the righteous live at peace, and they wish to [continue to] live at peace in this world, the Satan [is aroused to] prosecute and says, ‘Is that [reward] which has been readied for them in the next world insufficient for them that they seek to live in tranquility in this world, too?’”

Chazal note further that the purpose of the succession of troubles that befell Yaakov was to prevent him from living in peace, interpreting the *pasuk* in *Iyov* (3:24) in this light:

“I’d had no peace, no tranquility, and no rest, when trouble struck”;

“I had had no peace” — from Esav;

“no tranquility” — from Lavan;

“and no rest” — from Dinah;

“when trouble struck” — [and] *kafatz alai rogzo shel Yosef*, the trouble of Yosef pounced upon me.

A similar statement appears in the Midrash directly beforehand, but it concludes differently: “Because Yaakov Avinu wanted to live in tranquility in this world, he was confronted by ‘*sitno shel Yosef* (lit., the prosecutor of Yosef).”

What is so blameworthy about a person seeking a calm and peaceful life? And how are we to understand the term *sitno shel Yosef*?

☛ Tranquility Plays a Role in the Struggle

THE SEFAS EMES explains all this in context of the constant struggle in man between spirituality and holiness on one hand and physicality and desire on the other. This struggle demands that man maintain maximum vigilance and preparedness, thus precluding his enjoyment of an easy, undemanding life. There can be no calm amid battle, especially when one is fighting such a wily and cunning foe as the evil inclination. Having already grappled with the challenges of living in the company of Eisav and Lavan, Yaakov was well aware of this. He had known no rest, having been beset — in the Sefas Emes’s words — “by exacting tasks whose purpose was to banish him from [the realm of] holiness.”

What lay behind his desire to live in tranquility, an aspiration we think of as foreign to anyone fighting the pull of a materialistic environment in search of a life of holiness?

The Sefas Emes explains that Yaakov “sought a tranquil life” because tranquility is part and parcel of the struggle.

Attaining tranquility doesn’t necessarily imply relaxing the struggle. On the contrary, it can be a way of cleaving to the reality of the holy, Divine realm, thereby regarding one’s material adversary as altogether unsubstantial and diminishing its significance to zero. Only a person who assigns some validity to the physical realm needs to fight to maintain the prominence of spirituality and holiness, necessarily sacrificing his tranquility to do so. Yaakov, however, negated

physicality's possession of any independent worth and was thus able to attain spirituality without waging a struggle against any other entity. This was the tranquility he pursued.

This is implicit in the word *vayeishev* ("he dwelt"), whose two-letter root, *shin-beis* or *shav*, denotes return. Yaakov returned to the world's original, spiritual Source. Another derivative of this root is Shabbos, which shares this meaning, as it is the day when the world returns and reverts to its primordial, spiritual origin. Yaakov emerged victorious in his previous struggles, succeeding in his mission of suffusing the material realm of life with holiness by elevating himself "until he settled at his source" — as the Sefas Emes puts it — and thereby negated the realm of impurity, rendering it devoid of any independent existence.

But if Yaakov's desire for tranquility represented a further stage in vanquishing the realm of impurity, why was he "confronted by *sitno shel Yosef*"?

☞ Yaakov's Tranquility and Yosef's Tranquility

THE SEFAS EMES illustrates two types of tranquility, both of which involve clinging to the Divine reality while relegating the other, opposing realm to insignificance. These correspond to two types of situations, and Yaakov needed to implement both. Accordingly, the term that Chazal apply to Yosef, "Eisav's adversary," receives a new and surprising meaning, a tranquility born of a quality with which Yosef was blessed. In order to explain all this, the Sefas Emes unfolds a systematic analysis of Yaakov Avinu's credo of faith in which context both types of tranquility become apparent. Let us now explain this wonderful approach.

☞ Spiritual Unity Engenders Holiness

YAAKOV FOUGHT THE materialistic, lustful world around him by surrounding himself with a holy environment that acted as a barrier

between him and those who belonged outside the bounds of his tent. The secret of Yaakov's spiritual survival lay in the unity that existed among his sons who surrounded him. This is how Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 84:1) interpret the *pasuk* (*Yeshayah* 57:13), "When you cry out, your gathering will save you": as a reference to Yaakov Avinu, "whose gathering of himself and of his sons saved him from Eisav," as the Sefas Emes writes. This salvation from Eisav came about through the gathering and unity of Yaakov's immediate environment.

Unity fosters holiness. The principle at work here is, "Desire seeks solitude" (*Mishlei* 18:1), meaning that a person who pursues his material desires is egoistic. By contrast, unity is a function of gathering around the point of spiritual origin, with each individual negating himself before his sublime, spiritual origin in the shared understanding that "there exists naught besides Him" (*Devarim* 4:35). Unity thereby trounces the forces of impurity and physicality. Yaakov lived in an environment of holiness and unity, waging his battle against the forces of impurity and physicality by virtue of them disappearing in the light of the unity of him and his offspring, where these forces cannot endure.

☞ Holiness Extends throughout the World

THROUGH THIS UNITY, which is achieved through each individual's connection to his root and Source, impurity loses its power and fades away. It has no place in a world where the Creator's unity is apparent and obvious. When the truth shines in all its luminosity, it is clear to all that there is no "other side" (the literal meaning of *sitra achra*, the Aramaic term for the *yetzer hara* and the forces of impurity). Light banishes darkness, and holiness removes every trace of impurity. Chazal thus understand the *pasuk*, "Eisav took his wives, sons, and daughters and left for another land, because of Yaakov his brother" (*Bereishis* 36:6) as a reference to Yaakov having forced Eisav into submission such that the latter was compelled to abandon his domicile and move elsewhere.

Yaakov was thus correct in his assumption that following his encounters with Eisav and Lavan, holiness had spread throughout the world. Not only his immediate environment had become holy, but the entire world had become elevated and sanctified. The unity of Yaakov's family brought about a spiritual climax that forced the powers of impurity into retreat, extending even to Eisav himself.

☞ “Shabbos’s Secret” — Unity and Holiness Banish the Forces of Impurity

UNITY IS THE result of acknowledging that “there exists naught besides Him” and each individual’s submission to his sublime, spiritual Source. The result is that rather than losing his identity, it becomes centered upon the common Source instead of on itself.

The Sefas Emes points to the *Zohar*’s description of a similar process (Vol. II, p. 135a) whereby “Shabbos’s secret” — the holiness of Shabbos that prevails every seventh day — is portrayed as a function of creation’s alignment around the One G-d, thus banishing all harsh decrees as this unity drives away impure forces and ushers in holiness.

Here is a rendering of this passage from the *Zohar* (from the original Aramaic, which is said in many congregations as part of the Kabbalas Shabbos prayers):

“Shabbos’s secret — this is Shabbos that is imbued with the secret of unity... as Shabbos begins, it separates and individuates from the *sitra achra*, and all the decrees are moved away from it and leave it, and it remains alone in a holy luminescence. And it is crowned with several crowns for the holy King. All the powers of anger and prosecutors flee, and there is no other dominion in any of the worlds. And its face glows with a sublime light. It is crowned in the lower world among the holy nation, and all are adorned in new souls. Then the prayer begins, blessing it joyfully with a luminous countenance, saying, ‘Bless Hashem, who is blessed.’”

☛ The World of Shabbos and the Weekday Struggle

THE WORLD OF Shabbos contains nothing mundane. Even physical life is imbued with holiness on Shabbos, and no conflict exists between the spiritual and material realms. Thus, in the absence of any need to struggle to give holiness precedence over the mundane, calm and tranquility reign. This is the first type of tranquility.

With Shabbos's departure, though, *Motza'ei Shabbos* arrives. Man can no longer rest on his spiritual laurels, because his coarse, physical aspect desires gratification, yearns for rest, and resists effort. After scaling the spiritual peak of Shabbos, man is confronted with the slippery slope of descent into the mundane.

Man thus faces a dual challenge: "Who shall ascend to Hashem's mountain?" and, having arrived at the peak, "who shall endure in His holy place?" (*Tehillim* 24:3). Life doesn't always retain its uplifting, spiritual quality. A *tzaddik* may succeed in elevating life all the way to the heavens, but life is not static, and things tend to go downhill.

There is a type of existence that is wholly spiritual, abstract, sublime and holy — this is akin to Shabbos. But there are also weekdays, days of mundane activity when a person pursues a livelihood, sweating and toiling to support his family. During these days, he must try to swim through a sea of materialism, while fierce waves of desires threaten to drown every last spark of holiness within him. During these days, it can be very difficult to keep one's head above water and bear, in mind that "there exists naught besides Him." Under these circumstances, the first, "Shabbos-dik" type of tranquility is ineffective. The *tzaddik* will find it difficult to influence the public from his own sublime level, for they do not stand together with him upon the spiritual peak, having been pulled into the weekday struggle against earthly desires. What was Yaakov's response to the challenge of these mundane days?

There is no alternative but to continue struggling towards holiness, trying to bring it into the mundane realm — trying to bring

Shabbos into the weekday. The Sefas Emes notes that a *tzaddik* aspires with his every deed to increase Heaven's glory and bring about its revelation in every corner of this world, where it usually remains hidden and concealed. "This was the path of Yosef," he writes, "whose name means addition and increase and alludes to *tosefes shabbos* (adding on to Shabbos)."

In other words, the name Yosef alludes to adding the mundane to the holy and connecting them. Mundane time can be added to Shabbos through a Jew's ability "to make (or create) Shabbos" (*Shemos* 31:16), investing not only Shabbos proper with its holiness, but also the weekday time adjacent to it.

Adding time to Shabbos enables Shabbos's holiness to extend into the weekdays. As the Sefas Emes explains, this is enabled by the Jew's yearning through his work during the six weekdays to receive Shabbos, willingly and lovingly. This desire for Shabbos even amid the mundane days empowers the Jew to create Shabbos even before the seventh day actually begins. This is a great challenge that is very difficult yet very important; it can lead to drawing Shabbos's actual holiness into the six weekdays.

☞ "Yaakov Dwelt" — Between the Dogs

LIFE SHIFTS BACK and forth between two phases:

- At times, a person is enveloped in holiness, and his faith burns bright. This happens on Shabbos, a day when he can enjoy tranquility without having to grapple with the onslaught of the material world, because even physical pleasures constitute *oneg shabbos* (the mitzvah of making Shabbos pleasurable). This is a day for serving Hashem calmly and taking pleasure in the world of spirituality, a day that is "a taste of the World to Come," similar to the future world in which "the *tzaddikim* will sit with their crowns on their heads, enjoying the radiance of the *Shechinah*."

- . Then there are mundane times, when a person is thrust into the material world and must struggle under the constant tension between his soul that yearns for holiness and his body that desires physical pleasure. Under such conditions, tranquility is impossible.

Yaakov sought “to dwell in tranquility” even in a material world that was far removed from his own essence through involvement in his own spirituality and negation of the significance of anything outside his orbit. He wanted to maintain his peace of mind despite the materialistic tendencies of the surrounding society, and even exert an influence on the frantic strivings of those who constantly chase material gain. Yaakov was “a straightforward person” (*Bereishis* 25:27) who exhibited no contradiction between his physical and spiritual aspects, for he was a “dweller of tents [of Torah study]” (*ibid.*) in every sense. However, when he had to leave the tent and encounter life’s mundane aspects and an environment that was wholly materialistic and far below the spiritual peaks that he had scaled, instilling holiness became much harder.

This called for attaining tranquility of a more sublime nature.

The higher type of tranquility is attained when a person who is in a materialistic environment manages to utterly negate its significance in his heart. Looking at a physical item and discerning in it the Divine, inner core that allows it to exist and endure deprives it of its coarse physicality and strikes a common chord with the observer’s inner, spiritual world. Adopting this insight brings peace and reconciliation, obviating any need for a head-on struggle and allowing for tranquility. The Sefas Emes writes that this idea elucidates “Chazal’s comments in the Midrash in *Bereishis Rabbah* (84:5) on the words, ‘Yaakov dwelled’: This can be likened to a king who saw a pack of dogs and was afraid of them. He went and sat among them. Yaakov, too, was afraid of all of Eisav’s princes — *and he went and sat among them.*”

The Sefas Emes explains that sitting “among the dogs” denotes

“Yaakov’s desire to clarify and demonstrate that even the power of Eisav’s princes and of the *sitra achra* derives from the Divine energy that gives them life” and thus “they contain holy vitality, as is known, and lack any independent vitality.”

In other words, once a person fully absorbs the knowledge that “there exists naught besides Him” and that all existence is rooted solely in the Creator’s desire that it should exist, he understands that this applies even to Eisav and his descendants, who lack any independent existence and thus only represent an external husk of impurity which is sustained by the holy spark within it.

Living according to this understanding confers holiness even on the coarsest, most materialistic reality, and once holiness is instilled, impurity disappears.

☞ Great Fervor Can Implant Holiness in a Distant Setting

ATTAINING THE SECOND type of tranquility is a formidable task. As long as Yaakov dwelt “among the dogs” but was surrounded by his family that formed a strong nucleus of unity and holiness, he was able to draw that which lay beyond their circle towards his position, and even Eisav was positively influenced. However, it was difficult for the wider environment to absorb Yaakov’s powerful spiritual illumination, as its spiritual level was too low to absorb Yaakov’s influence. It was hard to have a more permanent influence on a wider and more distant circle, for amid the maelstrom of materialism, it is very difficult to hold onto the awareness that nothing has independent existence save for its Divine, holy root.

As the Sefas Emes puts it, “This [level of influence] is subject to more intense concealment and is something that is very difficult indeed to achieve.”

The individual who can dwell in tranquility, with untainted faith, within the *beis midrash* is not necessarily equipped with the same qualities as the person who is expected to do so even when he

leaves the confines of holiness and enters the mundane world, where he must contend with stormy waves of heresy and evil.

These are the two types of tranquility, the two routes for focusing on holiness. In order to bring holiness into an unclean environment, it must be more firmly anchored and espoused with greater fervor.

☛ The Challenge of Yosef

THE SEFAS EMES cites Rashi's comments on the *pasuk*, "And it was when Rachel bore Yosef that Yaakov said to Lavan, 'Dispatch me, and I will go to my place and to my land'" (*Bereishis* 30:25).

From the *pasuk's* juxtaposition of these two events, it is clear that only after Yosef's birth did Yaakov resolve to return to Eretz Yisrael, where an encounter with a hostile Eisav awaited him. What was the significance of Yosef's birth in this decision?

Rashi explains that Yaakov no longer feared Eisav after the birth of Yosef, who was Eisav's adversary, as it says, "And the House of Yaakov will be fire, and the House of Yosef flame, and the House of Eisav straw" (*Ovadiah* 1:18) — "Fire without flame doesn't reach far; once Yosef was born, Yaakov trusted in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and wanted to return."

The Sefas Emes explains that Yaakov himself is likened to a fire that singes whatever is nearby, whereas Yosef is like a flame, whose height and searing heat extend even to distant objects. Cowing Eisav into submission was only possible through Yosef, whose soul danced with leaping flames that were able to instill holiness even into a material reality far removed from the center of Yaakov's glowing fire.

This is the meaning of Chazal's statement that Yaakov was "confronted by *sitno shel Yosef*." Yosef represented the extension of Yaakov's focused holiness into faraway places. As we have shown, adding to and extending holiness is a very difficult task and is met with interference.

SUMMARY

We see that holiness enhanced by rallying around the Creator's unity and the awareness that "naught exists besides Him" banishes impurity. When Heaven's illumination is clear, there is no *sitra achra* of darkness and impurity. In this situation, a person is able to dwell tranquilly, with the peace of mind born of not having to wage a constant struggle against a hostile, materialistic environment. Yaakov aspired to this tranquility — the calm of the person who dwells behind a wall of unity, yet whose holiness breaks through barriers, for he identifies the holiness within physical objects and their lack of any independent existence.

This was the tranquility that Yaakov enjoyed, even while he sat "among the dogs." However, in regard to those who had moved away from his path, the further spread of his influence met with difficulties. Not every day is Shabbos, and it is sometimes necessary to implant holiness within a distant, hostile, and estranged environment. There too, a person must preserve his equanimity and maintain a firm grip on his faith that "naught exists besides Him." He must hold his head above the waves of heresy raging all around him. Therefore, Yaakov was "confronted by the difficulty of Yosef," because success in this endeavor requires a higher intensity of holy fervor, in the manner of Yosef, who extended holiness beyond Shabbos itself into the weekdays. Where materialism surges, Yaakov's fire alone is insufficient, and Yosef's flames are needed to penetrate into distant, impure realms and illuminate them with the bright light of holiness "until the shadows vanish."

Mikeitz

High Tide and Low Tide

☞ Pharaoh's Dream as a Message to Yosef Prior to the Exile

THE SAGA OF the Jewish nation's exile in Egypt began with a dream, which the Torah describes to us as follows:

It happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh was dreaming and there he was, standing by the [Nile] river. And there were seven fine-looking, robust cows emerging from the river, and they pastured in the marsh. And then there were another seven cows emerging after them from the river, poor-looking and thin, and they stood next to the other cows on the riverbank. The poor-looking, thin cows then ate the seven fine-looking, healthy cows. Pharaoh then woke up. (*Bereishis* 41:1–4)

It should be noted that:

- Pharaoh was unable to interpret his dream, as the Torah goes on to relate; it was Yosef who interpreted it. Pharaoh's dream was thus not meant for him — it was meant for Yosef.
- The dream marked the start of the unfolding of the exile, for it brought Yosef's wisdom to general notice, gaining him rank and power. Yaakov and his family moved to Egypt as a result, to be near Yosef during this time of famine. The message conveyed by the dream thus represented G-d's word prior to the exile.

What message of preparation for exile did the dream contain?

☛ Two Messages Hidden in the Dream

THE SEFAS EMES points to two messages concealed within the dream.

One was that during times of plenty, it is wrong to live as though the good times will continue forever. By undertaking preparations for lean times, their harmful effects can be mitigated.

The second message was that the lean times carry within them buds of regeneration whose source is in the preceding times of plenty. Within bad, there is an inner kernel of good. A superficial look at the lean cows after they had swallowed the sturdy cows would not reveal that they contained the latter within them. As Pharaoh said when relating the dream, “It was not apparent that they had entered them, and their appearance was still as bad as at first” (ibid. *pasuk* 21). Nonetheless, within bad lies good that sustains it. At the center of life, there is inner good, whereas anything bad represents an outer husk.

☛ Preparing a Reservoir of Inner Holiness during Good Times

ACCORDING TO THE Sefas Emes, both of these messages are subject to the principle, “The deeds of the ancestors indicate what will befall their descendants,” such that Pharaoh’s dream has relevance to every person, whatever his level and in every time and age, in regard to preparing for exile.

During times of plenty, preparations should be undertaken for lean times. Every person endures better times and harder times, not only in his material circumstances, but also in his spiritual world. A person experiences days of elevation alongside days of concealment. There are days of Shabbos and festivals, on which “An illumination of holiness is revealed to a person,” as well as mundane days of “small-mindedness” and limited spiritual insight.

The way to survive the challenge of spiritually lean times is also through advance preparation. A person should prepare within himself “a reservoir of holiness” by internalizing the illuminations of holiness

that he experiences during his elevated times so that they can illuminate his path even during darker days.

☛ Days of Surging and Days of Receding

ELSEWHERE (IN HIS comments on the Second Day of Pesach), the Sefas Emes clarifies this further. He writes, “At times, a person experiences ‘an expanded mind’ — times when he can serve his Creator with clarity and enthusiasm — alongside times when this awareness leaves, and he remains in a diminished state. The general rule is that during the times of expansion, he should remember to prepare himself and create an impression within himself so that even after his enthusiasm departs, he will not fall entirely *chas v’shalom*, but will be one of the victorious in battle, drawing strength and support from this.”

In other words, a person experiences days of enthusiasm and days of despondency, days of clarity and days of murkiness, days of closeness to Hashem and days of concealment, and his job is to preserve the clarity of thought and emotional fervor of the days of spiritual surge, carrying them within himself after the high tide recedes and he feels at a spiritual ebb.

☛ “True and Enduring” — “True and Faithful”

THE SEFAS EMES takes this further, asserting that the purpose of the illumination of a person’s elevated days is to prepare him for subsequent days of concealment.

He likens this to a person making his way in the dark with sudden bursts of light. During those brief moments of illumination, he can see the path ahead and understands which way he needs to go. Then, when the light disappears and he finds himself again in the pitch black, he knows where to go and how to continue. The sudden flashes of illumination serve the purpose of revealing his path to him.

The Sefas Emes explains the *pasuk*, “On a good day, be well disposed, and on a bad day, see” (*Koheles* 7:14) accordingly. On a good day, a person should impress upon his heart the insight he merits, thus

enabling him to see his way forward during the hard days. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* enriches him with illumination and holiness in advance, in an hour of illumination, before He presents him with a challenge.

This is how the Sefas Emes (*parshas Vayeitzei* 5653) explains the words, “*emes v’yatziv* (true and enduring)” that we say each morning following *kerias shema*, for the illumination that a person succeeds in absorbing during his good days enables him to navigate his way even during his difficult days. Therefore, at night, when darkness reigns, we say “*emes v’emunah* (true and faithful),” for these are the hours when a person clings to his faith, continuing on his path even though he cannot see his way ahead.

☛ Above the Sun There Is Constant Renewal

ILLUMINATION AND FERVOR are functions of novelty and renewal, which are only encountered in the spiritual, inner aspect of reality. In this connection, the Sefas Emes offers a new explanation of why people slip into days of obscurity and — aside from exceptional days of illumination and holiness — make their way forward in darkness and despondency.

The *pasuk* (*Koheles* 1:9) says, “There is nothing new under the sun.” “Under the sun” refers to all that goes on in the physical world, and indeed, when a person channels his energies into attending to his material needs, “there is nothing new.” In order to keep experiencing thrill and novelty in worldly pursuits, a person has to keep on upping the ante, going after ever more elaborate indulgences. Eventually, he reaches a point at which even if he attained his every ambition and should feel satisfaction, he will still experience routine and repetitiveness and will feel dissatisfied.

The physical world seems to lack novelty. The laws and cycles of the natural world are fixed, creating a world of routine. Novelty and routine are mutually exclusive. In order to experience novelty, a person must elevate himself, rising above the physical externalities of the world he perceives and divining their spiritual roots. Novelty comes

from accessing the spiritual, inner core of each thing in creation.

This is how to understand the *Zohar's* comment (Vol. II, 115b) on the above *pasuk*, that whereas “there is nothing new under the sun,” above the sun there is novelty. In spiritual life, which is focused on and expresses G-d’s word, there is constant renewal. Spiritual renewal engenders satisfaction and enthusiasm.

The Sefas Emes (*parshas Chayei Sarah* 5631) explains accordingly that “the rule is just as it is written, ‘There is nothing new under the sun.’ The converse is also true: in regard to everything that is above the sun, beyond the confines of nature, there is constant renewal, for the Divine vitality within every thing is always new, as we say [in the *yotzeir* blessing in Shacharis], ‘Who renews in His goodness every day, constantly, the act of creation,’ — ‘constantly’ meaning every moment anew. The greater the extent to which a person clings to life’s inner content rather than to its natural and physical aspects, the more sustained is the renewal he experiences.”

☞ The Second Message in Pharaoh’s Dream

IT EMERGES THAT the illumination a person absorbs in anticipation of future days of darkness flows from perceiving the inner content of things and understanding their concealed, spiritual aspects. The life of a person who is solely occupied with the world’s external, material aspect is devoid of fervor and enthusiasm, and he is constantly groping in the darkness.

This is the second message contained within the dream, in which we see that the life source of the “bad-looking cows” is their inner, concealed, spiritual core — the robust cows within them. The fine-looking cows represent the inner core that is enveloped within the physical covering represented by the bad-looking cows. The *pasuk* tells us about the fine-looking cows that “it was not apparent that they had entered them,” because a person is liable to forget about the inner core of everything in creation, which is hidden from view.

“The meaning of exile is concealment of the inner dimension,” writes the Sefas Emes, and thus, this was Yosef’s preparation for the approaching exile.

☞ Upholding the Covenant

THE SEFAS EMES derives a practical lesson from this idea.

Yosef, who resisted immorality, serves as our example of how to struggle against man’s most physical and strongest urge. Chazal tell us (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5) that “Sarah Imenu went down to Egypt and withstood [the test of] immorality [by refraining from sin with Pharaoh], and in her merit, all [Jewish] women are restrained. Yosef went down to Egypt and withstood immorality [by refraining from sin with Potiphar’s wife], and in his merit, all [Jewish] men are restrained.”

A covenant denotes the existence of a bond or connection between its parties. As discussed above (*parshas Vayeira*), the foreskin is a physical covering whose removal creates a covenant. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s connection to His nation denotes the inner core that provides them with life and sustains them. The *bris* takes place at the spot where a coarse, materialistic person experiences only lust and desire but that to a spiritually oriented person represents his partnership with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in being able to create the greatest novelty on earth — new life. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* revealed this inner core to the Jewish nation, and it is this that keeps them alive and sustains them. A person who perceives the tremendous illumination within himself will therefore refrain from abrogating the covenant and engaging in immoral behavior, for this is the very point where he experiences spirituality and his connection with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Yosef thus prepared the Jewish nation for surviving the period of their exile among the most defiled nation of all. He did so by conveying that in moments of illumination, holiness and fervor should be stored in anticipation of days of lowness and despondency, spiritual inspiration can be instilled by accessing the spiritual core hidden

within each physical thing, and perceiving the inner core can prevent being swept up in a maelstrom of desire.

☞ Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh Are Bursts of Light

THE SPIRITUAL CORE of everything in existence was implanted at creation. The gateway through which a person can pass in order to access this spiritual core is wide open on the day when creation rested and became enveloped in the holiness of Shabbos.

The prophet Yechezkel says (46:1), “The inner courtyard gate facing east shall be closed throughout the six weekdays, and on the Shabbos day, it shall be opened, and on the Rosh Chodesh day, it shall be opened.” The Sefas Emes explains that “the inner courtyard gate” represents the portal that allows a person to enter and perceive the inner, spiritual root that nourishes all physical existence. It is referred to as “*kadim*, facing east” because *kedem*, meaning “east” or “earlier” also denotes the earliest origin and the root of the vitality of each thing and its inner, spiritual core which is the source of its vitality. From this point of origin flows constant renewal that can be perceived by anyone who is not swept along by the world’s façade of nature and routine. The *pasuk* therefore says that this gate to perceiving the inner spiritual core “shall be closed throughout the six weekdays.” During these mundane days of darkness, “they will tire from [fruitlessly] searching for the entrance.” But there are bursts of light: “On the Shabbos day, it shall be opened, and on the Rosh Chodesh day, it shall be opened,” because the holiness of Shabbos and of Rosh Chodesh enables us to access the inner core even during the weekdays that follow them.

SUMMARY

Yosef conveys to us not to be afraid of the darkness. We inhabit a coarse, physical reality that is a dark and depressing place.

We experience days of small-mindedness, of spiritual exile and alienation. But there are also good days, days of holiness and closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that serve as bursts of light, allowing us to see our path in clarity and brightness. On these days, a person undergoes renewal and his soul experiences fervor and enthusiasm. This fervor must be preserved so that it can accompany him as he continues going forward, even after his inner illumination has once again dimmed. One shouldn't be afraid of this phenomenon. Even at the high point, the approaching ebb is a given and a person can navigate it safely if he preserves his momentum and mental clarity. Fervor is extinguished if a person starts to live a materialistic life of cause and effect subject to natural laws, cycles, and routine. That reflects reality beneath the sun, but when a person is elevated to existence "above the sun," when he exposes the inner, spiritual core of each thing, there is creativity, novelty, and his fervor endures. Man lives within nature, but he has a higher awareness and is laden with holiness; he perceives the Divine presence within his physical surroundings. Such a person can forge his way ahead, maintaining his faith and his purity of heart even during days of spiritual ebb. This is the great dream that prepares man for carrying out his holy mission.

Uayigash

Encounter between the Plower and the Reaper

☛ Yehudah Addresses Yosef

IT WAS A desperate situation when Yehudah stepped forward to speak in Binyamin's defense. All the facts seemed to militate for applying the full force of the law. Nonetheless, Yehudah confronted Yosef to plea for clemency, and as he finished speaking, the viceroy's harsh stance crumbled, and he burst into tears. Within moments, a scene of alienation and hostility was transformed into an emotional reunion between Yosef and his brothers. It was Yehudah's address that brought about this switch. As the Torah tells us, "Yehudah then approached Yosef and said, 'Please, my lord, may your servant now speak words that my lord should hear, but let my lord not become angry with your servant, for you are like Pharaoh...' (*Bereishis* 44:18–34).

However, upon examining the content of Yehudah's speech, it doesn't seem to contain anything new. Yehudah simply reviewed the events leading up to that day, events that were already well-known to Yosef. What plea in Binyamin's defense did Yehudah hope to marshal by repeating facts that were already known to both sides?

We also need to understand what message his words contained that "broke the ice" between Yosef and his brothers. The Torah tells that when Yehudah finished speaking, "Yosef could not restrain

himself in the presence of all those standing around, so he announced, ‘Remove every man from my presence!’ And nobody stood with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers” (ibid. 45:1). Until that moment, Yosef was apparently able to contain his emotions, but now the dam burst, and he could no longer stop himself. What was it that brought Yosef to his breaking point where he was no longer able to restrain himself?

☞ “He Approached Him” —

He Approached *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*

THE SEFAS EMES explains that two people can sometimes contemplate the same situation, from the very same vantage point, yet whereas one will see mud, the other sees the heavens. One of them perceives its physical aspect, while the other is uplifted by looking at the very same reality, because he sees Divine providence.

Yehudah perceived in everything the Giver of life, Who should be acknowledged and thanked at every juncture. Thus, even in the direst of circumstances, he was able to get up and praise Hashem for what he had received. This is the meaning of his name, which is derived from *l'hodos* (to thank), as it says, “She conceived again and bore a son and said, ‘This time, I will thank Hashem,’ and therefore, she named him Yehudah” (ibid. 29:35).

Quoting his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, the Sefas Emes notes that the members of the Jewish nation are known as Yehudim, collectively bearing Yehudah’s name, because they are endowed with this ability to acknowledge *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s role in everything that happens to them, major or minor, realizing that everything comes from Him alone. This quality of acknowledging Hashem serves to bring people closer to Him, perceiving His presence even amid coarse, material reality. Accordingly, on a deeper level, the words “*Vayigash eilav* (he approached Him)” denote a person’s ability to draw close to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* through acknowledging His role and offering thanks.

☞ Yehudah Was Speaking Out His Troubles — To Himself

IN LINE WITH this idea, the Sefas Emes explains that Yehudah indeed added nothing new to the account that he addressed to Yosef. Moreover, he asserts that Yehudah was not truly addressing Yosef; he was speaking to himself in Yosef's earshot. He reviewed the order of events for himself, this time seeing the inner significance that each successive step represented. By so doing, he bolstered his faith, bowing his head and acknowledging in his heart that this decree, too, was just and deserved, for it expressed Hashem's will. Yehudah repeated the sequence of events, perceiving G-d's presence and providence in each step and accepting what had happened with love and joy.

In times of trouble, a person is liable to feel alone, forsaken, and abandoned. However, if he acknowledges that now too it is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Who is "dealing with him" in order to straighten his path, he will be aware of G-d's closeness, and the rule is, "As for me, G-d's closeness is good for me" (*Tehillim* 73:28). Once Yehudah arrived at the recognition that everything that had happened was from Hashem, this brought the salvation immediately, which is why Yosef couldn't restrain himself for a moment longer — because "Hashem's salvation arrives in the blink of an eye."

☞ "You Have Become Indentured to Your Colleague" — To *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*

IN THIS CONTEXT, the Sefas Emes cites the *pasuk*, "My son, if you have become guarantor for your colleague, you have given your word to a stranger" (*Mishlei* 6:1), which Rashi explains as follows: "My son, if you have become guarantor for your colleague' — if you have become a guarantor for *Hakadosh Bruch Hu*, Who is your Colleague, as it says, 'This is my beloved and this is my colleague' (*Shir Hashirim* 5:16)." How are we to understand the idea of a person becoming *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* guarantor?

The Sefas Emes cites Chazal's comment (*Bereishis Rabbah* 93:1) that this *pasuk* refers to Yehudah, who undertook to guarantee Binyamin's return to Yaakov Avinu. How can such an undertaking be considered becoming *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* guarantor?

To this, the Sefas Emes responds by citing the above idea. A person finds himself ensconced within a physical reality that apparently operates according to fixed and unchanging principles of cause and effect. This puts him in danger of settling into this physical reality and growing distanced from his Creator. "The way to overcome the concealment inherent in physical occurrences," writes the Sefas Emes, "is to know and to realize that this world derives its vitality entirely from Hashem. Through this realization, a person will come to annul himself before the spiritual Root of all of creation. He can thereby be saved from [being overpowered by] physicality." In other words, a person can undertake to act as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* guarantor by finding, acknowledging, and revealing His role and His presence in every physical occurrence. This is how Yehudah saved Binyamin and fulfilled his undertaking.

☞ Encounter between the Plower and the Reaper

THE SEFAS EMES reveals an extra dimension of depth within this idea, portraying Yehudah's encounter with Yosef as a point of contact between two different and opposing approaches.

He asserts that Yehudah and Yosef espoused divergent approaches to serving Hashem, reflecting two distinct paths.

Yehudah was firmly implanted in physical life, every aspect of which he perceived as an expression of Hashem's will which he acknowledged, as implied by his name.

Yosef, on the other hand, didn't relate to the physical plane of existence. His name implies adding the mundane to the holy, i.e., subsuming the mundane aspect of existence into the realm of holiness rather than the other path of infusing the mundane with holiness by acknowledging Hashem's presence in everything.

Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 93:5), interpret the *pasuk* in *Amos* (9:13) accordingly: “Behold, days are coming, says Hashem, and the plower will approach the reaper; ‘the plower’ is Yehudah; ‘the reaper’ is Yosef;” and redemption will arrive when the ‘plower’ attains the level of the ‘reaper.’

Yehudah is referred to as a “plower” because his spiritual service involves breaking up the ground’s hard surface and turning over the topsoil, as is done when plowing. Yehudah tries to find the sparks of holiness amid concealment and physicality. He does so by virtue of his faith in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, who created everything in existence and Who continues to sustain it, supervising everything in His world.

Yosef is referred to as a “reaper” because harvesting marks the end of the toil, when the farmer recognizes at the end of the day, when things come full circle, that everything is from Hashem, reflecting His will at every time and in every situation.

Yosef was thus referred to by his father as “*nezir echav* (the *nazir* among his brothers)” (*Bereishis* 49:26), the title *nazir* denoting separateness, because Yosef was apart from all worldly matters and lived a wholly spiritual life, dedicated to Hashem alone, above nature.

We find an echo of these two approaches in the dispute between R. Yishmael and R. Shimon bar Yochai (*Berachos* 35a).

R. Yishmael learns from the *pasuk*, “You shall gather in your grain” (*Devarim* 11:14) that although it is written, “This book of the Torah shall not depart from your lips by day or night” (*Yehoshua* 1:8), this is not to be understood literally. Rather, a person must also work the land for his sustenance and gather in his grain. In the Gemara’s words, “Conduct yourself with them (i.e., *divrei Torah*) according to the way of the world.”

R. Shimon bar Yochai, on the other hand, says, “Should a person plow in the plowing season, sow in the sowing season, reap at harvest time, thresh at threshing time, and winnow when it is windy, what will become of Torah? Rather, when Yisrael conduct themselves according to G-d’s will, their work will be done by others.”

Here we encounter a difference of opinion as to whether a person ought to abstain entirely from worldly involvement or be part of it while imbuing it with holiness. However, according to all opinions, Yehudah ultimately has to bring himself to Yosef's level, perceiving G-d's presence alone in the mundane, physical aspect of the world.

Yehudah and Yosef meet in our *parshah*, and the words "Yehudah approached him" mean that Yehudah arrived at a point where he converged with Yosef's approach, whereby he too was granted Yosef's level of faith and ability to perceive reality through the lens of G-d's will.

SUMMARY

Yehudah wasn't addressing Yosef. Rather, he spoke to himself in Yosef's earshot and brought himself to Yosef's level. Yehudah, who was rooted in mundane reality, perceived everything that happened as a sign of Hashem's will and His individualized providence. He thereby attained a level similar to that of Yosef, who lived above the level of the natural world. When Yehudah and Yosef attained a common understanding, the barriers between them came down immediately. Yosef therefore no longer restrained himself, but called to his brothers, "I am Yosef, your brother."

Uayechi

What Constitutes Life?

☞ Vitality While Living in Egypt

REGARDING YAAKOV'S LIFE after settling in Egypt, the Torah tells us, "Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years, and Yaakov's days, the years of his life, were seven years and a hundred and forty years" (*Bereishis* 47:28).

The Torah differentiates this period in Yaakov's life, mentioning his years in Egypt separately from the total number of years he lived. Is this because his life in Egypt differed somehow from his life in Eretz Yisrael? One would imagine that life is life wherever one happens to be and that this would be particularly true of an individual of advanced years, whose lifestyle is stable and established. Moreover, Yaakov had experienced an earlier episode of exile, having spent twenty-two years in Lavan's home, and this period is not singled out for special mention. Why are his years in Egypt deemed worthy of being reckoned separately?

We might argue that he was less vibrant during the years in Egypt than previously. But this cannot be, for the Torah doesn't merely tell us that Yaakov spent those seventeen years in Egypt, but that he "lived in Egypt," implying that even there, his vitality was no less than it had been in Eretz Yisrael. What is the Torah's purpose in counting these years separately?

☞ A Full Life Is Possible Anywhere, through Clinging to the Trait of Truthfulness

QUOTING HIS GRANDFATHER the *Chiddushei HaRim*, the Sefas Emes explains that the Torah means to convey that even in Egypt, Yaakov remained fully alive, because adhering to the trait of truthfulness enables a person to live anywhere, even in Egypt. Yaakov possessed this trait, which was his salient feature, as it is written, “Grant truth to Yaakov” (*Michah* 7:20). We shall now elucidate this idea.

☞ What Is Considered Living?

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the concept of “life” implies maintaining a connection to the Source from whence all human life flows.

Thus, for example, when the Torah mentions “live water” (*Bamidbar* 19:17), this is a reference to a naturally flowing wellspring. Speaking of something as being “alive” denotes it having some connection to its root and source.

Life is not characterized solely by the ability to move. A lizard’s tail, for example, continues moving even after it has been severed from the rest of the body. It moves but isn’t alive. Only something that remains connected to its life source can be said to be alive.

Man’s life flows from his soul’s connection to G-d. In the *Zohar* (Vol. I, 197a), Chazal express surprise at the *pasuk*’s statement that upon being informed that Yosef was alive and that he held a powerful position in Egypt, “Yaakov’s spirit lived” (*Bereishis* 45:27). “And until now, had he been dead?” Chazal respond that when he lost Yosef, Yaakov lost his joy in life and his “augmented inspiration,” as the Sefas Emes adds to it, referring to the special inspiration that fills a person within whom the *Shechinah* dwells. Upon being assured that Yosef was indeed alive, Yaakov’s joy returned to him, and his life source was reawakened. He reconnected to the *Shechinah*, the Source of vitality. It is thus accurate to say that his spirit was revived and that it lived.

☞ How Did Yaakov Find the Life Source in Egypt?

THE TORAH DISTINGUISHES between the land of Egypt and Eretz Yisrael:

For the land which you are entering to take possession of is not like the land of Egypt which you left, where you must sow your seed and irrigate it manually like a vegetable garden. Rather, the land to which you are crossing over to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys; it is irrigated by rain from the heavens. It is a land which Hashem, your G-d, cares for. Hashem, your G-d, keeps a constant eye on it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year. (*Devarim* 11:10–12)

Eretz Yisrael is nourished by rainwater; its life source is heavenly, coming from above. By contrast, the land of Egypt is irrigated by the waters of the Nile River, from below — “You must irrigate it manually.” It lacks a connection to a higher source. Egypt was a moribund place of spiritual death that had no flow of life or connection to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Chazal capture this idea very succinctly (*Shemos Rabbah* 5:14). On Pharaoh’s words, “I do not recognize Hashem and neither shall I send Yisrael away” (*Shemos* 5:2), Chazal record Pharaoh’s words to Moshe and Aharon and their response:

“Wait for me until I check in my book.” He thereupon went into his palace and looked at each nation and its deity. He started reading, “The god of Moav, the god of Amon, the god of Zidon...” He told them, “I have searched for His Name in my treasure house and haven’t found it.” This is comparable to a *kohen* who owned a foolish slave. The *kohen* traveled away, and the slave went to look for him in a graveyard. He started shouting to the people standing there, “Have you seen my master?” “You fool,” they told him. “Your master is a *kohen*; who goes looking for a *kohen* in a graveyard?” Thus, Moshe and Aharon responded to Pharaoh, “You fool, does one look for a living person among the dead? The names you read out are dead, whereas our G-d is living and is Ruler of the world.”

This Midrash likens Egypt to a graveyard, lacking any connection to spiritual life and vibrancy.

Thus, by telling us that “Yaakov lived in Egypt for seventeen years,” the Torah conveys that even while he lived in that place of impurity that was far removed from any holiness, he remained spiritually alive and maintained his connection to the Divine wellspring of life and holiness. This is highly significant, for it communicates to us that even during his sojourn in Egypt — a place apparently unconnected to the Source of life — Yaakov remained fully alive to the extent that this period is also to be reckoned among his years of life in every sense.

How did Yaakov succeed in accessing holiness even in Egypt?

☞ A *Tzaddik* Finds the Source of Life Even in a Desert

REGARDING THIS POINT, the *Chiddushei HaRim* points out that Yaakov managed to locate his spiritual life source in Egypt through his salient trait of truthfulness. The Sefas Emes elaborates that through his ability to pinpoint the kernel of truth amid all the surrounding falsehood, Yaakov was able to discern the *Shechinah*’s presence even amid the filth and defilement of Egypt. The apparent reality of Egyptian life was a mask concealing the inner content which was holy, for the source of their vitality was Hashem Himself.

Yaakov understood that the *sitra achra* is nonetheless nourished by G-d’s word that gives it life, for without G-d’s word, nothing whatsoever can exist. Thus, even in an environment that was the embodiment of impurity and physicality Yaakov was able to experience holiness and attachment to G-d. Indeed, a genuine *tzaddik* can discover a wellspring of living water even in a desert and perceive G-dliness even amid material defilement.

☞ An Evildoer Is Considered Dead Even While He Lives

IN CONTRAST TO a genuine *tzaddik*, who can identify the innermost point of truth within every situation, the evildoer is focused upon

superficial externalities and remains oblivious to the nourishing flow of spirituality. He doesn't understand that true life is measured solely in terms of connection to Hashem, the Source of all life. Chazal (*Berachos* 18b) therefore teach that "Evildoers are referred to as dead even during their lifetimes," for they are detached from Hashem, who is the Source of life. This is also how Chazal understand the *pasuk* in *Koheles* (9:5), "For the living know that they will die, whereas the dead know nothing."

"The living know that they will die" — they know that they will experience physical death, yet they will continue living. "This refers to the righteous," say Chazal, "who are referred to as living even after their death, as it says, 'And Benayahu ben Yehoyada, son of a living person, greatly accomplished' (*Shmuel II* 23:20). 'Son of a living person?' Are other people sons of the dead? Rather, 'son of a living person' means that he is referred to as alive even after his death.

"Whereas the dead know nothing" — this refers to evildoers, who are referred to as dead even during their lifetimes, as it says, 'And you are dead, an evildoer, prince of Yisrael' (*Yechezkel* 21:30), and 'By the testimony of two witnesses or three witnesses, the dead person shall be put to death' (*Devarim* 17:6)." Why is he referred to as dead before he has died? It can only be because as an evildoer, he is considered spiritually dead to begin with.

Whereas the *tzaddik* enjoys an eternal connection to the Source of life that actually intensifies after the body's demise, the evildoer is detached from this wellspring of Divine spirituality such that he is considered dead even while he is physically alive. Movement is indeed no yardstick of life; life is a function of Divine inspiration.

☞ We Are Merely Sojourners

IN WHAT SENSE are the righteous said to be alive even after they die? Don't they experience death just as evildoers do? After all, it is written explicitly, "For certain things happen to people and certain things happen to animals, but one thing happens to all of them: like

this one dies so does that one die, and all have the same life spirit, and man's superiority over animals becomes nothing when he dies, for then everything is worthless" (*Koheles* 3:19). Death is a given and to be expected; it is inexorable.

In addressing this question, the Sefas Emes presents a profound insight into life's meaning.

It is written, "For we are sojourners before You and settlers like all our ancestors [were]; our days are like a [fleeting] shadow upon the land, and there is no hope [of lengthening our lives]" (*Divrei Hayamim I* 29:15). Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 96:2) understand this to mean that man's lifespan is like a fleeting shadow — not like the shadow of a wall or a tree which are stable and permanent, but like the shadow cast by a bird flying by, for it is written, "Our days are like a passing shadow" (*Tehillim* 144:4). Man knows that his sojourn in this world is temporary and fleeting. "And there is no hope" — nobody can hope to avoid death; everyone knows that his time to pass on will arrive. Throughout his life in this world, a person thus lives as a sojourner, who is not settled in his proper place but is just passing through.

What then is the purpose of life? Does a person come into this world solely for the sake of passing through it? Should we consider ourselves tourists? Why was man created?

Since physical existence is temporary and doesn't endure, it cannot be the true focus of man's life. Life's purpose must therefore be to draw upon the Divine life source, thereby sanctifying physical life by imbuing it with spirituality. A person's spiritual achievements endure for eternity, even after his body expires and breaks down. He can therefore be considered alive even after his death.

The Sefas Emes asserts that this is the significance of the word *ger* (sojourner) in the *pasuk*, "For we are sojourners before You."

"The noun *ger* is related to [the concept of] continuation," he writes. In other words, the word *ger* is related to *gorer*, dragging or drawing something from its original place such that it continues elsewhere.

We find the Torah using the word in this sense when referring to a ruminant animal as *ma'aleh geirah*, chewing the cud (*Vayikra* 11:4). Rashi explains, “It regurgitates the food in its stomach, returning it to its mouth to finely grind and crush it.” In other words, the animal draws up food from its intestines that it has already swallowed. *Geirah* therefore denotes drawing or dragging something upward.

We are *geirim* in this world in the sense that the purpose of our lives is to identify the inner kernel of holiness within every aspect of physical life and draw the rest of physical existence upward after it. By doing so, we can overcome our anticipated death and transform our passing sojourn in this world into eternal life.

☛ The Purpose of Exile

DELVING MORE DEEPLY into this idea, the Sefas Emes explains along the same lines that a non-Jew who converts is known as a *ger* because he perceives the kernel of holiness within his soul and draws his entire existence and identity after it.

The Sefas Emes clarifies that the souls of *geirim* represent sparks of holiness that have fallen among the gentile nations. The *ger* grasps this spark and draws it towards the realm of holiness. The Gemara thus says (*Pesachim* 87b), “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* exiled Yisrael among the nations solely in order that *geirim* should become attached to them.” R. Chaim Vital, citing the Arizal, explains similarly (*Shaar Hapesukim, parshas Shemos*) that the reason for Yisrael’s exile among the nations is because the soul of Adam Harishon encompassed all the souls of every person who would ever come into the world, and when Adam sinned, those souls fell away from him, becoming trapped within husks that were dispersed among the seventy nations. Yisrael therefore had to go into exile among each and every one of the nations “in order to gather these flowers of holy souls that were scattered among the thorns,” as R. Chaim writes.

This was also the reason for the Egyptian exile, about which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Avraham Avinu, “You shall surely know,

ki ger yihyeh zaracha, that your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs” (*Bereishis* 15:13). Hashem referred to Bnei Yisrael here as *geirim*, not only in the sense of their being sojourners in a foreign land but also on account of their mission to be *gorer*, to draw out the holy sparks that had become mingled among the Egyptians.

Accordingly, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s promise to Avraham (*ibid.* *pasuk* 14), “And after that they will leave with great wealth” can be understood as referring to the souls that would leave Egypt along with Bnei Yisrael.

Yaakov’s descent to Egypt and his descendants’ subsequent exile there thus all served the same purpose, which is summed up in the words “Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt” — meaning, in order to find the kernel of holiness there that is the point of contact with the spiritual source of life and to be *gorer-megayer* it — to draw it fully into the realm of holiness.

☞ Revealing the End of the Exile

ALTHOUGH THE PURPOSE of the exile is to find the inner kernel of holiness, it can be hard to locate, for it is heavily concealed. The *Shechinah*, too, is in exile and cannot be perceived with a superficial glance. Only by toiling will a person succeed in uncovering the innermost truth.

Appreciating this will enable us to understand the profound meaning of Rashi’s comments at the beginning of *parshas Vayechi* that the reason why this *parshah* is closed (i.e., it lacks the usual space between the end of the previous section and the beginning of a new one) is because “Yaakov wanted to reveal when the end of the exile would be, and it was closed off from him.” Why did Yaakov want to reveal the end of the exile, and why was he unsuccessful?

Quoting his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, who in turn quotes R. Bunim of Peshischa, the Sefas Emes explains in light of the above that “the vitality of holiness never departs from the world

entirely.” Exile represents the mere concealment of that inner, spiritual kernel. All of creation derives its inner power from a single source of vitality — *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. No other life source exists. Although *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* hides, He is present even amid the Egyptian defilement, which represents a mere husk or covering. It was this that Yaakov attempted to reveal to his sons. Revealing the end doesn’t refer to the date when the exile would end, but to its purpose. However, once the mask is removed from the inner kernel of truth, there is no longer an exile, for the whole purpose of the Jewish people’s exile is the concealment of this inner point and their mission to find and uncover it. Yaakov was therefore prevented from revealing this.

☛ Falsehood Cannot Survive, Whereas Truth Is Eternal

WHY SHOULD REVEALING the exile’s purpose be referred to as “revealing the end?” The answer is that so long as falsehood holds sway in the world, everything is relative, unstable, and correct only in the moment. Absolute truth is eternal — it has no end or expiry date with changing times.

It is thus straightforward that anything that comes with an end date cannot be the truth. Had Yaakov revealed the existence of an end to their exile, they would have understood themselves that it represents a mask of falsehood covering reality behind which Heaven’s truth is concealed. This truth is G-d’s existence at the root of the apparent endurance of the forces of impurity.

Yaakov wanted to reveal this so that there should be no possibility of erring by imagining that the *sitra achra* has independent existence. But as soon as this becomes apparent, the exile comes to an end. This therefore had to remain fully concealed, and it is our task to work to recognize it and find the kernel of inner truth of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s existence that is hidden within material reality.

SUMMARY

In his unique manner, the Sefas Emes demonstrates the common thread connecting the meaning of life, *geirus*, and the exile's conclusion.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the world's life source, and man lives as long as he maintains his connection to this source.

The vitality that this connection imparts is independent of time and place. Yaakov was able to live a spiritual life amid the impurity of Egypt. His descendants remained in Egyptian exile for the purpose of discovering the points of holiness and inner, spiritual life that were hidden in that land's materialism and defilement, extracting them from the outer covering concealing them, and drawing them wholly into the realm of holiness. This process of *geirus* is the purpose of exile — drawing out the inner kernel of truth so that it extends into and elevates every aspect of physical existence. Upon the completion of this process, the exile will have served its purpose and will come to an end. Eternal, unchanging, pristine spiritual truth and values will then dominate, as opposed to the previous state of shifting values and relative half-truths. The purpose of a person's life is to focus upon the inner, spiritual kernel within physical reality, thereby broadening and strengthening eternal life even during his fleeting sojourn in this world. Indeed, as David Hamelech said, "For we are sojourners before You and settlers like all our ancestors; our days are like a [fleeting] shadow upon the land, and there is no hope [of lengthening our lives]."

Shemos



The Names Went into Exile and Brought About the Redemption

☛ What Is the Significance of the Names of Bnei Yisrael?

THE TORAH BEGINS its account of the Egyptian exile by listing the names of Yaakov's sons who accompanied him to Egypt: "And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt. Each man and his household came with Yaakov: Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehudah; Yissachar, Zevulun, and Binyamin; Dan and Naftali, Gad and Asher. All Yaakov's descendants were [then] seventy people, and Yosef was in Egypt" (*Shemos* 1:1-5).

Why are Yaakov's sons named here again individually? After all, they were already listed in *parshas Vayigash* in the account of their actual descent to Egypt. As the Torah relates, "And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt: Yaakov and his sons, Yaakov's firstborn was Reuven, etc." (*Bereishis* 46:8). After informing us there of the name of every member of Yaakov's family who came to Egypt, why repeat his sons' names again here?

☛ A Name Is a Token of Fondness

CHAZAL TELL US that the names of the tribes are indeed not mentioned here for the purpose of providing new information, but

because “the names of the tribes are beloved.” There is a special quality about these names that arouses *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s love.

We thus find in the Midrash (*Koheles Rabbah* 7:12) that if the *kohen gadol* served without wearing the *choshen*, his service was invalid.

The *kohen* would be liable for his life, unless the names of all twelve tribes were engraved on [the stones of the *choshen* which lay over] his heart, as it says, “Aharon shall bear the names of Bnei Yisrael upon the *choshen mishpat* when he enters the holy place” (*Shemos* 28:29). *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, “The names of the tribes are more precious to Me than the anointing oil [with which] *kohanim* and kings were anointed.”

A person’s name apparently evokes special fondness in one who loves him, even beyond that which is felt towards the person himself. What is the significance of this closeness, and why should it be elicited by a name, which seems to be only an arbitrary means of identification?

☛ Miracles Are Only Performed for the Bearer of a Good Name

WE FIND ELSEWHERE that names do seem to be significant. Chazal tell us further (*Koheles Rabbah* 7:1:1) that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* only performs miracles for those who bear a good name. On the *pasuk*, “A good name surpasses fine oil” (*Koheles* 7:1), they comment:

“‘A good name surpasses’ — this refers to Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah, who exited a fiery furnace alive;

“‘[surpasses] fine oil’ — this refers to Nadav and Avihu, who were burnt despite having been anointed with the anointing oil.”

This seems difficult understand, for it is one of the fundamentals of our faith that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “pays a man kindness according to his deeds [and] awards the evildoer according to his wickedness” (from the *piyut* “*Yigdal*”). How is it possible that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* treats a person better or worse merely because of his name? Would Heaven deal in such an arbitrary manner?

☞ A Good Name Is an External Manifestation of an Inner Quality

THE SEFAS EMES elucidates this topic, explaining what a name represents:

Fine oil used for anointing remains external to the body, and the person applying it is also an outside party, pouring it onto the head of the anointee. By contrast, a good name arises from a person's own achievements. Its origin lies within its bearer.

When a *kohen* is anointed with anointing oil, his essence doesn't change. He can serve in the Beis Hamikdash by virtue of his priestly lineage even if he hasn't improved himself in the slightest. This contrasts with a good name, which a person acquires in an honest manner, attaining this virtue through his own sweat and toil; it isn't a gift granted by Heaven. A good name thus denotes a higher distinction than fine oil.

We might note, though, that the names of the tribes were given to them at birth, so how can we attribute them to the inner virtue of their bearers, which is clearly not evident at such a young age?

It is important to understand that when parents name their child, they are inspired by a minor level of prophecy, guiding them to bestow the name that captures the child's essence.* The source and essence of the child's soul are conveyed in his name. Man has free choice, though, and his choices in life will either enhance or diminish his given name. If he conducts himself in a negative manner, his name changes. We thus find the *Ohr Hachaim* noting (in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:20), that following the primordial sin, woman's name was changed to Chavah, for, as he writes, "This principle operates in the world: the more a person sins, the more his name is diminished." In order to preserve the name his parents gave

* See R. Chaim Vital, quoting the Arizal, in *Shaar Hagilgulim, Introduction*, 23. See also *L'ohr Hachaim* pp. 269-276, where this is discussed at length.

him, a person must therefore maintain his inner integrity and live up to the good that his name represents.

A person who merits earning himself a good name has thereby demonstrated an undertaking to implement profound and significant self-improvement. His good name is not an external coating like fine oil; it indicates his inner toil to polish his traits and shine the gems within his soul. This is hard work that is only undertaken by a select handful of individuals. The reputation of a rare gemstone reaches far; the rarer the stone and the higher its quality, the further afield its reputation extends. “This,” writes the Sefas Emes, “is the significance of a name, which denotes its bearer’s reputation and the distance to which it extends.”

We thus find in the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 48:1), “To what distance does the aroma of fine oil extend? From the vestibule into the main hall.” In other words, whereas the extent to which a pleasant aroma can be appreciated is limited, “A good name extends from one end of the world to the other, as it says, ‘David’s reputation extended to every land’ (*Divrei Hayamim I* 14:17).” The extent of a reputation is thus an indication of its bearer’s superior quality.

In other words, a “good name” is the distant echo and the external manifestation of an advanced inner quality. This idea enables us to understand the significance of the names of the tribes of Yisrael, as we shall now explain.

☛ The *Avos* Form the Core of Holiness, Whereas the Tribes Represent Branches That Extend into the Mundane Realm

THE SEFAS EMES differentiates between the *avos* and their descendants, the *shevatim*:

The *avos* represent the focus of holiness and the heart of the *Shechinah*’s presence in this world. Chazal refer to this as, “The *avos* are the chariot of *Shechinah*,” i.e., their righteousness rendered them vehicles for demonstrating the *Shechinah*’s involvement in their lives.

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 86:6) cites the following *pesukim* that speak of the *avos* as having served as the substrate upon which the *Shechinah* rested: “G-d ascended from upon Avraham” (*Bereishis* 17:22); “G-d ascended from upon him” (ibid. 35:13); and “Behold, Hashem was standing over him” (ibid. 28:13). The Sefas Emes explains accordingly that “The three *avos* lived on a supernatural plane, in attachment to Hashem, serving as His chariot constantly.”

By contrast, the twelve tribes represent the extension of holiness beyond its core and its transmission to distant realms. The realm farthest from holiness is the physical world. In the Sefas Emes’s words, the tribes “revealed the sparks of holiness even within nature.” Yaakov’s twelve sons are therefore referred to as *shevatim* (tribes), for the word *sheivet* also refers to a stick or staff, as in the branches of a tree that extend outward from the tree trunk. The *pasuk* “It produced mighty staffs, becoming *shivtei moshlim* (dominant branches)” (*Yechezkel* 19:11) is understood in this sense by the Radak, who explains, “*shivtei moshlim* — branches.”

The Maharal writes similarly (*Gevuros Hashem*, Chap. 13):

There is one trunk and from that one — which is Yaakov — the twelve tribes extended; they are referred to as *shevatim* because the *sheivet* is the branch and is part of the tree. So was each of these twelve a part of the whole.

The Abarbanel’s comments (*Bereishis* 49:28) are particularly relevant:

Shivtei Yisrael (the tribes of Yisrael) are branches that extend from the same worthy trunk (i.e., the *avos*, who were the root and trunk), and they were all perfect in their deeds. He (i.e., Yaakov) therefore referred to them as *shevatim*, for [the Torah] likens Yaakov and his sons to a tree whose roots are one and from which many branches extend. The main bough is called a *sheivet*, and from each one twigs branch out — these are families. And from each twig come many leaves — these are family members. Just as the nature of a tree is that when its roots are sound, all of its shoots, branches, and leaves

are sound, so is it [here that] Yaakov, who is the root, is good and complete, so his sons, the *shevatim*, are upright and good.

☛ The Purpose of the Tribes' Descent to Egypt Was Their Sanctification of the Mundane

MITZRAYIM, THE NAME by which the Torah refers to the land of Egypt, is derived from *meitzar*, meaning a narrow place, strait, or difficulty. This was a land where coarse physicality held sway, a place that resisted the effect of holy, spiritual influences.

The purpose of the twelve tribes' descent to Egypt was to bring to light the holy sparks hidden there — even in that place of defilement and impurity. The tribes exerted an effect on the region's impurity, without being affected by it. During a process of radiating or secreting outward, nothing gets absorbed. This rule has practical application in the halachah that while a vessel or food is expelling previously absorbed matter, it will not absorb anything new. The Torah attests to this, telling us, “And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt — each man and his household came with Yaakov,” thereby conveying that while they were in Egypt, the tribes remained attached to Yaakov and his level of holiness. They instilled this holiness into their impure surroundings, demonstrating that nowhere is either spiritually or geographically beyond the reach of holiness. It can reach everywhere, infiltrating and bringing change for the better.

The *Baal HaTurim* points out that the final letters of the words “*eis Yaakov ish...* (with Yaakov, each man...)” are *tav*, *beis*, and *shin*, which, when reversed, spell “Shabbos.” He explains this as alluding to Bnei Yisrael's keeping Shabbos even in Egypt, in which merit they were redeemed, as Chazal tell us (*Shemos Rabbah* 5:18).

This phenomenon of the outward spread of holiness to distant realms is also found in connection with Shabbos, which represents the core of holiness that extends into the adjacent weekdays by virtue of *tosefes Shabbos* (adding on time to Shabbos). The Gemara (*Shabbos*

118a) thus tells us, “Whoever makes Shabbos pleasurable is given *nachalah bli metzarim*, an unbounded inheritance.” Rashi (ibid.) explains that *bli metzarim* means “never ending.” In other words, Shabbos’s holiness spreads ever outward into the six weekdays.

☞ The Tribes’ Names Convey Their Mission and Preface the Approaching Exile

WE THUS UNDERSTAND the reason for the Torah prefacing its account of the Egyptian exile with, “And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael...” A name denotes its bearer’s essence that extends to distant realms. This was precisely the function of Yaakov’s twelve sons, who instilled the holiness of the *avos* into a place as distant from and antagonistic to holiness as Egypt. In a similar manner, we understand that Nadav and Avihu, who served within the core of holiness, the *Mishkan*, did not attain the level of Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah, who publicly sanctified Heaven’s Name in the Babylonian exile, in surroundings that were far removed from the Beis Hamikdash.

We now also understand Chazal’s statement, “The names of the tribes are more precious to Me than the anointing oil [with which] *kohanim* and kings were anointed,” for the anointing oil rendered a person fit to serve as a *kohen* and attain the ultimate level of holiness while he was within the Beis Hamikdash, the center and core of holiness. The tribes’ names, on the other hand, denote the extension of holiness into distant realms. The tribes indeed brought about the revelation of their essence even in places that were distant from holiness.

☞ “To Place His Name There”

THIS IDEA ALSO provides insight into the *pasuk*’s description of the *Mishkan* as “the place that Hashem, your G-d, shall choose from all your tribes to place His Name there; His dwelling you shall seek

out, and you shall come there” (*Devarim* 12:5). We are not told that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Himself will dwell in the *Mishkan*, but that His Name will dwell there. How are we to understand this?

There is actually no physical location capable of containing *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, whose glory fills the entire world. The aspect of Him that dwells within the *Mikdash* is His Name, which denotes the extension of its bearer’s essence to a distant realm.

Moreover, a thing’s *actual* essence neither requires nor can be expressed by its name. A name only has relevance in relation to other beings, representing something’s externalization and how it is perceived and grasped by others, to the extent of their comprehension.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s Name thus denotes our limited perception of ways in which He operates, but it has no bearing on His Essence, which is beyond our perception and comprehension.

☞ The Tribes Themselves Were Not Exiled, Only Their Names

THE SEFAS EMES explains accordingly that the exile only affected Bnei Yisrael’s external names, whereas their essence remained attached to Yakov’s level and did not suffer exile in Egypt. The Torah therefore tells us, “And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt,” intending this to be understood not as “these are the names — of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt,” but as “these are the names of Bnei Yisrael — who came to Egypt,” for the tribes themselves were not exiled there; only their names were. In other words, the servitude only affected their external, revealed aspect, corresponding to their names, which denote only how they are perceived externally. Their inner essence always retained its pristine holiness. Thus, on one hand, the names were exiled, not the inner essence, while on the other hand, the names brought about the redemption by giving expression to the ability to instill holiness in distant realms, even amid the worst impurity.

SUMMARY

The Torah teaches us that the *shevatim* clung to the level of Yaakov's holiness and that their intense fervor thereby instilled holiness in distant realms, like a person's name that is the external representation of his essence. The Torah therefore stresses that "these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt," for the initial stage of exile is a person's name, which is the means by which his essence finds outward expression and reaches afar. The glowing inner fire of the *shevatim* indeed brought holiness into a hostile exile.

On the other hand, a name denotes an external image and a perception of something or someone in the eyes of others, according to the limits of their comprehension, not its essence. This is particularly apparent regarding our perception of the Creator and the Names by which we relate to His ways, without having any understanding whatsoever of His Essence. The Torah tells us that a person's inner essence cannot be enslaved; exile only affects the outer shell represented by his image and name. His essence, though, always remains unfettered and free.

Ua'era



The Obligation Imposed by Redemption

☞ “You Shall Know That I Am Hashem”

IN RESPONSE TO the dismay Moshe expressed that his mission to Pharaoh had not only been unsuccessful but had apparently worsened Bnei Yisrael's situation, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* reiterates His promise to redeem Bnei Yisrael and take them out of Egypt. But He adds that their redemption will be carried out with “an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment,” after which the Jewish nation will know with certainty that Hashem is the only G-d. Hashem instructed Moshe, “Therefore, say to Bnei Yisrael, ‘I am Hashem; I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians, release you from their servitude, and redeem you with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment. I will adopt you as a nation for Me and act as G-d for you. You will know that it is I, Hashem, your G-d, who is freeing you from the burdens of the Egyptians’” (*Shemos* 6:6–7).

If not for these *pesukim*, we could have understood the redemption to be merely the result of the exile reaching its end. In other words, whatever particular Divine purpose Bnei Yisrael's exile in Egypt served, once this had been achieved, their redemption followed as a matter of course. A careful reading of these verses, however, reveals that the exile's purpose was to lead to the redemption, which brought the people to recognize Hashem; we were exiled

solely in order to be redeemed. Can this be the case? Isn't this like making someone sick solely in order to heal him?

We encounter a similar paradox regarding the plagues with which G-d smote the Egyptians. At the *bris bein habesarim*, Avraham was promised, "Know well that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and they will serve them, and they will afflict them for four hundred years. And also, the nation that they will serve I shall judge, and after that, they will leave with many possessions" (*Bereishis* 15:13–14). From the order in which these events are mentioned, it is apparent that Egyptians' punishment would take place before Bnei Yisrael's departure, implying that in addition to penalizing the Egyptians for their treatment of Bnei Yisrael, it was also important, for some independent reason, that the latter witness this being carried out. The Torah indeed states in *parshas Bo*, "For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants so as to enact these signs of Mine in his midst, and so that you shall relate to the ears of your son and your son's son that I toyed with Egypt and the signs that I performed among them; and you shall know that I am Hashem" (*Shemos* 10:1–2).

From all this, it emerges that both the plagues and the redemption had a purpose independent of bringing about knowledge of G-d.

☛ Substituting One Form of Servitude for Another

RECOGNIZING G-D AS our Redeemer is not just important as a piece of information; the obvious conclusion to be drawn from this knowledge is that it is fitting that we serve Him.

The Torah thus tells us that when Moshe questioned his suitability for the mission of leading Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, Hashem told him, "And this is your sign that I have sent you — when you bring the People out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d on this mountain" (*ibid.* 3:12). How are we to understand an event that was only to take place after the redemption being cited prior to it as an indication of the imminence of that selfsame redemption? Once the redemption happened, there would be no need for any further signs. The

Torah is conveying that redemption confers an obligation to serve the Redeemer, and without that outcome, we would not have merited being redeemed. In other words, the service that would result was the prerequisite for being redeemed. Had our deliverance been a mere consequence of the exile coming to an end, we would owe no debt of gratitude to its agent, just as a released prisoner doesn't thank the authorities when leaving prison upon completing his term. They have not given him anything — he ordinarily enjoyed freedom, and with the conclusion of his forced incarceration, he is simply returning to his natural situation.

For a Jew, however, complete and utter freedom is not a natural state. Serving a human master is forbidden, for the Torah reminds us: “They are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt — they shall not be sold in the manner of slaves” (*Vayikra* 25:42).

With our departure from Egypt, we were not awarded our freedom. Rather, we substituted one form of servitude for another. Instead of subjugation to human masters, we became servants of the Creator, Who removed us from human control so that we should serve Him. The natural condition of an Israelite is thus not freedom but servitude; a Jew's destiny is not to assert his rights, but to discharge the obligations that his situation places upon him.

In the words of the Sefas Emes, “You will know that it is I, Hashem, your G-d' — this constitutes a promise that they would know that G-d had taken them out of Egypt, and this [eventual outcome] was the purpose of the entire exile, so that a person knows that for his part, he is ready to be in exile, and this applies with every member of Yisrael.”

☛ No Instructive Process Is Necessary for the Individual Who Understands Independently

THIS APPROACH DOESN'T regard exile as a punishment, but as part of an instructive process that climaxes in man shouldering the yoke of servitude and undertaking to be a servant of G-d. It is therefore

evident that the individual who arrives at this point on his own is relieved of the hardship of exile to begin with. Exile breaks a person's pride and his pretention of mastery over his surroundings. He comes to acknowledge his insignificance and inability to alter events around him. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* inflicts suffering upon man and seemingly conceals His presence while things are hard so that man realizes that it is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that is all-capable and all-powerful, not man, and that He and He alone runs His world. This enables us to understand the remarks that the Sefas Emes quotes from his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*: "If man truly knew that everything comes from Hashem, there would be no concealment whatsoever from him. All concealment is necessary only so that man should not imagine that He is the source of things."

☞ Spiritual Empowerment Is Also the Result of Heavenly Assistance

WHY SHOULDN'T MAN naturally be free and unshackled?

Recognizing the compelling nature of subjugation to the Creator is apparently a function of acknowledging man's utter dependence on *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who runs His world single-handedly. However, if this dependence were solely confined to the material realm, man would still feel deserving of accolades in his capacity as the unsurpassed crown of creation in the spiritual realm. The Sefas Emes therefore stresses that man must acknowledge his innate powerlessness to change anything or to guarantee his success not only in the physical realm, but even in the spiritual realm. Let him not imagine that for fathoming a *sugya* of Gemara, immersing himself in Torah study, savoring a profound insight, or gradually strengthening his attachment to Hashem, his own free will suffices, and thus he is justified in attributing these attainments to his own toil and capabilities. The truth, insists the Sefas Emes, is that "man must be aware that even in moments of spiritual goodwill, when he attains a degree of attachment to Heaven, he should never forget that

left to his own devices, he is imminently capable of the worst sins and that he is only spared from this through Heaven's assistance."

☞ The Truly Free Individual Enjoys Dominion over Time and Subjugates His Time to His Creator

THE VERY FIRST mitzvah that Bnei Yisrael were given, just prior to their departure from Egypt, was, "This month is for you the first month" (*Shemos* 12:2). The difference between a slave and a free man is not a function of how hard each of them works. It is quite possible that lacking any personal incentive to achieve, a slave will be lazy and sluggish, whereas a free man will work much harder, with greater and more sustained energy. Where the two truly differ is regarding their relationship to time. Whereas a slave's time belongs to his master, a free man's time is his own, and he decides how to use it. The initial manifestation of the impending redemption was therefore, "This month is for you," conveying the message that "From now on, your time will be your own, and you are commanded to subjugate to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* not only your physical and mental resources, but also your time."

Commenting on the words, "This month is for you the first month," the Seforno writes, "Henceforth, the months will be yours to do with as you wish, whereas throughout your enslavement, your days did not belong to you, but were subject to others' [imposed] work and wishes. Therefore, 'It is to be the first for you of the months of the year,' for it is when your existence as exercisers of free will began." A Jew must take every realm in which he enjoys freedom and subjugate it to serving Hashem.

☞ "They Are My Servants, Not Servants to Other Servants"

A PERSON'S ACCEPTANCE of the yoke of Heaven's rule must be unre-served. He must subjugate every realm of his existence to *Hakadosh*

Baruch Hu, keeping nothing back. It is therefore impossible for him to be subservient to two masters. In this context, the Sefas Emes cites the *Zohar's* comments (Vol. III, 108a):

Come and see: [Canaanite] slaves are exempt from the mitzvah of *kerias shema* and accepting the yoke of Heaven's rule and fulfilling the mitzvos. This can be likened to an ox upon which a yoke is placed and then attached to a plowshare. If the ox doesn't accept the yoke, it cannot be harnessed to anything. Likewise, a person must first accept a yoke and then work with it at whatever needs to be done. If he doesn't accept the yoke to begin with, he is unable to serve — a yoke won't rest (i.e., cannot be placed) upon someone who is [already] subservient to another.

✎ Leaving Egypt and Accepting the Yoke of Heaven's Rule

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the first section of *kerias shema* relates to man's acceptance of Heaven's rule and his acknowledgment that he has no independence of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. These realizations lead him to shoulder the yoke of serving Heaven. Our nation's departure from Egypt thus serves as the foundation for our realization that we are not free to do as we wish and that we are subservient to nothing else besides fulfilling Hashem's will. Mention of the watershed event that led us to these undertakings is thus interwoven with *kerias shema*.

SUMMARY

The Sefas Emes asserts here that complete freedom is not man's natural state and that our departure from Egypt should not be understood as a release from an unnatural state of slavery, resulting from the fulfillment of the exile's purpose. A Jew does

not come to this world in order to exercise his rights and freedoms, but to discharge his obligations to his Creator. He must live as Hashem's servant. It is the inculcation of this awareness that was the purpose of the Egyptian exile and our subsequent redemption.

This was achieved through a three-stage process. The first stage was enforced exile that demonstrated the powerlessness of the individual. This experience breaks man's pride as he realizes that on his own, he is utterly powerless to change events and to influence what transpires around him, for there is none besides Hashem — no other independent power.

The second stage brought the ten plagues upon the Egyptians, leading Bnei Yisrael to conclude that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* controls every aspect of creation. They attained the level referred to in the *pasuk* as, "You shall know that I am G-d."

The third stage is the Jew's acknowledgment that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is the sole Power in the entire world and that it is He who substitutes our forced servitude to other human beings for our willing, inner servitude to Him.

Sanctity and Renewal in a World That Operates According to the Laws of Nature

☛ What Is Special about the Mitzvah of Sanctifying Rosh Chodesh?

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU prefaced His command to Bnei Yisrael to set aside a lamb for the Pesach sacrifice by telling them, “This month shall be for you the first month; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year” (*Shemos* 12:2).

Rashi begins his commentary on *chumash* by quoting R. Yitzchak, who questions why the Torah opens with an account of creation when instead, he argues, “The Torah should have started with ‘This month shall be for you...’ which is the first mitzvah that Yisrael were commanded. Why did it start with *Bereishis*?”

What is so important about this mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon that makes it the first mitzvah Yisrael were given as a nation and qualifies it as a possible opening of the entire Torah? Wouldn’t one of the mitzvos that conveys Judaism’s fundamental teachings, such as Shabbos, *bris milah*, *kerias shema*, etc., have been a more appropriate choice with which to begin the Torah?

☛ The Friction of Routine vs. Renewal

THE NATURAL WORLD operates on the basis of a fixed, cyclical order that is preprogrammed. This idea is expressed in the Hebrew

word for nature, *teva*, which is related to *tavua*, meaning stamped or imprinted. The *pasuk* in *Koheles* (1:9), observes accordingly, “That which was is what will be; that which was done is that which will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.”

The entire universe from the heavenly bodies downward operates according to a predestined plan that contains no novelty. New discoveries and uses can be made of existing phenomena, but the natural world offers nothing novel. That which already exists can be further developed and modified, but nothing that doesn’t already exist can be brought into existence. The Hebrew word for routine, rote, or habit is *shigra*, which is related to *shigur*, meaning dispatching or sending off, because everything operates according to a preset and preactivated program. Whatever we see are the results of a process that has been unfolding ever since the world’s creation.

But renewal can be experienced in the spiritual realm.

The physical realm can be likened to a cistern that holds whatever has been put into it, whereas the spiritual realm is like a wellspring that is constantly being replenished. Nothing is preordained in the spiritual realm. Divine providence is constant and ongoing and is thus the antithesis of the natural realm, which runs according to fixed laws. The *Zohar* (Vol. II, 115b) thus observes that while “there is nothing new under the sun,” there is novelty above the sun. Everything in existence derives its life force from the spiritual world, from the Divine will that sustains and imparts its vitality at all times. As we say in the daily *yotzeir* blessing, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “renews creation each day, constantly.” The world’s creation that began with the Six Days of Creation has thus never ended. It is ongoing, from day to day, for without G-d’s word and will that it continue to exist, it would simply evaporate and instantly disappear. It is G-d’s command that supports existence and sustains it at any given moment.

Man therefore finds himself torn between two worlds:

- His feet are planted firmly in the physical world, where he lives his life governed by routine, lacking novelty and renewal.

On the material plane, he is exposed to all the ravages of the natural world and its built-in processes of wear and tear, aging, and decay.

- His heart and his mind, though, reach the heavens, where there is constant creation and renewal, for there, he is able to connect to the Divine source of vitality that beats within creation, channeling new life to it at every moment anew.

☛ The Spiritual Wellspring of Youth That Bypasses the Ravages of Time

THE LIFE FORCE sustaining every physical entity derives from the Divine realm. Once it reaches the physical realm it is subject to a process of becoming ever further distanced from its life source, and it begins to wither. In time, standing water grows stagnant, meat becomes wormy, milk ferments and sours, the body ages and wears out, etc. Things are drawn downwards; every physical entity tends towards repose, slowing down, withering, and eventually, returning to the dust from which it originally grew and developed. Time works against all physical matter, for it moves ever farther from its life source, and nothing can restore its youth. Our prayer, “Do not cast us out in old age” can therefore also be understood as a plea that even while we are young, we should not be cast upon days that lack renewal, when everything is old and foregone, and the future holds out no more promise than the present.

However, man is able to shake this torpor off and preserve his youthful qualities. By holding onto his spirituality and the Divine kernel of vitality that lies within each living thing, he can experience renewal, drawing from world’s eternal wellspring. For example, on Yom Kippur when a person feels great spiritual arousal, he can reconnect to his flow of vitality and recharge himself with new life. These special moments in time do not represent milestones marking ever greater distance from his starting point. Rather, they mark a

cyclical path, affording periodic opportunities for reconnecting to one's point of origin. Upon reaching each of these cyclical contact points with his life source, a person makes the *shehecheyanu* blessing.

☞ Exile and Redemption, Aging and Renewal

EXILE DENOTES THE concealment of Divine providence. Since this is the source from which renewal flows, exile — which represents its concealment — imposes a deterioration into a world that withers, lacks novelty, and is exposed to the ravages of time.

This is apparently what the Sefas Emes means when he writes that “in exile, this renewal is lacking.”

Redemption represents a sharp switch from heavenly concealment and apparent lack of involvement to heavenly illumination and clear providence. Man thereupon moves into a world where he reconnects to the ever-flowing wellspring of spiritual vitality and again experiences renewal.

The Sefas Emes thus explains:

At the moment of redemption, when it becomes apparent that the life force of every thing flows from Hashem, this [revelation] serves as the source of renewal. For Hashem's vitality bestows constant renewal, as we say, “Who in His goodness renews creation each day, constantly.” Only of the person who forgets [this] and who is mired in nature is it said, “There is nothing new under the sun.” But the person who clings to Hashem's inner vitality experiences constant renewal.

☞ Redemption and Sanctification of the New Moon

THE SOLAR YEAR is known as a *shannah*, meaning repetition, a reference to the constancy of the solar cycle. Upon their redemption, the Jewish people passed from living with “nothing new under the sun,” subject to the passage of solar years, to marking time according to the moon, which waxes and wanes each month. The Jewish calendar is based on the lunar cycle, and every month, we

make a blessing over the new moon in which we say, “And about the moon, He said that it should be renewed, a crown of glory for those borne [by G-d] from the womb, who in the future will be renewed like it [is renewed at present] and will accord glory to their Creator for the glory of His kingdom. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who renews the months.”

It is therefore abundantly clear why the first mitzvah we received upon leaving Egypt was the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon, which denotes renewal and novelty.

☞ Permeating the Weekdays with Holiness

THE SEFAS EMES adds a novel insight, distinguishing the holiness of Shabbos from that of Rosh Chodesh.

Shabbos is referred to by the Gemara (*Berachos* 57b) as “an encapsulation of the World to Come,” whose holiness is “predetermined and ongoing” from the Six Days of Creation (*Pesachim* 117b). Shabbos’s holiness is a fixture in the time continuum, independent of any action on the part of Yisrael. By contrast, the holiness of Rosh Chodesh brings about renewal and reveals the inner spirituality inherent even in ordinary weekdays. This holiness is dependent upon the actions of Yisrael, who confer it by declaring the arrival of a new month upon the moon’s renewal. Permeating G-d’s creation with holiness is an achievement wrought by man, who manages to reveal Divinity even amid nature. This is why Rashi suggests that the Torah could have begun with the fundamental mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon, which touches upon the entire purpose of the world’s creation.

☞ Moshe’s Difficulty in Understanding the Nature of Darkness and the Need for Renewal

THE SEFAS EMES explains Chazal’s comments (*Mechilta, parshas Bo, Masechta D’pischa* 1) in light of the above:

“This month shall be for you” — R. Akiva says, “This is one of the three things with which Moshe had difficulty, and G-d showed him all of them, pointing to them and telling him, ‘this.’” R. Shimon ben Yochai says, “But every time Hashem spoke to Moshe only during the day, whereas He showed him the new moon at night. How so? He spoke to him during the day and showed him the new moon at night.” R. Eliezer says, “He spoke to him during the day towards evening and showed him the new moon at night.”

What difficulty did Moshe have with the mitzvah of sanctification of the new moon? And why did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* speak to him just as day was giving way to night? The Sefas Emes offers the following explanation:

In *Bava Metzia* (83b), Chazal explain the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (104:20), “‘You impose darkness, and it becomes night’ — this refers to this world, which is akin to night.” Nature, with its absence of novelty, is likened to night, for night denotes concealment.

The Gemara in *Yevamos* (49b) states, “Whereas all other prophets perceived [their prophecies] through *aspaklaria she’einah me’irah* (a ‘non-transparent glass’), Moshe perceived [his] through *aspaklaria hame’irah* (a ‘transparent glass’).” In other words, Moshe perceived Divine providence openly and constantly, living in a world that was constantly bathed in Divine light.

Moshe’s level of prophecy is akin to the holiness of Shabbos, which is unaltered, constant, and independent of any human action. This is why we mention Moshe’s sublime level, which was akin to that of Shabbos, in the Shabbos morning prayer: “*Yismach Moshe b’matnas chelko.*”

Darkness was thus a foreign experience to Moshe, who never needed to benefit from the effect of the moon’s renewal in revealing Divine providence within the darkness and concealment of nature.

This explains Moshe’s difficulty in grasping the mitzvah of the sanctification of the new moon. For him to understand it, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had to speak to him during those moments when day gives way to night.

SUMMARY

The most drastic manifestation of the change from exile to redemption is the transition from living in darkness and concealment to a life of radiance and revealed Divine providence. While inhabiting the physical plane of life, a person is detached from inner, renewable vitality and is therefore subject to the ravages of time, withering amid the effects of unchanging nature. This is the darkness of exile. By contrast, when a person witnesses Divine providence with his own eyes and rises above physical reality, he connects to the wellspring of Divine life and abundance, is rejuvenated, and becomes holy.

The first mitzvah we were given upon leaving exile was therefore the sanctification of the new moon, which introduces holiness and renewal into the darkness of the natural order.

Beshalach

The Song That Bursts Forth When Points Are Joined to Form a Line

☞ What Is the Meaning of the Distinction between a Caesar and a King?

AFTER EMERGING FROM the *Yam Suf*, Moshe and Bnei Yisrael burst into song: “Then Moshe, with Bnei Yisrael, was moved to sing this song to Hashem, and they said [in unison, after being prompted] to say...” (*Shemos* 15:1).

Chazal interpret the word “then” as a reference to the same word in the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (93:2), “Your throne has been established since then; You have existed forever.” They explain that *pasuk* as follows:

Even though “You have existed forever,” Your throne wasn’t established and You weren’t known in the world until Your children uttered song. Therefore, it says, “Your throne has been established since then” (i.e., since “then Moshe...sang”). This can be likened to a king who conducted a war and was victorious, and then they appointed him a caesar. They told him, “Before you waged war, you were a king; now we have appointed you a caesar.” What is the difference between a king and caesar? A king stands upon the platform, whereas a caesar is seated.

How are we to understand the distinction between these two ranks of monarch in relation to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s* rule?

☞ Song Transcends All Usual Expressions of Thanksgiving

CHAZAL'S COMMENTS ELSEWHERE imply that song is an exceptional expression of thanksgiving that has the wondrous property of being able to raise the person reciting it to sublime spiritual heights. Chazal tell us (*Zohar*, Vol. II, 54b) that a person who recites *az yashir* every day will merit saying it at the time of the future redemption. The *Ben Ish Chai* writes (*Halachos*, Year One, *parshas Mikeitz*) that *az yashir* should be said in joyful and melodious tones, as though one were actually standing at the sea while the miracle was taking place, "And [when said] in this manner, it has the ability to atone for sins."

The *Ben Ish Chai* also writes (Vol. I, Rule 18; see also *Mishnah Berurah* 51:17), "He should say *shiras hayam* joyfully and imagine that he crossed the sea that very day. A person who says it joyfully has his sins forgiven."

☞ Miracles Demonstrate That There Is No Nature — Everything Is Divine Providence

THE SEFAS EMES explains that due to the miraculous events surrounding our nation's departure from Egypt, it became apparent that all the regular workings of the natural world merely serve to conceal *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s providence. The sea splitting showed that it responds exclusively to G-d's will, and thus, even when it follows its usual pattern, it is not subject to any natural force, but solely to the Creator's wishes. In reality, there is no such thing as nature; there is only Divine providence that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* conceals behind the framework of the laws that he built into the world to give it the appearance of flowing in its set pattern in order that man should be free to choose whether to believe or deny G-d's existence. When an open miracle takes place, anyone with open eyes can see that "nature" does not exist as an independent force. Rather, everything results from G-d's specific desire. We thus find the following account

in *Maseches Taanis* (25a): “R. Chanina ben Dosa noticed that his daughter was sad and asked her why. She told him, ‘I confused a container of vinegar for a container of oil and lit the Shabbos lights with it.’ He told her, ‘My daughter, why be upset? He Who commanded oil to burn shall command vinegar to burn.’” The Gemara records that that light continued burning throughout the day until they were able to take a light for *havdalah* from it.

The true believer understands that there is no such thing as nature, and oil also burns only due to Hashem’s will. For him, therefore, there is no difference between burning oil and burning vinegar, and when Hashem so desires, vinegar can burn even better and for longer than oil. Either way, it is G-d’s desire that determines the outcome irrespective of whether to us what is happening seems “natural” or “miraculous.” The open miracle and the miracle of nature are essentially one and the same.

This idea is expressed by the Ramban in his well-known remarks at the end of *parshas Bo* (*Shemos* 13:16), where he writes:

From the great and evident miracles, a person comes to acknowledge the hidden miracles, which are the foundation of the entire Torah, for no person has a share in Moshe Rabbeinu’s Torah unless he believes that all our affairs and all that befalls us, whether collectively or as individuals, are miracles. They are not in the least degree “natural” or subject to “the way of the world.”

☞ The Difference between a King and a Caesar: The Latter’s Rule Is Settled and Evident

THIS IS THE meaning of Chazal’s distinction between a king standing on the platform, whose rule is not fully established or apparent, and a caesar sitting securely on his throne, whose rule is fully consolidated and evident.

This analogy conveys that at creation, Hashem concealed His providence and rule behind the mantle of nature such that they are not apparent. With the splitting of the sea, however, His absolute

rule over all the forces of nature became evident, and His rule was thereby secured, attaining the permanence of a caesar's rule. With this open and evident miracle, it became clear as day to any clear-sighted person that nature itself is orchestrated and determined by the King of kings, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The Sefas Emes explains:

At the time of creation, when nature's laws and cycles were established, Hashem's providence was concealed, and only upon our redemption from Egypt did its illumination become apparent. This is the meaning of their statement in the Midrash that through the song following the miracle of the sea splitting, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s throne became secure and permanent — by virtue of that miracle, knowledge of His providence became settled, and its awareness was fixed in the hearts of His creations.

☞ Joining in Now with the Song of the Future

RASHI EXPLAINS THE plain meaning of *az yashir* as “was moved to sing.” However, the Sefas Emes uses the previous idea to elucidate Chazal's remarks (*Sanhedrin* 91b) regarding the *pasuk*'s use of the future tense, “*Az yashir Moshe*,” literally, “Then Moshe will sing,” rather than the past tense, “*Az shar Moshe*, Then Moshe sang.” The Gemara cites this as “proof from the Torah that the dead will be revived,” for the *pasuk*'s plain meaning is that at some future time, Moshe will sing this very song. How are we to understand this?

The splitting of the sea, explains the Sefas Emes, momentarily revealed a sight that will be revealed again in its full clarity at some time in the future. At that time, it will be unequivocally clear and evident to everyone that the entire chain of world events has always followed a meticulous and precise Divine program, the product of Divine providence implemented by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who runs every detail of His world in every moment. Nature's laws that have “prevailed” hitherto served to conceal the providence pulsing within each and every natural process so that we retain our freedom

of choice whether to believe in Hashem or to go astray and maintain that nothing exists beyond “nature” and happenstance. At that future time, however, when the world attains its destiny, when “Hashem will be King over the entire earth,” this concealment will be redundant. It will then be abundantly clear that everything that was created in the world played some role in the Divine master plan. It is thus written, “All that Hashem wrought is for His sake” (*Mishlei* 16:4), meaning that everything in the world is there solely for Hashem’s sake and for the part it plays in revealing His glory. It is similarly written, “Every thing with which My Name is associated and that is created for My glory, I have formed and have also made” (*Yeshayah* 43:17). The *beraisa* (*Avos* 6:12) states, “Everything that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created in His world, He created solely for His glory... and it says, ‘Hashem shall rule forever and ever’ (*Shemos* 15:18).” Each and every creation thus has a holy and sublime destiny; nothing was created “just because,” by happenstance or lacking purpose. Every creature and every human being thus undergoes elevation, becoming a means of increasing Heaven’s glory. Every creation has its own song of praise that it offers to the Creator for having endowed it with importance and a holy, sublime destiny. In the future, this song will burst forth from the lips of every creature in the world. This will be the ultimate song that will encompass the entire world on the day when “the land will be filled with knowledge of G-d, like the waters covering the sea” (*Yeshayah* 11:9).

It is thus clear that when the Torah writes, “Then Moshe, with Bnei Yisrael, will sing this song,” this means that they then sang this song of the future that will one day burst forth in its full glory from every creature in the world.

☞ Nature Sings When Man Pulls Back Its Covering

NATURE’S SONG WILL burst forth when man listens. This revelation of Hashem’s involvement in every aspect of the world’s functioning is contingent upon man’s deeds. Nature will sing when man

acknowledges that there is no separate force of nature; all that happens in the world results from Divine providence, and every creation is sustained in every moment by a Divine spark. The words “*Az yashir*” can thus be understood as meaning that through their faith, Bnei Yisrael lead all of creation to join them in their song, every creature discovering its inner kernel of truth and recognizing that it lives and endures solely by virtue of the vitality bestowed upon it by Hashem, “Who constantly renews each day the work of creation.”

☞ *Shirah* and *Shurah* — Song and Outline

WE PERCEIVE THE world around us as being made up of isolated dots, unconnected and unrelated to one another, that do not yield a comprehensive picture. We therefore imagine that they are arbitrary and not part of any greater, overall plan. Were we able to divine their pattern and relation to one another, we could connect them and understand the resulting image.

The word *shirah* (song) is related to the word *shurah*, meaning a line formed by joining a series of dots such that the overall picture emerges. When we discern the shape and outline, we realize that there was no arbitrariness and no randomness; neither fate nor happenstance was at work. Rather, everything we observed was orchestrated by Divine providence working according to a preordained plan. Two other words, related both in spelling and concept, are *sharsheres* (a chain), which is composed of individual links that interlock to yield a larger whole with its own function; and *shoresh* (root), which shares a similar relation to the item to which it is connected and which it nourishes. Thus, every occurrence in this world is part of a chain of events deriving from a heavenly root that contains the blueprint of the eventual outcome.

The Sefas Emes remarks accordingly that “everything is drawn [together] into a line or row that eventually connects to its sublime source and root, which provides the vitality that He bestows upon it.”

☞ Song Expresses Not Only Wonder and Thanks, but Also Complete Faith

THE SONG THAT erupts from within a person when he experiences redemption reveals far more than excited emotions and an elevated state of mind and feeling that seek expression. The roots of such a song are even deeper. The song is inspired by a heightened awareness of the Creator's closeness and by the utter conviction borne of suddenly realizing how the dots form lines to yield a clear vision of Divine providence at work. At that moment, a person realizes that his entire experience from beginning to end consisted of a series of dots that connect to yield the clear outline of a Divine master plan.

Song thus expresses faith in Hashem. The Torah informs us just prior to the actual *shirah* that this is what Bnei Yisrael experienced — “They believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant” (*Shemos* 14:31). Chazal comment on these words, “When He split the sea for them, they believed in Hashem, and in the merit of their faith, they merited uttering song, and the *Shechinah* rested upon them” (*Shemos Rabbah* 22:3).

☞ Without Some Deepening of Faith There Is No Song

QUOTING HIS GRANDFATHER the *Chiddushei HaRim*, the Sefas Emes explains the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (94a) that tells us, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to make [King] Chizkiyahu the Mashiach. The attribute of justice spoke up before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, “*Ribbono Shel Olam*, if You did not make David, king of Yisrael, who uttered a number of songs and praises before You, into Mashiach, shall You make Chizkiyahu, for whom You performed all these miracles, yet he did not utter song before You, into Mashiach?”

The *Chiddushei HaRim* asks why Chizkiyahu didn't in fact utter song after all the miracles that took place in his time. He offers a breathtaking explanation.

A person is moved by witnessing a miracle when as a result, the dots join up into lines, and he realizes that nothing in the chain of events was natural or haphazard, but Divine providence alone at work. It is this intensification of his faith that prompts him to sing. In Chizkiyahu's case, however, the miracles he witnessed yielded no novelty, because even beforehand, the fact that Hashem's providence was orchestrating everything happening in the world was clear and apparent to him, and he divined its workings within every supposedly natural occurrence. He therefore wasn't overly excited by the miracles he experienced, which yielded him no new insight or realization that deepened his faith. He found nothing more remarkable in these miracles than he found in every sunrise and sunset. Without some novel insight of faith, no song erupts.

Whereas Moshe sang when Hashem's providence became clearly and sharply revealed to all, Chizkiyahu had already so deeply internalized this awareness that even witnessing it anew personally awakened no sense of wonder or novelty in him. Now it is clear why, having failed to sing, he could not become the Mashiach. He judged others according to his own sublime level and found it unnecessary to demonstrate through song to the entire nation these revelations of Divine providence. This rendered him unsuited to serve as Mashiach, whose role is to usher in that future epoch when song will erupt from every heart upon witnessing Hashem's existence.

☞ Blessing Hashem as the Redeemer Immediately before Praying to Him

CHAZAL (*BERACHOS* 10B) explain Chizkiyahu's prayer, "He said, 'Please, Hashem, remember how I proceeded before You in truth and wholeheartedness and that I did that which was good in Your eyes'" (*Yeshayah* 38:3).

To what "good" was Chizkiyahu referring here? The Gemara explains: "I did that which was good in Your eyes" refers to having

put ‘redemption adjacent to prayer’ (i.e., making the blessing ‘Who has redeemed Yisrael’ immediately prior to praying).”

The Sefas Emes explains this in line with the *Chiddushei Ha-Rim*’s idea. In a moment of redemption, instead of unconnected dots, a person perceives purposeful lines and realizes that everything was and is orchestrated by Divine providence, according to Heaven’s master plan. Chizkiyahu knew that every single event in the world is activated by some inner spiritual trigger. This inner impulse is part of the process of redemption, and acknowledging it brings redemption to the world. Redemption is not just deliverance from some affliction, but in a broad sense any pulling back the mantle of nature that usually covers and conceals the workings of Divine providence.

Now we understand the significance of Chizkiyahu “putting redemption adjacent to prayer.” Prayer is offered when a person enters a state of standing before Hashem, i.e., he conducts himself as befits a subject standing in the presence of his King and addressing his requests to Him. When a person chooses to believe wholeheartedly in the reality of redemption, seeing beyond the mantle of natural cause and effect and acknowledging the underlying Divine plan prompting everything that happens in the world, he is in the right frame of mind for standing before Hashem in prayer. “Putting redemption adjacent to prayer” thus represents the attainment of a level of faith whereby a person recognizes that all he does in the world is in the King’s presence and that essentially, he accomplishes nothing on his own, for all of his deeds and achievements are only possible through the power that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bestows on him. As the Gemara says (*Chullin* 7b), “No one so much as bangs his finger in this world unless it has been so decreed for him in the Upper World.”

The person whose life is permeated with such clear, intense faith can indeed declare, like King Chizkiyahu, “I did that which was good in Your eyes.”

SUMMARY

Chazal assigned *shiras hayam* to be part of our daily Shacharis prayer, because a person can thereby arouse himself and the rest of creation anew each day to utter song that beyond expressing gratitude represents the ultimate level of faith, where we recognize the need to connect the dots of life to yield a solid line that comprises a single stroke in the Divine master plan.

By undergoing this process, each and every creation finds its designated, important position in the prearranged, Divine master plan that assigns a role to each creature, whose fulfillment affords it the opportunity to express G-d's glory in its own unique way. Creation's song is a sublime affirmation of faith. After experiencing a miracle, a person acknowledges and believes that nothing whatsoever happens arbitrarily or haphazardly. Events follow a precise, meticulous process, pre-planned down to the smallest detail — in a word, Divine.

Yisro

We Will Fulfill the Commands and Hear the Utterances

☞ Declaring “We Will Do!” before “We Will Listen!”
Seems to Be a Superhuman Feat

THE SALIENT FEATURE of Bnei Yisrael’s acceptance of the Torah was their expressing in advance their readiness to comply with whatever would be demanded of them. The Torah tells us that they declared, “Everything that Hashem has spoken, *naaseh* (we will do) *v’nishma* (and we will listen)!” (*Shemos* 24:7).

Chazal praise Bnei Yisrael effusively for expressing their willingness to fulfill the Torah in practice even before hearing what this would involve. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88a) tells us, “When Yisrael declared ‘*naaseh*’ before ‘*nishma*,’ a heavenly voice uttered, ‘Who revealed to My children this secret that the *malachim* use, as it says, “Bless Hashem His *malachim*, mighty in strength, who fulfill His command, to hear the content of His command” (*Tehillim* 103:20)?’ First it says ‘who fulfill,’ and only then it says, ‘to hear.’” Rashi (*ibid.*) explains, “‘Who fulfill His command, to hear’ — they are prepared to fulfill [even] before they hear, unlike other servants, who first hear the command in order to know whether or not they can undertake to fulfill it.”

Willingness to fulfill Hashem’s command whatever it may entail is thus typical of *malachim*, for whom no Divine mission is too difficult. However, it is fundamental to the human condition that a

person should act responsibly and first gauge the difficulty of a proposed undertaking and his ability to execute it before committing to it. Since every person is subject to certain limitations, it is only reasonable to look into something before undertaking to do it. A person who neglects to do so and gives his word before finding out what he is signing up for is either irresponsible or doesn't really intend to keep his commitment. How were Bnei Yisrael able to declare 'naaseh' before 'nishma'?

☞ “We Will Hear!” —

Hashem's Word That Sustains Creation

THE SEFAS EMES offers a novel elucidation of Bnei Yisrael's declaration.

“Hearing” does not refer to the commands to learn Torah and fulfill mitzvos, which they had accepted in advance unconditionally. “*V'nishma*” was an undertaking to listen to Hashem's word that sustains creation at every moment.

The *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 33:6) tells us, “With Hashem's word, the heavens were made, and with the breath of His mouth, all the heavenly bodies.” The Mishnah (*Avos* 5:1) states, “The world was created through ten utterances,” recorded in the Torah's account of the six days of creation (*Bereishis* 1:1–31). However, since this was an act of creation *ex nihilo* the universe has no permanence or independent existence, and it is constantly dependent upon Hashem's word maintaining it. We thus speak of Hashem daily (in the *yotzer* blessing of Shacharis) as, “renewing in His goodness each day, constantly, the act of creation.” Hashem's word is thus present in the world, emanating and echoing from every creation in existence. It is this word that must be heard, for this is the basis of faith.

☞ G-d's Voice Echoes Onward

WHILE IT IS possible to look upon creation and perceive nothing more than a beautiful view, there are people who look at creation

and are moved to exclaim, “How great are Your works, Hashem!” (*Tehillim* 104:24). But it needn’t take a magnificent view for the Creator’s greatness to move a person. A person who sees a flower, for example, and fails to hear G-d’s word sustaining it at every moment or to perceive the *malach* “beating on its head and telling it, ‘Grow!’” (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 10:6) also fails to fully appreciate what he is actually seeing. In essence, a flower is not a flower; it is a manifestation of Hashem’s word. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* communicates with us through the world around us that He maintains and sustains with His word. This word reverberates constantly throughout creation and is continually being sounded anew.

This explains the double expression occurring several times in the Torah in relation to Hashem’s instruction to us: “*shamo’a tishmeu*, listen perpetually.” We don’t only listen once; we listen over and over, again and again. We must remain constantly attuned to Hashem’s communication with us.

☞ “We Will Do and We Will Listen!” — Because Only the Person Who First Acts Will Hear

IN ORDER TO hear the constant sound of Hashem’s word, though, a person must, “put *naaseh* before *nishma*” — he must preface hearing with action.

“Hearing” and “action” refer neither to the physical sensation of hearing nor any specific physical action or activity. Rather, this refers to inner hearing — comprehension. In order to tap into this nuanced perception and comprehension, a person’s personality and consciousness must be suitably attuned. The action that needs to be taken in order to facilitate this hearing thus consists of profound intellectual and emotional preparation. Only the person who is primed and believes in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will be able to hear His voice reverberating throughout creation. This, according to the Sefas Emes, is the meaning of putting *naaseh* before *nishma*.

Hearing the Creator's Voice Means Hearing the Torah's Voice

HEARING HASHEM'S WORD that sustains creation is an outgrowth of basic faith and as such relates to every aspect of human existence, to every step a person takes and whatever he seeks to accomplish in life. How was Bnei Yisrael's declaration, "*Naaseh v'nishma*" specifically relevant to their acceptance of the Torah?

Here, the Sefas Emes deepens our understanding of this concept, showing that Hashem's voice sustaining creation actually emanates from the Torah. Here is his line of thought:

Chazal tell us (*Zohar*, Vol. II, 161b) that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* "looked into the Torah and created the world." We find similarly in the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1) that the Torah is the plan or blueprint according to which the world was created. The Midrash likens this to a craftsman erecting a palace based on a plan that directs him where each and every detail should be placed. By looking into the Torah, as it were, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world as its parallel. The Torah thus reveals and conveys G-d's word that constitutes the foundation of the world's survival.

The *Zohar* (Vol. III, 11b) points to the correspondence of the Ten Utterances through which the world was created (*Bereishis* 1:1–31 and *Avos* 5:1) to the *Aseres Hadibros*, the ten commandments that Hashem addressed to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. The *Zohar* shows how each of the utterances at the time of creation is echoed in its corresponding commandment.

By listening to the Torah's message, it is thus possible to "tune in" to Hashem's voice that created the world. Discovering Hashem's word encompasses not only the Ten Utterances of creation but also the Ten Commandments.

The Sefas Emes then further deepens this idea:

The *Zohar* (Vol. III, 73a) says that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah are one and the same.

Having established that the world is an outgrowth of the Torah and that the Torah expresses and conveys G-dliness leads us to conclude that at the root of creation is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Whose word both created the world and continues to sustain its existence.

By studying Torah, a person develops his personality and trains his mind to hear Hashem's word through which the entire creation came into being.

The "action" that precedes "hearing" is thus accomplished through Torah study, which equips a person's mind for hearing Hashem's word that maintains and sustains creation.

☞ Only through Hearing Declarations Is It Possible to Hear Utterances

AS WE HAVE mentioned, the Ten Commandments parallel the Ten Utterances with which the world was created. In order to better understand this, we need to distinguish between the more definitive and categorical types of speech referred to as *dibbur* and *haggadah* and the milder manner of speaking referred to as *amirah*.

Dibbur shares the same root as the word *yadbeir*, as in "*Yadbeir amim tachteinu*" (*Tehillim* 47:4), which means, "He shall lead (i.e., bring) nations under our rule" and thus denotes forceful and controlling speech, such as issuing a command.

We thus find the Midrash observing: "The term *dibbur* denotes harsh speech, as it says, 'The man who is master of the land spoke to us harshly' (*Bereishis* 42:30)."

Haggadah similarly denotes a categorical, unequivocal declaration, in the sense of "telling it like it is." It shares a root with *gid*, meaning sinew. In the same way that sinew is tough and cannot be chewed or digested, speech that is termed *haggadah* denotes a definitive statement, as in the term "*haggadas eidus*" (testifying in court).

Amirah, by contrast, denotes a gentler form of communication, as is evident from Rashi's comments on the *pasuk*, "So shall you say to the House of Yaakov and tell Bnei Yisrael" (*Shemos* 19:3): "To

the House of Yaakov' — this refers to the women; convey to them [Hashem's invitation to accept the Torah] in gentle language; 'and tell Bnei Yisrael' — matters that are as hard as sinews."

Chazal tell us (*Zohar*, Vol. I, 231b) that *amirah* is conveyed privately, in soft and gentle tones.

In order to hear *amirah*, one must listen very carefully. *Dibbur*, on the other hand, is delivered loudly and forcefully and thus is easily heard.

We heard the Ten Commandments, the *Aseres Hadibros*, loud and clear, for they were *dibros* that were delivered with might and force.

A person must listen very carefully, though, in order to also hear the Ten Utterances, the *Asarah Maamaros* through which the world was created. Each of these *maamaros* is conveyed by creation and can be heard by an attuned and attentive ear. This *amirah* can only be heard when it has been prefaced by the "action" of the Ten Commandments.

☞ Our Departure from Egypt

Transformed *Maamar* into *Dibur*

THE SEFAS EMES explains that subsequent to our departure from Egypt, Hashem's word reverberated strongly and forcefully throughout the world.

It then became apparent to all that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world and that He continues to maintain it in every moment. Divine providence was evident, and G-d's word was now clearly audible. *Maamar* became *dibbur*; the volume was raised. No longer was the utmost care and fine-tuning necessary in order to hear. Therefore, once of Bnei Yisrael departed from Egypt, even Yisro heard Hashem's word and traveled to their encampment. And as a result of this heightened awareness of the Creator's ongoing involvement in His world, Bnei Yisrael heard the *Aseres Hadibros*. The Torah's message was out in the world, and with it, Bnei Yisrael received the

means of continuing to hear Hashem's word even during periods when it issues forth quietly and it takes a refined soul to listen carefully in order to pick up and absorb it.

SUMMARY

When Bnei Yisrael undertook to act before hearing, this did not refer to observing the mitzvos, but to every Jew's obligation to perceive the Divine presence in every creation and in every process. Everything in existence calls to us, "Witness G-d's presence!" because every detail of creation exists solely by virtue of Hashem's desire that it should exist.

Although Hashem's word reverberates throughout creation, a person's hearing must be attuned to it in order to listen. This is not regular hearing; in order to hear this sound, one's mind and heart must be attuned. This preparatory work is the action that precedes hearing. It is carried out within the heart of those who study Torah, for Torah is the expression of G-d's will, which itself is reflected in creation. Bnei Yisrael's departure from Egypt ushered in a period when Divine providence was open and apparent. Bnei Yisrael thus declared, "*Naaseh v'nishma!*"

"*Naaseh*" — we will accept the Torah and ready our hearts;

"*V'nishma*" — we are ready to hear at all times the Ten Utterances through which the world was created, which continue to maintain it at every moment, and which can be discerned in its every fine detail.

Mishpatim

“Judgment Is G-d’s”

☞ The Monetary Laws Were Given at Sinai

FOLLOWING THE ACCOUNT of *matan Torah* in *parshas Yisro*, the Torah opens *parshas Mishpatim* with a detailed list of monetary and other interpersonal laws. This section is introduced with the words, “And these are the judgments that you shall place before them” (*Shemos* 21:1). Rashi notes the connecting *vav* at the beginning of the word “*v’eileh*, and these,” which implies that this is somehow a continuation of the preceding topic. He explains, “This is an addition to the earlier [precepts]; just as the earlier [precepts] are from Sinai, these too are from Sinai.”

We need to understand why the Torah finds it necessary to emphasize that the monetary laws were also given at Har Sinai when this was the case with all of the mitzvos in the Torah. Why might we have thought that these laws are any different?

☞ Why Did Moshe Consider Teaching Bnei Yisrael the Halachos without Providing Their Rationale?

RASHI EXPLAINS HASHEM’S command to Moshe “to place” the laws “before them” as follows: “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Moshe, ‘Don’t think, “I’ll teach them [each] section or halachah two or three times until they can repeat it accurately, but I won’t go to the trouble of

helping them understand the rationale and explanation.” It therefore says, ‘That you shall place before them’ — like a table set and ready for dining, [placed] before a person.”

Here too, we need to understand in what respect the Torah’s monetary laws differ from all the other mitzvos such that Moshe might have thought to only teach Bnei Yisrael the basic rudiments of these laws without any rationales or explanations.

Moreover, Chazal refer to Moshe on many occasions as *raya meheimna* (the loyal shepherd) on account of his selfless devotion to the welfare of each and every member of the Jewish nation. Moshe certainly spared no effort in this respect, sacrificing his all for the sake of his people. How can we imagine that he wanted to minimize Yisrael’s Torah knowledge and, without express instructions, to teach them just the bare bones of these halachos without explaining their underlying reasoning and logic?

☛ Human Judgment vs. Hashem’s Torah

THESE QUESTIONS CAN be answered by contemplating a profound distinction that the Sefas Emes draws between human jurisprudence and Hashem’s Torah.

The foundation of all human justice is the implementation of straight logic in the quest for establishing a social order upon principles that are just, fair, and humane. In order to prevent anarchy and avoid the law of the jungle, whereby the strongest and most aggressive elements have the upper hand, society — or its representatives — establishes a body of laws that bind all its members in a manner that seems to them effective and fair. This is done on the assumption that there exists a consensus among said members that they ought to organize their lives according to rules that appear logical in light of the spirit of their time and place, to which end they are ready to forgo a degree of their personal autonomy for the sake of establishing a proper, fair, and effective societal structure.

Hashem’s Torah, by contrast, is not based on human intellect or

on agreed upon principles. Its cornerstone is how Hashem desires human society to function and His instructions as to how He wants people to live. Whereas the goal of human jurisprudence is to impose order on society, the purpose of Divine justice is to impose G-d's will and "to mend the world under the rule of the Almighty." The gulf dividing these two approaches is vast. We shall give just a few examples of the differences that emerge as a result.

Human justice regulates society as a whole, whereas the Torah's laws are addressed to individuals, since the goal is to perfect the conduct and functioning of each individual member of society.

Therefore, for example, the Torah contains laws whose stated purpose is that "you shall do what is good and upright" (*Devarim* 12:28). Similarly, parallel to the basic law is a further set of responsibilities that *beis din* is entitled to impose that go beyond the demands of strict justice and whose goal is to instill conduct in the parties that tempers these demands with benevolence.

Human justice is necessarily relative. Truth as perceived by the human mind is by definition temporal and fleeting. It cannot presume to be more, for a judge can only rule and legislate on the basis of what he currently sees. Torah truth, by contrast, is absolute, unadulterated truth. We therefore find, for example, that if, based on the arguments and proofs that have been presented, a *dayan* feels that the case before him involves deceit and cannot result in a true verdict, he should abstain from issuing a ruling.

Human justice turns and pivots like a weathervane according to man's ever-changing ideas about what is right and fair. Society's needs and circumstances also undergo periodic changes, and the law changes accordingly. By contrast, Hashem's word endures forever, and the Torah's truth is eternal. This is why in Torah law, values are never adapted to the current reality, but the reverse.

My late elder brother, Dr. Yaakov Weinroth ז"ל, pointed to a profound and very basic distinction between these two justice systems.

Human justice determines the law according to human need. By contrast, the concept of Divine justice preceded creation. Chazal

tell us (*Zohar*, Vol. II, 161b) that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “looked into the Torah and created the world [accordingly].” The Torah therefore does not adapt itself to current reality, because it preceded reality. The Midrash tells us similarly that the Torah represents the plan or blueprint according to which the world was created. In other words, the world functions according to the dictates of the Torah, not the other way around. Not only don’t the Torah’s laws change according to the needs of the times, but they were never instituted to serve the needs of human society to begin with, because they existed before human society. The Torah’s laws thus present us with a pristine ideological and organizational system that is abstract and unaffected by any temporal constraints (see *Derashos HaRan* 11). Here are several examples:

- Despite society’s need to prevent malpractice, Torah law establishes that “damage caused indirectly is exempt from payment,” for such is the demand of an abstract analysis of liability for damages.
- Despite society’s need to rid itself of criminal acts carried out by one party acting on behalf of another, the Torah lays down that “an emissary who commits a crime is held solely responsible, not his dispatcher,” for such is dictated by the essence and correct definition of the laws of emissaries.

While Divine law of course also contains various laws that are meant to regulate society, no change is made to the monetary laws or the concepts of justice that are dictated by the nature of their abstract truth. The Torah’s laws thus encompass abstract principles that extend beyond society’s needs. This is absolute justice.

☞ “And These Are the Judgments” — Because the Torah’s Monetary Laws Do Not Reflect Human Logic

IN LIGHT OF the above, it should be clear why the Torah finds it so important to stress that the monetary laws were also received at Sinai. Whereas monetary laws usually are governed by clear human

logic, this is not the case with the Torah's monetary laws. These are not the product of human intellect, but reflect G-d's will.

☞ “Laws That the Non-Jews Do Not Know”

THIS CONCEPT EXPLAINS why it is strictly forbidden for Jews to bring a case before a non-Jewish court, even when the relevant law is judged in an identical manner by the Torah.

Were the Torah's purpose merely to ensure that society functions in an appropriate and fair manner, it is conceivable that the human mind could arrive at the same conclusion that Torah law yields, and it would then be possible to avail ourselves of a human-based justice system. If a human legislator reaches the same conclusion as the Torah, we might think that there is nothing wrong in approaching a non-Jewish court.

However, the Torah's judgments have a different purpose. They are not intended solely as a means of regulating society and imposing order. The Torah's monetary laws are the way to carry out G-d's will. In this respect, there is no difference whatsoever between monetary law and the prohibition against *shaatnez* (wearing a mixture of wool and linen, a classic example of a statute whose reason is not understood by human logic).

In this context, the Sefas Emes cites his grandfather the *Chid-dushei HaRim*, who quoted the explanation offered by R. Simchah Bunim of Peshische of the words, “And these are the judgments that you shall place *before them*.” R. Simchah Bunim suggests that this means that a Jew must put G-d's desire before his own, putting Heaven's interests before his own personal interests. In other words, “before” is being understood in the temporal rather than the spatial sense, meaning that Heaven's laws take precedence over human calculations.

Since this is the Torah's goal, how can a Jew have the fulfillment of Heaven's will in mind by following the verdict of a non-Jewish court? This is contradictory. The Gemara thus rules (*Gittin* 88b) that

wherever there are non-Jewish courts, it is forbidden to approach them even when they judge according to Jewish law, because it is written, “And these are the judgments that you shall place before them,” i.e., before Jewish judges whose intention is to arrive at the Torah’s law, but not before non-Jews.

☞ How Are the Torah’s Monetary Laws to Be Conveyed?

MOSHE IS REFERRED to by all subsequent generations as “Rabbeinu,” meaning “our teacher.” We don’t accord him any of the other titles to which his many achievements on our behalf would entitle him, such as “leader,” “redeemer,” “giver of the Torah,” “greatest of the prophets,” etc. He is known to posterity simply as “our teacher,” a superlative instructor. Certainly, when Rashi cites Moshe’s original intention of teaching the monetary laws in a concise manner, no unworthy teaching methods are being imputed to him.

Moshe wanted to explain the Torah’s monetary laws to Yisrael in light of their ultimate, Divine purpose. To him, they were clear and lucid. He perceived the Divine will emerging from each halachah with supreme clarity. To him, the concealed reasons for each law were transparently clear, and he intended to convey their essence to Bnei Yisrael, just as this was abundantly clear to him.

In Rashi’s words, Moshe wanted to “teach them [each] section or halachah two or three times until they could repeat it accurately.” In other words, he wanted to convey to them Heaven’s will that underlies each law, and whomever understands this Divine will can easily internalize the law’s essence. He preferred this to explaining the line of human reasoning inherent in the laws after which great toil is still required on the listener’s part in order to extract the Divine intention that is buried and concealed within the outer layers of human logic.

This is Rashi’s meaning in writing, “I won’t go to the trouble

of helping them understand the relevant rationale and explanation.” Human intellect tries to divine a law’s inner, Heavenly intention through contemplation of the outer layers of reasoning and explanation that it grasps, but success is by no means assured. It is an arduous task at which few succeed. There is tremendous advantage in elucidating the Divine intent from the outset, for when the profound, underlying rationale is appreciated, it is a simple matter to arrive at accurate conclusions. However, this path does involve some danger, for the student who is unequipped to process abstract ideas is liable to fail to fully grasp the basic logic. He will err in his thought process and will ultimately misunderstand altogether. It is therefore vital to present the laws’ “human” rationale rather than their inner, Divine goal.

When conveying the monetary laws to Moshe, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* therefore directed him to present them in terms of human rationale and logic, accompanied by reasoning and explanations similar to those which govern man-made legal systems. Rashi explains the words, “that you shall place before them” to mean, “like a table set and ready for dining, [placed] before a person.” The monetary laws were elucidated before Bnei Yisrael like a spread-out tablecloth, without divulging their deeper, hidden reasons. Bnei Yisrael would then be in a position to arrive at this deeper, inner understanding “and derive the Divine judgment through their [own] toil,” as the Sefas Emes writes. In other words, the plain meaning of the laws as they are written in the Torah serves as a cover or garment concealing their profound, inner meaning, but the astute scholar can reach further. By toiling and delving deeply into their meaning, he can arrive at their inner, Divine intention. Similarly, it is written, “This matter, however, is very close to you for you to carry out with your mouth and with your heart” (*Devarim* 30:14). Through the toil of study — of the mouth and heart — a person can uncover inner layers of meaning “very close” to him and merit the revelation of the matter’s essence.

SUMMARY

The Torah's monetary laws are far more sublime than any human legal system. They do not derive from the rationale of the human mind seeking to impose fair and efficient order upon society. They are implemented with the profound goal of fulfilling Heaven's will and readying the world to accept the Almighty's rule by rectifying both society and each individual. These starkly different agendas lead to very different outcomes; hence the obligation for Jews to adjudicate their disputes exclusively before Torah courts. Moshe originally intended to teach Bnei Yisrael the inner, Heavenly logic of these laws, which to him was abundantly clear, but *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* instructed him to convey their simple meaning in a way that is akin to a cloth spread out over further levels of depth which they would have to toil on their own to access.

Terumah

The Person Who Believes That “Hashem Is My Shepherd — Will Not Lack”

☞ Does the *Shechinah* Dwell within Curtains Made from Goat Hair?

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU'S glory fills the entire world (*Yeshayah* 6:3), yet Bnei Yisrael were commanded to erect a *Mishkan* for Him, a clearly bounded physical structure of modest size whose dimensions and details the Torah lists exhaustively in this *parshah*. What purpose did the *Mishkan* fulfill? Did the *Shechinah* dwell only within the curtains of woven goat hair covering the *Mishkan*?

This question was posed by Yeshayah himself, who declared, “Thus said Hashem, ‘The heavens are My Throne, and the earth is My footstool; what House shall you build for me, and what is the place of My repose?’” (ibid. 66:1). What purpose was served by making a *Mishkan*? The question actually presents us with a conundrum: if Yisrael were worthy of the *Shechinah* resting upon them as individuals, why was a *Mishkan* necessary? And if they were unworthy, how did its presence alter that?

☞ When the Seller Himself Is Purchased Along with the Item Sold

THE CONSTRUCTION OF the *Mishkan* was preceded by Bnei Yisrael donating the relevant materials.

The Torah tells us, “*V’yikchu li terumah*, They shall set aside a contribution for Me” (*Shemos* 25:2). Chazal explain that the words *v’yikchu li* can also be understood to mean, “They shall purchase Me.” In other words, by donating the materials for the *Mishkan* and constructing it, Bnei Yisrael were acquiring *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Himself, as it were. This idea is explained a little more by the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 33:1):

There can be an item whose seller is purchased along with it. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Yisrael, “I have sold you My Torah, and as it were, I have been sold along with it.” This can be likened to a king who had an only daughter. Another king came and married her, and he then wanted to return to his country and take his wife with him. The king told him, “My daughter, whom I have given to you, is my only child. I cannot be parted from her. Neither can I tell you not to take her, because she is your wife. However, do me this favor: wherever you go, make a small chamber for me to live in, next to you, for I cannot abandon my daughter.” So said *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to Yisrael: “I have given you the Torah. I cannot be separated from it, but neither can I tell you not to take it. Wherever you go, make Me a house in which I can dwell,” as it says, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary” (*ibid. pasuk* 8).

The curtains of goat hair delineated a specific area: the “chamber” that was designated as the King’s quarters. The significance of the *Shechinah* dwelling within this space is that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* accompanies the Torah and cannot be parted from it. With the Jewish nation’s acceptance of the Torah and the latter’s descent into this world from the sublime Upper Worlds to the physical realm which Bnei Yisrael inhabit, the *Shechinah* descended from the Upper Worlds along with it. When we accepted the Torah, we thus also received the *Shechinah* dwelling with us. The *Mishkan* is the dwelling for the *Shechinah* that accompanies the Torah wherever the latter resides among Bnei Yisrael. The heart of the *Mishkan* was indeed the *Aron Hakodesh* which contained the *luchos habris*, which bore the synopsis of the entire Torah (Rashi, *Shemos* 24:12).

How are we to understand the concept of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “selling Himself” along with the Torah and subsequently being “owned” by His nation?

☞ The *Shechinah* Dwells Wherever People Have Faith

THE SEFAS EMES explains that there is a link between the degree of Yisarel’s acceptance of the Torah and the degree to which the *Shechinah* rests upon them. His line of thought is as follows:

The Torah is infinite, relating to every facet of existence and containing all the wisdom therein. How can the human mind encompass such infinite vistas of knowledge? It must be that the extent of the Torah given to Yisrael is commensurate with the degree to which they equip themselves spiritually for receiving it. A person’s Torah attainments reflect the degree to which he has readied himself spiritually. He will discover Torah’s depth and breadth according to the extent of his searching and toiling. The Torah’s richness yields itself to the person who studies it, according to the power of his desire to acquire it and genuinely understand it.

The intensity of the *Shechinah*’s presence is also a consequence of the level of a person’s preparation, for the *Shechinah* is infinitely holy. Man can experience the *Shechinah*’s presence only to the degree that he has made himself holy and refined himself.

The Torah’s name for the place where the *Shechinah* resides is a “*mikdash*,” as it says, “They shall make for me a *mikdash*, and I shall dwell among them.” The word *mikdash* is derived from *kedushah* (holiness), separation and removal from the mundane. Holiness is a consequence of a person devoting himself to spirituality and abstaining from worldly desires.

We thus find, for example, that when a man contracts marriage with a woman, he tells her, “You are hereby *mekudeshes* (sanctified) to me.” Tosafos (*Kiddushin* 2b, s.v. *d’asar lah*) explain this as meaning, “You are sanctified to me forever, for me — as in the expression, ‘They shall be sanctified to Heaven’ (*Nedarim* 48a), to

be acquired by Heaven and henceforth forbidden for mundane use. The simple meaning of ‘sanctified to me’ is, ‘special to me and ready for me.’”

The place where the *Shechinah* dwells is similarly called *Mikdash*, because the precondition for attaining holiness is that a person devotes his heart wholly to Heaven.

How are we to explain the concept of Hashem declaring, “I shall dwell,” denoting the revelation of Heaven’s glory in some specific setting within creation — in this case, “‘within them’ — within the heart of each one of them?”

We know that Hashem is holy and altogether separate from this world. In what sense does He dwell within man’s heart?

How is Hashem’s glory revealed in the world? Through man realizing and acknowledging that everything in the world is sustained by vitality bestowed by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and that practically speaking, man is powerless to influence this in either direction. Every process underway in the world is fueled by the Divine force pulsing within it, such that “no person so much as bangs his finger in the lower world unless it has been decreed up above that he should do so” (*Chullin* 7b). By acknowledging the intrinsic futility of his own actions and ascribing them to their true, Divine source, man merits serving as the agent of the revelation of the Creator’s will. This is the meaning of Hashem’s promise, “I shall dwell within them.”

The meaning of the word *Mishkan* thus extends beyond its root, the verb *lishkon* (*shin-kaf-nun*), meaning to dwell. It is related as well to *limshoch* (*mem-shin-kaf*), meaning to pull or draw, referring to a means of drawing down heavenly bounty. Rabbeinu Bechaye indeed relates the word *Mishkan* to “*hamshachah mimarom*, drawing [down] from above.” The intensity of the *Shechinah*’s presence thus depends on the degree of man’s preparedness and spiritual attainments. Hashem’s promise to dwell within Bnei Yisrael thus means, “I shall dwell,” i.e., the revelation of My presence shall be “within them,” i.e., wholly dependent on man’s preparedness.

The Sefas Emes uses this approach to explain the Midrash's comparison to an item whose seller is sold along with it. Hashem has placed Yisrael in control of the revelation of His presence in the world. According to the state of their preparedness, so will be the degree of revelation of His *Shechinah*.

In this sense, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has, as it were, placed Himself under Yisrael's control.

☞ The Degree of Providence a Person Experiences Varies with the Degree of His Trust in G-d

THE SEFAS EMES adds a further layer of depth to the above ideas with a highly novel insight that he heard from his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*. Not only is the degree of the revelation of Heaven's glory dependent upon the extent of man's spiritual preparation and his belief that "none exists besides Him," but even the degree to which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s providence is apparent in the world depends on the level of man's faith. The person who wholeheartedly believes in individualized Divine providence experiences it, whereas failing to believe leaves a person at the mercy of happenstance.

The life of the person who believes that a Divine, guiding Hand from above operates in this world is steered by that Hand, assuring him a secure outcome. However, the person who believes that arbitrary fate controls his path finds himself assailed by every chance tempest. If he attributes what befalls him to chance — in the words of the *pasuk*, "If you proceed with Me with happenstance" (*Vayikra* 26:7) — he is then dealt "the fury of happenstance" (*ibid. pasuk* 28).

This is how the *Chiddushei HaRim* explains the *pasuk* in *Yirmeyahu* (17:7), "Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem; Hashem will then be his security," for according to the degree and level of a person's trust in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, he is assured of salvation and will have a basis for his trust, because his individualized providence will intensify.

☞ The Person Who Doesn't Believe in Providence Is Not Supervised

A SOURCE FOR this highly novel and far-reaching idea can be found in the Rambam's comments in *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:51), where he writes that the degree to which a person intellectually grasps G-d's individualized Divine providence will determine how much he personally experiences G-d's providence: "The person whose grasp is complete, whose mind turns away from Hashem momentarily, will experience providence only while his thoughts are with Hashem, but it will leave him while he is [otherwise] occupied."

Divine providence should thus not be seen as a constant and operating system whose existence only awaits man's discovery. The situation is more nuanced in that the providence a person actually experiences depends on the degree of his reliance upon that providence. Water is only available to the individual who digs a well. The person who fails to dig will have no water, and the person who doesn't believe in Divine providence will indeed not experience any.

☞ Individualized Providence Is Experienced by Those Creations Endowed with Intellect

AS WE HAVE seen, the person who believes that a misfortune that befalls him is a chance occurrence is punished with "the fury of happenstance." Thus, the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Taaniyos* 1:3–4):

If they do not cry out [in prayer, when troubles occur] and do not [sound the] blast [of the trumpets to arouse the people to repent,] saying instead, "This event has befallen us in the regular way of the world, and this misfortune is a chance happening," this is [taking] the approach of cruelty and will lead them to adhere to their evil practices, and the misfortune will [then] be compounded by additional misfortunes. This is the meaning of the Torah's words [that if] "You proceed with Me according to happenstance, I shall behave toward you with the fury of happenstance," meaning that if when I

bring upon you trouble so that you should repent, you [instead] say that it is only a chance event, I shall compound for you the fury of that happenstance.

Although it is clear that ignoring the providential nature of troubles invites further such “natural” misfortunes, the general assertion that the degree of providence a person experiences depends upon the degree of his belief in its existence still requires further clarification.

Individualized providence is apparently a corollary of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* running His world according to the principles of reward and punishment. Thus, even a person who doesn’t believe in individualized providence is still subject to it. What then is the difference between the believer in this degree of Heavenly intervention and one who does not believe in it?

In *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:17), the Rambam explains that individualized providence affects all human beings. The Rambam only accepts Aristotle’s opinion regarding general providence for the entire world in regard to the animal kingdom where, he asserts, there is no individual providence in regard to any particular event befalling any particular animal. In the Rambam’s words:

And this (i.e., mankind) is the only species the affairs of all of whose members and that which befalls them, good or bad, is determined by [Heavenly] judgment, as it says, “For all His ways are justice” (*Devarim* 32:4).

This is in contrast to other living creatures, and all the more so plant life and other inanimate objects, regarding which the Rambam writes:

My opinion in their regard concurs with that of Aristotle — I do not believe at all that this leaf fell providentially nor that this spider attacked that fly by Divine decree and by His personal desire at that moment, nor that the spittle that Reuven ejected traveled until it fell upon this particular mosquito in that particular spot, killing it by Divine decree, nor that this fish grabbed and swallowed that worm from the water’s surface by dint of individualized Divine decree.

In my opinion, all these events are utterly coincidental, as Aristotle considers them. Divine providence, however, in my opinion and according to that which I see, is a function of Heavenly bounty, and the species to which that intellectual bounty attaches, rendering it intellectually endowed such that all that is revealed to an intellectual being is revealed to it, is the one to which Divine providence connects, such that all that happens to it is a matter of reward and punishment. However, if a ship sinks with all its cargo, as mentioned, or a roof falls in upon the house's occupant, while this was [apparently] a chance occurrence according to our perception, it was [in fact orchestrated] by Divine will, according to the justice of His judgments, knowledge of whose functioning our minds cannot grasp.

☞ A Different Perspective on Individual Providence — Corresponding to the Freedom of Action of the Active Agent

THE SEFAS EMES elucidates this topic, introducing the novel idea that when Chazal (*Sotah* 8b) state, “According to the very same measure with which a person measures, [Heaven] measures to him,” this also refers to the degree to which Hashem running the world will relate to him.

Let us explain this fundamental and profound topic:

While it is incontrovertible that “the entire world is filled with [Hashem’s] glory,” this is not generally apparent due to the concealment of Divine providence, the purpose of which is to enable people to choose freely whether to believe or deny, thinking that everything happens by itself, naturally and arbitrarily.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His might are infinite. However, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sustains all His creations in a fixed and measured manner, according to the “laws” of nature that place limits upon each creature’s range of activity and vitality. This “natural” manner according to which the world runs is thus referred to as a “measure,” meaning the fixed, limited measure of vitality which Hashem instills into each of His creations.

Obviously, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not subject to the limitations of this measure and can either extend or shorten the measure of vitality and range of activity allotted to each creature. In such instances, individualized providence operates, diverging from the usual natural order and measures.

The measure determining the degree of providence an individual experiences depends upon the person himself. According to the degree of his faith that everything lives and exists solely through Hashem, so will be his measure of providence.

If a person believes that everything is determined and constrained by natural limitations, Heaven deals with him according to those expectations. It is indeed the case that everything that happens to a person is from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, following the principles of reward and punishment. However, the measure with which Heaven deals with him will correspond to the natural order. The tools he is given will come with limitations and will not diverge from their “natural” capacity.

By contrast, if a person believes wholeheartedly that “There is none besides Him” (*Devarim* 4:35) and that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is neither limited by the workings of nature nor subject to its happenstance, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will deal with him with a measure that diverges from the natural order, and he will experience individualized providence that provides him with unnatural opportunities and tools of unlimited capacity.

☞ “Hashem Is My Shepherd” — Otherwise a Person Lacks

THE SEFAS EMES explains that this novel insight of his accords with the interpretation of the *pasuk*, “Hashem is my shepherd, I shall not lack’ (*Tehillim* 23:1), given by R. Simchah Bunim of Peshischa in his *Kol Simchah* (quoting R. Mordechai of Neschiz). David Hamelech was praying that he should never lack faith that “Hashem is my shepherd.” Whereas the *pasuk* is usually understood as referring to

a cause and effect, i.e., because Hashem is my shepherd, therefore I shall not lack, according to this interpretation, it is a prayer that a person should never lose the awareness that “Hashem is my shepherd,” because by forgetting this, a person causes himself a dearth and lack of Divine providence. The weaker his faith, the less providence he experiences, and he will then truly find himself lacking. “Understand this well,” comments the Sefas Emes, “for this explanation has the ring of truth.”

In light of the above, this means that while *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* indeed runs his world, He conceals the workings of His individualized providence in order that people retain the free will to deny its existence or believe in it. For the person who believes, there is no longer any need for the concealment of His individualized providence. The extent of the bounty that such a person is liable to receive is unlimited, for he wholeheartedly believes in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s infinite abilities, and the capacity of the measure that he will be dealt corresponds to the extent of his faith. Therefore, the person who believes that “Hashem is my shepherd,” whose faith is in no way lacking, will never experience lack in the material bounty that is bestowed on him. However, for the person who doesn’t believe that Hashem’s Hand runs the world, it is necessary to maintain the concealment of individualized providence, so the measure that is dealt to him will be the natural one. Thus, the person who doesn’t believe that “Hashem is my shepherd” will find that he lacks.

SUMMARY

The *Shechinah*’s presence doesn’t require curtains of goat hair, for the *Shechinah* is present within the hearts of those who believe in Hashem.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as it were, “sold Himself” along with the Torah, and when the Torah writes, “They should take for

Me,” this means that we are acquiring *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Himself, as it were, in the sense that the revelation of His presence in the world is dependent on the strength of our faith in Him. In the same way that it is up to a person to extend and empower Torah, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s Shechinah* resides in a person’s heart according to the level of his faith in Hashem.

The Sefas Emes takes this further, asserting that this reciprocity has practical consequences, for the degree of individualized providence a person experiences varies according to the degree of his faith in its existence. If a person believes that the range of Heaven’s dealings with him corresponds to the principles of nature according to which the world apparently operates, these limited principles will be implemented in relation to him. However, if he believes that Hashem runs His world and that He is not limited in any sense, he will be dealt with by Heaven with a limitless measure and will inherit “unlimited possessions.”

Indeed, the person who believes that “Hashem is my shepherd” will not lack.

Tetzaveh



Mitzvos Make the Man

☞ Why Make a Point of the Constantly Burning Lamp Being a Commandment?

FOLLOWING THE CONSTRUCTION of the *Mishkan*, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to kindle a lamp — the *Menorah* — that would burn constantly, day after day: “And you shall command Bnei Yisrael that they obtain for you clear olive oil, pressed for the light, with which to light up the lamp regularly” (*Shemos* 27:20).

The introductory words “And you shall command” seem superfluous, for everything addressed to Bnei Yisrael in the Torah is a command. Why is this clarification particularly necessary in regard to kindling the *ner tamid*? Neither are these precise words — “and you shall command” — encountered in relation to any other mitzvah in the Torah. Why is this expression used when speaking about obtaining oil for burning in the *Menorah*?

☞ What Is Chazal’s Question?

CHAZAL FIND IT altogether strange that there should be an obligation to illuminate the *Mishkan*, for we praise *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* daily as the “Creator of the Heavenly Bodies” (Shacharis, *yotzer* blessing). It is thus unclear how man can have an obligation to provide illumination for the Source of all light. Chazal ask (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:13), “Does *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* need Yisrael’s light?

After all, it is written, ‘Light dwells with Him’ (*Daniel* 2:22).” With the Source of all light present in the *Mishkan*, how is it possible to provide Him with illumination?

Chazal therefore explain that the reason for the command to illuminate the *Mishkan* is “to provide merit for Bnei Yisrael and to atone for their souls that are likened to lamps, as it says, ‘Man’s soul is Hashem’s lamp, searching all the chambers of the stomach’ (*Mishlei* 20:27).”

In other words, Bnei Yisrael are actually providing light not for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, but for themselves, to benefit their souls. Kindling the *Menorah* is an act that kindles new light within man’s soul.

The Sefas Emes wonders what difficulty *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s command to Yisrael to kindle the *ner tamid* posed to Chazal to begin with. Certainly, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is the Source of light, yet He nonetheless runs His world according to the laws of nature, and thus, He created sources of light for humanity and also commanded Bnei Yisrael to illumine the *Mishkan* by burning oil. Why does this constitute a problem? *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* doesn’t need the sacrifices we offer either, yet He commanded us to offer them. Why do Chazal find difficulty with the command to kindle the *Menorah* in particular?

The Midrash views the oil burning in the *Menorah* not as providing physical light, but as providing spiritual light as a result of the mitzvah’s fulfillment. Even so, it is difficult to understand Chazal’s question, for, as the Sefas Emes writes, “Such is His desire — that Bnei Yisrael should add further light with their good deeds.” A person’s mitzvos and service of Hashem create holy illumination.

What is the difficulty in understanding this topic?

☛ Our Service Is Needed by Heaven

NEITHER IS THE answer given by the Midrash altogether clear, for we find in a number of places that when Bnei Yisrael carry out Hashem’s

will, this has a positive effect upon Heaven, as it were, and they are not solely benefitting themselves. For example, the Midrash says (*Eichah Rabbah* 1:33), “When Yisrael fulfill Heaven’s will, they increase Heaven’s strength, as it says, ‘*B’Elokim naaseh chayil* (We shall impart strength to G-d)’ (*Tehillim* 60:14).” The Midrash continues, “And when Yisrael don’t carry out Heaven’s will they, as it were, weaken Heaven’s great strength, as it says, ‘You have weakened the Rock that bore you’ (*Devarim* 32:18).”

We find similarly in the *Zohar* (Vol. III, 7b): “Yisrael sustain their Father in heaven.”

In various places, the *Rishonim* write that Yisrael’s worship fills some heavenly need. For example, the Ramban writes (*Shemos* 29:46) that “the service [of the *Mishkan*] is a heavenly need.”

Rabbeinu Bechayei writes (*Shemos* 20:1):

From here, you will understand that the *Shechinah*’s association with Yisrael is not solely a need of mortals, but also a heavenly need, for when Hashem is [acknowledged as] the unique one and renowned through the honor [that Yisrael’s service accords Him], the honor receives additional holy inspiration, and this is the meaning of [the *pasuk*], ‘May Hashem’s honor be forever; may Hashem rejoice in His deeds’ (*Tehillim* 104:31). Yisrael therefore have the power to either weaken or add to Heaven’s strength in accordance with their deeds.

Why, then, does the Midrash portray the kindling of the *ner tamid* as a need of the Jewish nation rather than of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*?

☛ A Deed’s Value Is a Function of Being a Fulfillment of the Desire of the Commander

IN ORDER TO explain Chazal’s comments, the Sefas Emes proposes the highly novel idea that a person’s acts of service lack any intrinsic value and that they provide no illumination or benefit for Heaven

whatsoever. The sole value of Yisrael serving Hashem lies in His command to perform a specific act and their fulfillment of His will. Heaven's sole satisfaction from any mitzvah does not arise from any special property with which it is endowed, but from the simple fact that Hashem's children are fulfilling their Father's desire.

This can be likened to a father who asks his son to give him one of the son's favorite games. The father has no need for the game; he doesn't engage in such pastimes. Moreover, he is also the one who gave his son the game to begin with. All the father seeks is that his son should demonstrate his love for him by giving to his father some article that is important to him. The sole value of a mitzvah deed thus lies in its performance as a deed that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has requested be performed.

Therefore, those sources that speak of a deed strengthening *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as it were, refer to its performance signifying the fulfillment of His wishes by His children; this constitutes its purpose and significance.

Accordingly, the meaning of the Midrash is as follows:

With what intrinsic spiritual value is a mitzvah deed invested? What is gained spiritually by kindling the *ner tamid*?

Chazal's answer is that the act itself indeed has no inherent value; its importance lies in the fact that by performing it, Yisrael are carrying out Hashem's desire. This is why the Torah writes, "You shall command" — the significance of kindling the *ner tamid* lies in the fulfillment of Hashem's command to do so. More important than the lamp being kindled are Hashem's wishes that have been fulfilled!

This point is made in regard to lighting the lamp because kindling a physical light adjacent to the Source of all light is akin to striking a match next to the sun — there is no rhyme or reason in doing so. This is therefore the case *par excellence* that shows that any mitzvah is essentially devoid of content other than as a fulfillment of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s instructions.

☞ The Benefit in Choosing Good Lies in the Act of Choosing

THE SEFAS EMES'S comments contain a highly novel idea. Man was created as an amalgam of a physical body and a holy, spiritual soul. This dual composition forces him to choose between good and bad. By making good choices, he merits justly earned reward that is not bestowed on him as charity. This apparently means that man is capable of doing good and that his good choices have intrinsic value. According to the Sefas Emes, however, when a person makes a good choice, there is no intrinsic benefit whatsoever to his choice, and its sole value hinges upon Hashem having commanded him to do this act. Whatever good lies in a good choice therefore depends upon actually making the choice.

☞ Each Mitzvah “Creates” Its Corresponding Limb

THE SEFAS EMES explains further that the word mitzvah is related to the Aramaic *tzausa*, meaning connection and attachment.

A mitzvah is thus not solely a command, a *tzivui*; it creates a bond between the Commander and the individual commanded. A mitzvah has a special power because it creates a connection between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who instructed that it be performed, and the person fulfilling those instructions.

The Sefas Emes adds that through the act of performing a mitzvah, “the action carried out by the person’s active aspect will be drawn to the mitzvah’s illumination, thereby also rectifying the part of him that executes physical action.”

This means that it is the mitzvah that a person carries out that invests the particular limb involved with spiritual significance. Thus, when a person performs a mitzvah, the mitzvah has “made” him. The act of performing a mitzvah yields holy illumination that provides a spiritual dimension to the physical limb that carried it out.

The Sefas Emes uses this idea to resolve a very fundamental question.

A mitzvah is an act that has spiritual significance. How can a person's physical act create spiritual light?

His response is that it is in fact inaccurate to think of a person's 248 limbs as carrying out the mitzvot. The opposite is the case; it is the 248 positive mitzvot that invest the body's limbs with significance. Each limb derives its spiritual energy from the mitzvah it has performed. We thus find the *Zohar* (Vol. I, 170b) stating that the 248 limbs in the human body correspond to the 248 positive mitzvot in the Torah. With each mitzvah a person does, the corresponding limb becomes a vessel for absorbing the illumination of Hashem's wisdom contained in the mitzvah to which it corresponds.

☞ “For It Is He Who Gives You the Strength to Amass Bounty”

THE SEFAS EMES then adds the novel idea that the connection that a commandment creates between the Commander and the commanded extends to the ability that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bestows on the latter to fulfill His command. The Sefas Emes quotes his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim* that in the blessing we make prior to fulfilling a mitzvah, we say, “Who has sanctified us with His mitzvot and has commanded us...” because it is Hashem's command that gives a person the strength to fulfill the mitzvah and become sanctified thereby.

SUMMARY

The free will that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gives people to choose good has three-fold significance:

1. An intended deed is not good in and of itself; the good in it arises from it being a fulfillment of Hashem's command;

2. The person fulfilling it is not good to begin with; it is the good in the deed that makes the person good;
3. A good deed is not a function of the strength or power of the person doing it; it is Hashem's command that invests the person with the strength to perform the good deed.

The corollary of all this is that all Jews possess equal merit. No individual Jew has greater intrinsic power than any other. An individual's greatness does not exist prior to having fulfilled mitzvos, but is attained as a consequence of fulfilling mitzvos. Greatness is thus not a precondition for performing mitzvos. No matter a person's origins, the finish line is the same. Every individual is capable of building himself through the dedication he shows to Torah and mitzvos.

Ki Sisa

Shabbos and the *Mishkan* Are Portals for Accessing the Holiness within the Mundane

☞ Work on the *Mishkan*'s Construction Doesn't Displace Shabbos

HASHEM INTERRUPTS HIS instructions to Bnei Yisrael concerning the *Mishkan*'s construction to impress upon them once again the need to keep Shabbos. The Torah writes, "And you shall speak to Bnei Yisrael saying, 'However, My Shabbasos you shall guard, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am Hashem who sanctifies you'" (*Shemos* 31:13).

Why does the Torah interrupt the topic of the work on the *Mishkan* to reiterate the obligation to observe Shabbos? In response to this question, Rashi explains that this teaches us that despite the great importance of working on the *Mishkan*, this activity must cease on Shabbos.

"Even though I have ordered you to command them about working on the *Mishkan*," writes Rashi, "you should not consider it simple to displace Shabbos on account of that work. 'However, My Shabbasos you shall guard' — even though you are pressured and are working diligently, Shabbos shall not be displaced because of it."

Where in the wording of the above *pasuk* is there any indication that work on the *Mishkan* doesn't take precedence over Shabbos?

Rashi cites the *Yerushlami* (*Berachos* 9:5) that lays down the general rule that whereas the added word *es* (before a direct object) or *gam* (also) indicates the inclusion of some unmentioned item in a *pasuk*'s message, the word *ach* (but or however) or *rak* (only) implies the opposite, i.e., that something we might have thought should be included is in fact excluded. Accordingly, when the Torah writes "*Ach es Shabbosai tishmoru* (However, you shall guard My Shabbasos)," the purpose of the word *ach* is to exclude Shabbos from the mitzvah of working on the *Mishkan*, limiting this work to the six weekdays.

☛ The Ramban Asks an Incisive Question

THE RAMBAN RAISES a very penetrating question on Rashi's explanation.

If the Torah's intention was to exclude the obligation to build the *Mishkan* from applying on Shabbos, he says, the word *ach* should have been written in regard to the *Mishkan* rather than Shabbos. Since it is in fact written adjacent to the warning to keep Shabbos, it would appear to indicate the opposite, i.e., some limitation of Shabbos observance and thus an extension of the obligation to build the *Mishkan* to include Shabbos.

In other words, according to the rule that "*ach* and *rak* come to limit," the words "*Ach es Shabbosai tishmoru*" imply some limitation of the obligation of keeping Shabbos, such that work on the *Mishkan* can be done on Shabbos as well.

Chazal in fact understand the function of *ach* in this way (i.e., as limiting Shabbos). The *Yerushalmi* (*Yoma* 8:5) states: "How do we know that possible danger to life takes precedence over Shabbos observance? For it says, '*Ach es Shabbosai tishmoru*' — thus imposing a limitation," i.e., limiting the obligation to keep Shabbos to situations where life will not be endangered. We should similarly say that *ach* limits the obligation to keep Shabbos vis-à-vis building the *Mishkan*, which should be permitted on Shabbos. Why don't we interpret the *pasuk* this way?

☞ Shabbos and the *Mikdash*

Both Represent Realms of Holiness

THE SEFAS EMES quotes his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, who states that the word *ach* is indeed to be understood as limiting Shabbos. However, it excludes not the observance of Shabbos, but the day of Shabbos *from the need* for a *Mishkan*. Why is this so?

- The purpose of the *Mishkan* is to provide a physical framework that enables the *Shechinah* to reside within the physical world.
- The purpose of Shabbos is also to facilitate the *Shechinah*'s dwelling in the world; as the Sefas Emes writes, Shabbos “elevates every creature.”

It is thus self-understood that the *Mishkan* should not be constructed on Shabbos, for on Shabbos, there is no need for a *Mishkan*. Everything physical already experiences sanctification on account of Shabbos.

This idea is still not altogether clear, though, for the *Mishkan* and Shabbos operate on two parallel planes of the realm of holiness within this world. As such, they ought to complement one another rather than render each other superfluous. The *Mikdash* facilitates the *Shechinah*'s presence in the spatial dimension, while Shabbos does the same in the temporal dimension.

Perhaps this is why the Sefas Emes writes in reference to his grandfather's idea, “His words require further elucidation, for I don't remember any more than this.”

☞ Both Shabbos and the *Mishkan* Reveal the Holiness of the Thirty-Nine *Melachos*

THE SEFAS EMES therefore explains in what he terms “a straightforward manner” as follows:

The six weekdays are not devoid of holiness; these mundane days are also invested with holiness, but their holiness is concealed.

The difference between Shabbos and other days lies in the fact that their holiness is hidden and concealed, whereas Shabbos's holiness is revealed and apparent to all. The Sefas Emes finds an allusion to this idea in the *pasuk*, "[On the] six days of work it shall be closed, while on the Shabbos day, it shall be opened" (*Yechezkel* 46:1). In other words, while this holy content is present both in the weekdays and in Shabbos, the path to making it apparent is open on Shabbos and closed during the week.

The person who manages to perceive the holiness of the weekdays experiences Shabbos every day of the week.

Indeed, there are people whose Shabbos doesn't end with *motzaei Shabbos*. Instead, another Shabbos begins. These individuals are the Torah scholars!

We thus find that Torah scholars are themselves referred to as Shabbos. The *Zohar* (Vol. III, 29a) states, "*Talmidei chachamim*, sons of the king and the queen, are known as Shabbasos and Yamim Tovim."

It is written, "G-d blessed the seventh day" (*Bereishis* 2:3), and Rashi explains that Shabbos is blessed through the *mann*. In the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 88a), Chazal discuss how Shabbos can be said to have been blessed through the *mann* when it is the weekdays that were blessed with the *mann*'s descent, while it did not descend on Shabbos. The *Zohar*'s response to this question is, "All the blessings in the upper and the lower worlds depend on the seventh day, and we have learned that there was no *mann* on the seventh day because all six weekdays are blessed through Shabbos, and each and every person receives his daily sustenance in this world from that blessing by which all are blessed on the seventh day."

It emerges that Shabbos is not detached from the weekdays; rather, it bestows something of the supernal light upon them. The material and spiritual bounty that is amassed within Shabbos exerts an effect and is bestowed upon each of the weekdays that follow it.

Shabbos is thus the key to uncovering all the holiness that exists within the six weekdays.

The purpose of the *Mishkan* was also to expose the Divine holiness that exists within every physical object.

Should a person imagine that when he engages in some sort of creative work, he is the one who is being creative, the *Mishkan* — which was created through the thirty-nine *melachos* — shows him that the *Shechinah*'s light must rest upon each and every one of a person's deeds, whether physical or spiritual, for it to succeed and endure.

Shabbos, too, reveals the *Shechinah* that rests upon the tasks a person performs during the weekdays. The open revelation of the *Shechinah* that takes place on Shabbos obviates any need for the performance of these *melachos* on that day, and they are therefore forbidden. We learn in *Maseches Shabbos* (49b) that the thirty-nine *melachos* that are forbidden on Shabbos are the very same thirty-nine *melachos* that were required for constructing the *Mishkan*. Those *melachos* that were performed in constructing the *Mishkan* may not be done on Shabbos.

This leads us to the following straightforward conclusion: The purpose of the thirty-nine *melachos* employed in making the *Mishkan* is to reveal the *Shechinah*'s presence in every physical deed;

On Shabbos, the *Shechinah*'s presence within every deed is revealed and apparent to all. Therefore, these thirty-nine *melachos* are forbidden on Shabbos, for on that day, there is no need to show that Hashem is present in every deed, for it is openly apparent.

It thus follows that just as the thirty-nine *melachos* may not be done on Shabbos for any mundane purpose, neither may these very *melachos* be done for the purpose of building the *Mikdash*, for the Shabbos day itself reveals the *Shechinah*'s presence in every deed.

☞ Shabbos and the *Mikdash* Restore

Yisrael's Lost Freedom and Their Lost Crowns

WHILE ENGAGED IN physical activity, man doesn't perceive holiness or the *Shechinah*, for he is a servant of his urges, captive to a slew of

desires and beset by material goals. If he escapes this servitude to his urges, he is able to live an openly holy life.

The Sefas Emes portrays man's progression from stage to stage from this angle, distinguishing between his states of subjugation to his desires and to living in freedom and perceiving holiness:

When the Torah was given, prior to the sin of the golden calf, Bnei Yisrael enjoyed freedom. On the *pasuk*, "And the *luchos* were the craft of G-d, and the writing was G-d's writing engraved upon the *luchos*" (*Shemos* 32:16), Chazal comment (*Avos* 6:2), "Do not read it *charus* (engraved), rather, read it *cheirus* (free), for nobody is free besides the person who is occupied with Torah study." Enjoying this spiritual freedom is akin to existing in the World to Come, to which the *Zohar* refers as "the world of freedom."

In contrast to a servant, a king obviously has his freedom. A king wears a crown that sets him above the ordinary folk and their struggles. Chazal tell us (*Shabbos* 88a) that upon accepting the Torah, Bnei Yisrael attained such a lofty spiritual level that they became free from subjugation to any urge or desire, and each of them received two crowns (one corresponding to "*naaseh*" and the other to "*nishma*"). They were spiritually free and were able to perceive holiness openly.

However, Bnei Yisrael did not remain at this spiritual level. The Gemara (*ibid.*) tells us that when they sinned and made the golden calf, "destructive *malachim*" descended and removed the crowns from upon Bnei Yisrael's heads. They returned to their former state of subjugation to their desires in which everything appears material and holiness cannot be perceived.

With the erection of the *Mishkan*, Bnei Yisrael again scaled this spiritual peak. The *Mishkan* rectified the sin of the golden calf, opening their eyes to the holiness around them even in their material environment.

Even in the absence of the *Mishkan*, this freedom is restored every Shabbos, for R. Chaim Vital writes (*Pri Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar Ha-Shabbos* Chap. 8) that as Shabbos begins, Moshe Rabbeinu returns

the crowns to Yisrael. On Shabbos, Yisrael regain their state of freedom, where holiness is apparent even amid their physical existence.

This freedom from servitude to physical urges and desires thus returns both through the *Mishkan* and through Shabbos, which constitute two paths to the same goal of revealing Heaven's glory that lies within the mundane life surrounding us.

☞ Shabbos and the *Mishkan* Are Closely Intertwined

WE AGAIN ENCOUNTER the interconnectedness of these concepts upon studying R. Shlomo Alkabetz's poem *Lecha Dodi*, where Shabbos, the *Mikdash*, and the *Shechinah*'s presence are all intertwined. For example:

- The first stanza, *Shamor v'zachor b'dibur echad* ("Guard" and "Remember" [Shabbos] in a single utterance...), refers to Shabbos;
- The second stanza, *Likras Shabbos lechu v'neilchah* (Go and let us proceed towards Shabbos...), talks about Shabbos and also mentions that *sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah* (the culmination of deeds was in mind from the start). Shabbos is the source of all blessing, channeling holiness to all the weekdays;
- *Mikdash melech ir meluchah* (the King's *Mikdash*, the royal city...) speaks about the *Mikdash*;
- *Hisna'ari mei'afar kumi* (Shake yourself off, rise from the dust...) speaks about the *Shechinah*'s arrival;
- *Hisoreri, hisoreri, ki va oreich* (Awaken, awaken, for your light has come...) describes the *Shechinah*'s arrival;
- *Lo seivoshi v'lo sikalmi... v'nivnesah ir al tilah* (Be neither ashamed nor embarrassed...and the city will be built on its foundation) speaks about Knesses Yisrael and the site of the *Mikdash*.

What lies behind Shabbos's intimate connection with the *Mikdash* and with the *Shechinah*? The thirty-nine *melachos*. Both Shabbos and the *Mikdash* bring about revelation of the *Shechinah*'s presence through the thirty-nine creative acts of *melachah* that man employs.

☞ Shabbos and the *Mikdash*

Provide Reassurance to Troubled Faith

THIS PROFOUND CONNECTION between Shabbos and the *Mikdash* is also evident to anyone who reads *Tehillim* carefully. There are two chapters in which David HaMelech addresses a fundamental question that troubled him: how is it that righteous people suffer while evildoers prosper? He only finds the resolution of this problem when he contemplates Shabbos and the *Mikdash*.

In Chapter 73, David HaMelech wonders, “I envy the empty-headed; I see the evildoers at peace... behold, these evildoers who are permanently tranquil have secured strength” (*pesukim* 3, 12). David was only put at ease by recalling the *Shechinah*’s presence in the Beis Hamikdash, of which he says, “I pondered in order to clarify this, [but] I found it vexing, until I entered G-d’s sanctuaries — [and then] I understood their ultimate fates” (*pasuk* 17).

In Chapter 92, we again find David HaMelech wondering about this: “An ignorant man cannot know, and a fool cannot understand this, when evildoers flourish like grass” (*pasuk* 8). Only because he is singing, “A psalm, a song to the Shabbos day” (*pasuk* 1) is he put at ease by concluding, “For Hashem is upright, and there is no injustice in Him” (*pasuk* 16).

Shabbos and the *Mikdash* are thus two paths that both lead to the same stage of unquestioning belief, for both Shabbos and the *Mikdash* reveal the *Shechinah*’s presence within all of man’s activities, affording a glimpse of a world that bespeaks Heaven’s glory and is a harbinger of the World to Come.

☞ When the Gold Is Pure, Holiness Is Apparent

THE SEFAS EMES cites Chazal’s observation (*Berachos* 57b) that Shabbos represents an encapsulation of the World to Come, explaining that this is because on Shabbos, there is no concealment of the inner “Divine spark” that supports and sustains every physical thing.

This is why all physical work is forbidden on Shabbos, including the construction of the *Mishkan*, which shares the very same purpose of exposing and revealing Heaven's glory that lies within all human activity. Using this idea, the Sefas Emes seeks to provide further explanation of the exclusive "*ach*" in the *pasuk*, "*Ach es Shabbsosai tishmoru.*"

To this, he proposes the following beautiful idea:

Bnei Yisrael were commanded to immerse the vessels they had taken from the Midianites in boiling water in order to expel any forbidden food particles they had absorbed and to purify them. The Torah writes, "*Ach es hazahav...* However, the gold, the silver, the copper, the iron, the tin and the lead — everything that comes into contact with fire, you shall pass through fire and it will be pure" (*Bamidbar* 31:22).

Here too, the word *ach* is exclusive. Chazal derive from it (*Yalkut Shimoni* 785) that any rust must be removed from the gold's surface before its immersion. *Ach* thus denotes that when it is immersed, the gold must be pristine, clean and uncontaminated, without any addition of rust covering and concealing it.

Similarly, says the Sefas Emes, with the *ach* of "*Ach es Shabbsosai tishmoru,*" the Torah indicates that on Shabbos, there is no concealment or "rust." The Divine inner spark is revealed and apparent; the gold is pure, and holiness is revealed.

SUMMARY

The Sefas Emes asserts that the mundane weekdays are also invested with holiness that remains concealed until the arrival of Shabbos. Similarly, it is hard for a person to discern Hashem's existence in his own handiwork, which appears to him that he himself has created. The thirty-nine *melachos* involved in

building the *Mikdash* are actions that reveal the *Shechinah*'s presence within the material world that man inhabits, demonstrating to him that the real Creator is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, whose presence is revealed in the *Mikdash*. Shabbos and the *Mikdash* are thus two parallel channels leading to the same goal of revealing the holiness within man's creative work. They both demonstrate that within the outer covering, within mundane life, holiness is concealed, and all man has to do is open his eyes and look.

The thirty-nine creative *melachos* of the *Mishkan* are therefore forbidden on Shabbos; with holiness already apparent, their performance is superfluous.

Uayakhel

Advancing and Withdrawing — Maintaining Worthy Intentions Necessitates Periodic Pauses

☞ Stopping in Time

MOSHE'S APPEAL TO Bnei Yisrael to donate the materials for the *Mishkan*'s construction met with success. Just three days later, no further donations were needed, and Moshe instructed the people to refrain from bringing any more. The Torah devotes three *pesukim* to describing this development:

“They (i.e., the craftsmen) told Moshe, to convey [to the people], ‘The people are bringing more than what is required for the work that Hashem has commanded to do.’ Moshe commanded [them,] and they announced in the camp, saying, ‘No man or woman shall do any more work for the contributions for the *Mishkan*,’ and the people then stopped bringing. What had been brought was enough for them for all the work [that they had] to do, and there was extra” (*Shemos* 36:5–7).

The Sefas Emes wonders, “What is the reason for the Torah’s lengthy account of this matter?” Specifically, what lesson for future generations is the Torah conveying by informing us of Moshe’s command that the people stop donating once no more was needed?

☞ “Just Enough” or “Too Much”?

THE SEFAS EMES notes that the *Ohr Hachaim* dwells on an additional problem in the wording of the *pasuk*: “What had been brought was

enough for them for all the work [that they had] to do, and there was **extra**.” The words “enough for them” imply that all in all, sufficient materials had been donated, i.e., as much as was needed.

On the other hand, the words “there was extra” imply that the donations were in excess of what they needed, i.e., there was too much.

The *Ohr Hachaim* explains that Bnei Yisrael in fact brought more than was required, but miraculously, once the work was underway, use was made of every single item that had been donated. In this way, nobody would feel more important that his donation had “made it” into the *Mishkan*, while simultaneously nobody would feel unworthy that his offering had been superfluous.

The Sefas Emes, however, takes a completely different approach to resolving this and the other aforementioned difficulties.

☛ Stopping in Order to Restore

Pure Motivation That Has Been Derailed

THE SEFAS EMES notes that sometimes, when a person embarks on a holy endeavor, somewhere along the way the purity of his motivation suffers, and his deed becomes tainted. Although he continues out of habit, his heart grows jaded, and his good intentions fall by the wayside. In such a case, it is preferable that he stop immediately. Stopping provides him with the opportunity for renewal, backtracking, and reconnecting with his original, pure motivation. Thus, when he resumes his activity, his intentions will be consistently worthy. Interrupting enables him to maintain the purity of his motivation so that the endeavor’s completion doesn’t overshadow its beginning, with his pure motivations becoming adulterated by other intentions that lead elsewhere.

☛ Running and Returning

THE UPSHOT IS that a person’s progress is not constant and linear, but follows a pattern of “advancing and returning,” as Yechezkel (1:14)

describes the motion of some of the heavenly hosts that he perceived in his vision of the Divine Chariot. Man can scale a steep incline, but he can't reach the top and conquer the peak in one burst. He must make stops on the way up and at times must even regress to recoup his energy and reassess his path. After he has recharged spiritually and replenished his strength, he can continue his ascent.

R. Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Aptá, the *Ohev Yisrael*, writes similarly (*parshas Shekalim*). The *Ohev Yisrael* likens the ebb and flow of a person's attachment to his Creator to the motion of a dancing flame constantly jumping up and falling back. A person's enthusiasm is fueled by an inner fire that seeks elevation and communion with its Divine Source. His soul yearns for spiritual attachment, but his enthusiasm doesn't remain at a constant level. Man's shifting moods keep him "advancing and returning," sometimes falling below his former level but then rekindling his enthusiasm and again leaping upward, like a tongue of flame.

We find a deeper explanation of this phenomenon in the writings of R. Yaakov Yosef of Polnoah, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. In his *Tzafnas Paneiach* (*parshas Bo*), he quotes the Baal Shem Tov as follows:

Everything in existence yearns to return to its source and become attached to it. The soul therefore experiences eagerness and yearning for attachment to its Divine Source, which expresses itself as the desire for Torah study and serving Hashem.

However, once the soul attains this state of attachment to the Creator, it is subsumed and loses its independent existence, becoming completely absorbed within the Source of Divine holiness from whence it was hewn. The soul therefore cannot remain in this situation whereby it is obliterated.

This is why *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* clothed the soul in a physical sheath, which cannot merge completely with abstract holiness. Man's physical aspect forces him to devote time to his bodily needs, to providing and satisfying its various requirements.

At times, though, "a thing's [temporary] negation is responsible for its survival." These temporary interruptions of the soul's Divine

communion and its service allow it to rest and recharge before renewing its holy endeavors.

Spiritual ascent is not constant; it must accommodate both occasional spells of regression and attendance to bodily needs. These interruptions can be referred to as “descent for the sake of ascent,” for after pausing, it recoups any losses, making up any ground lost during the interruption of its Divine service with renewed vigor. By the end of the lull, the soul is akin to a coiled spring being released. During its break, the soul reinforces its yearning for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and bounces back to serving Him with renewed intensity.

☛ The Problem Is Not Excessive Giving, but Intentions That Get Out of Hand

THE SEFAS EMES explains accordingly that when the Torah tells us that Bnei Yisrael were called upon to stop bringing their donations for the *Mishkan*’s construction, the problem was not that their giving was out of hand and too many materials had accumulated. The problem lay in the people’s intentions that were in danger of getting out of hand. Their donations might no longer be inspired solely by a genuine desire to give for the sake of Heaven, becoming intermingled with alien, personal reckonings. Moshe therefore became alarmed and called upon the people to immediately stop their efforts on behalf of the holy work. The purpose of this interruption was to preserve the integrity of the people’s intentions, which is the most basic foundation of donating to any holy cause.

☛ Pride Can Ruin a Donation

PRIDE AND SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT are a source of impurity that will contaminate a holy endeavor.

We pray every evening to Hashem to “remove Satan from in front of us and from behind us” (*Hashkiveinu*, Maariv), because the *yetzer hara* works on two fronts: before we accomplish something and afterwards.

Before we accomplish anything, the *yetzer hara* attempts to nip our efforts in the bud, trying to convince us that our actions are insignificant and that our efforts to withstand our challenges are therefore irrelevant.

Post accomplishment, after a person has successfully overcome the *yetzer's* discouragement and managed to stand firm, the *yetzer's* tactics undergo a complete reversal, and an inner voice starts telling him, "Your deed was truly great and important," as the *yetzer* tries to ensnare him in the sin of pride. A person must therefore stop mid-activity as soon as he senses that prideful feelings are worming their way into his heart. He should refrain from forging ahead and instead look back and remember Whom he is serving so that submissiveness reenters his heart and brings his intentions back into line.

☛ Donating and Pride

DONATING ONE'S RESOURCES to a holy endeavor renders a person particularly susceptible to this failing. He is liable to lose sight of the fact that the point of his giving is not to amass donations, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* needs nothing from human beings. In fact, man possesses nothing whatsoever of his own, for, "Everything is Yours, and [it is] from [what we have received from] Your Hand [that] we have given [back] to You" (*Divrei Hayamim I* 29:14). A donation thus has value only due to the donor's willingness and joy in donating. David HaMelech says accordingly, "I know, my G-d, that You examine hearts and that You desire upright conduct; in my heart's straightness, I have volunteered all these, and now, I have seen that Your people who are here have [also] donated to You joyfully" (ibid. *pasuk* 17).

It follows that if a person forgets that this is the purpose of his giving and believes that his possessions are the fruits of his own skill, he misses the entire point of his donation. The greatest concern in regard to Bnei Yisrael's donations to the *Mishkan* was therefore the possibility of them being prompted by other interests, resulting in Bnei Yisrael feeling proud. Moshe therefore instructed the people to

stop bringing more so that they should not reach the stage of growing proud on account of their donations and thus preserve the pure motivation of that which they had already given.

☞ Locking the Gates of the Heart to Alien Thoughts

THE SEFAS EMES cites the explanation of the *pasuk*, “How beautiful are your steps in shoes, daughter of benevolence” (*Shir Hashirim* 7:2) that he heard from his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*. A person’s benevolence needs “shoes,” i.e., it needs to be contained and held in check in a similar manner to the way a shoe holds the foot. This is necessary as a protective measure to avoid his generosity veering off course, tainting his donations with impure motivation.

The Sefas Emes continues, explaining the Mishnah in *Shekalim* (1:1), “On the first of Adar, they make announcements about *shekalim* (the annual half-shekel donation each man donated towards funding the communal sacrifices) and about *kilayim* (a reminder to farmers to uproot any sprouts of other species from among their crops).” He points to a close connection between *shekalim* and *kilayim*, for any donation of *shekalim* — for a charitable or other holy purpose — must be free of any thought that can be regarded as *kilayim*, a mixture of alien interest, adulterating the pure intention of donating for the sake of Heaven. In addition, the word *kilayim* is related to *keliyah*, meaning confinement or withholding, for if prideful thoughts steal into the donor’s heart, he must immediately stop his giving, as it says, “The people stopped bringing.”

☞ Both “Sufficient” and “Extra”

THE SEFAS EMES then explains the *pasuk*’s assessment of the materials donated as having been at once both “sufficient for them for all the work” and “extra.” According to his explanation, these terms do not refer to the amounts of materials that were ultimately received, but to stages in the process of accepting the donations.

The term “extra” denotes virtuous, sublimely inspired giving, free of any self-aggrandizement and suffused with joy on the part of the donor, who recognizes that everything comes from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and that he is actually privileged to be able to give.

The term “sufficient for them” alludes to the brakes and checks to which a person must subject himself when he is rushing ahead at full speed to attain the virtue of inspired, “extra” giving. The purity of his actions depends on exercising these checks and balances. Only by pausing to assess is it possible to ultimately reach the higher level of purely inspired, “extra” giving. The *pausk* is thus telling us that as soon as concern arose that people might be giving with self-serving intentions, it became necessary to announce, “Enough!” and limit the donations, halting the process in its tracks.

SUMMARY

It isn't enough merely to *do* good — one's intentions must be worthy as well. From beginning to end, a good deed must remain untainted by pride and any trace of self-interest. The danger of stumbling this way is all the greater when a person is donating to a holy endeavor. A donor is liable to believe that he is actually giving something concrete when in fact, everything he has comes from Hashem, and all he can truly contribute is his goodwill and readiness to give. In order to preserve the integrity of his intentions, it is thus necessary to occasionally interrupt his activities. His progress should be characterized by “advancing and withdrawing,” periodically stopping, reverting to his starting point, and renewing the purity of his intentions.

Pekudei



“The Man of Faith Channels Great Blessing”

☞ Why Were All the Details Specified and Why Was There No Concern About Counting Them?

THE TORAH ENUMERATES the amounts of gold, silver, and copper that were donated towards the construction of the *Mishkan* as well as all the various vessels that were kept there and their purpose. We are told: “These are the accounts of the *Mishkan*, the *Mishkan* of testimony, that were calculated according to Moshe’s instruction for the [work of the] *levi’im*, under the direction of Isamar, son of Aharon the *kohen*” (*Shemos* 38:21). There then follows a lengthy, exhaustive account of all the donations.

Why is this detailed account necessary? As we know, the Torah never writes a superfluous word or letter.

Moreover, shouldn’t there have been some concern about quantifying this great bounty? In general, the operative rule is that blessing only rests upon something that is hidden from sight and not counted. The Gemara (*Taanis* 8b) tells us, “A person who goes to measure the contents of his granary should say, ‘May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d, to send blessing into our endeavors.’ Once he has started measuring, he says, ‘Blessed is He who sends blessing to this pile [of grain].’ [However,] if he measured and then made the blessing, his prayer has no purpose, because blessing does not rest upon that which is weighed, measured, or counted, but only upon that which is concealed from sight.”

If counting and specifying keep blessing away, why did Moshe enumerate all the donations to the *Mishkan*?

☛ Does Counting People Bring Plague or Blessing?

THIS DIFFICULTY BECOMES even more pronounced in view of a further contradiction that we confront about counting.

On one hand, we find that counting Bnei Yisrael leads to plague (*chalilah*). It is thus written, “When you wish to calculate the total amount of Bnei Yisrael according to their numbers, each man shall give his personal redemption to Hashem when you count them, and there will then not be a plague among them when you count them” (*Shemos* 30:12). This is why instead of counting the people themselves, the half-*shekel* coins that each of them donated were counted.

On the other hand, we find in *parshas V’zos Haberachah*, “[G-d] has become [acknowledged as] King in Yeshurun [and they are fit to be blessed] whenever the total number (lit. heads) of the people is gathered and the tribes of Yisrael are together” (*Devarim* 33:5). Rashi understands this gathering as denoting counting: “At every gathering of the total number of heads of their convening.” Rashi explains that the Torah refers to the number of the people as *roshei am* (the people’s heads) because heads are usually counted rather than the whole person, as we saw in the *pasuk* quoted previously, “When you wish to calculate *es rosh Bnei Yisrael*, the total amount (lit. the heads).” Heads are counted because this brings blessing, as Rashi writes (*ibid.*), “They are worthy of My blessing.” Here, it seems that counting brings blessing rather than the opposite.

So what does counting achieve? Does it lead to plague, or does it bring blessing?

☛ Why Are Counting and Blessing Mutually Exclusive?

THE GEMARA THAT we quoted earlier raises a fundamental question: *why* does counting something preclude it being blessed?

A person measuring his produce in private is not subject to

anyone else's *ayin hara*, i.e., nobody is gazing upon him with a malevolent, begrudging eye; nobody besides himself knows how much he has. Why shouldn't he still be able to make the *berachah* that invokes blessing in his deeds? Evidently, as soon as he has finished measuring and knows the final tally, the effect of any blessing that might have been present ceases. What is it about items that have been counted that keeps blessing away?

Perhaps we might explain that blessing cannot rest on something that has been counted because knowing its quantity renders its potential increase through Hashem's blessing an open miracle. As a rule, an open miracle, as opposed to a concealed miracle, is only performed when some extraordinary merit exists. Whereas a concealed miracle takes place without obviously defying the natural order, an open miracle, where Hashem's intervention is evident, eclipses a person's free will that enables him to deny the existence of Hashem's blessing, if he so chooses. This type of miracles is thus reserved for special circumstances.

However, this explanation is insufficient, for we find in the Gemara (*Yoma* 22b) that during the daily counting of the *kohanim* in the Beis Hamikdash to ascertain which of them would perform that day's service, their fingers were counted rather than the *kohanim* themselves. The Gemara asks why the actual *kohanim* were not counted, and responds that "It is forbidden count Yisrael, even for the purpose of a mitzvah," for assigning a number leads to plague. It is not clear, though, how counting the fingers of the *kohanim* avoids this problem. How does determining the number of people present by counting their fingers differ from obtaining the same knowledge by making a headcount? Would a blessing that arrives be any less of an open miracle if the number were determined by counting fingers?

☞ Having Faith in Heaven Brings Blessing, Whereas Its Absence Brings Plague

THE MIDRASH (*SHEMOS RABBAH* 51:1), views the Torah's exhaustive listing of all the *Mishkan's* components and vessels in light of a principle

that emerges from the *pasuk*, “The man who is faithful will be greatly blessed, while the person who hastens to enrich himself will not escape [the consequences of his dishonesty]” (*Mishlei* 28:20).

In the words of the Midrash:

R. Tanchuma bar Abba began: “The man who is faithful will be greatly blessed” — you find that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* brings blessing through every person who is faithful, whereas “He who hastens to enrich himself will not escape.”

“The man who is faithful” — this refers to Moshe, who was trusted by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as it says, “My servant Moshe is not like this; among My entire House [of Yisrael], he is loyal” (*Bamidbar* 12:7). It can therefore be said of him, “The man who is faithful will be greatly blessed,” for all the things over which he was treasurer were blessed, because he was faithful.

“He who hastens to enrich himself will not escape” — this refers to Korach, who was a *levi* and who sought the position of Kohen Gadol. And what was his fate? “The ground opened its mouth [and swallowed him]” (*ibid.* 16:32).

In other words, since the counting was carried out by Moshe, who was “a faithful man,” blessing rested on his endeavors despite the thorough and exhaustive detailing of the amounts of materials used in making the *Mishkan*.

☞ Blessing That Comes through a G-dly Person Rests Even upon Something Measured and Counted

THE *ZOHAR* OFFERS the same perspective as the Midrash.

In the *Zohar*’s words (Vol. II, 221b):

Come and see: this *Mishkan* was subjected to counting and therefore needed Moshe’s prayer so that blessings should rest upon it, as it says, “Moshe blessed them” (*Shemos* 39:43). What was his blessing to them? “May it be Heaven’s will that blessing should rest upon your handiwork.” The blessings did not rest upon this accounting until Moshe attached it to the “heavenly *Mishkan*,” for it is written,

“These are the accounts of the *Mishkan*, the *Mishkan* of testimony, that were calculated according to Moshe’s instruction.”

The *Zohar* cites a further instance of blessing resting upon something measured whose measurement were carried out upon the instructions of a man of G-d, in this case Eliyahu Hanavi.

It is written, “Hashem’s word came to him (i.e., to Eliyahu) saying, ‘Rise, go to Tzarfas next to Tzidon and dwell there. Behold, I have instructed a widowed woman there to sustain you’” (*Melachim I* 17:8–9). This woman told Eliyahu that she had nothing to give him: “She said, ‘I promise by Hashem, your G-d, that I don’t have any cake (i.e., baked dough), just a handful of flour and a little oil in the flask’” (ibid. *pasuk* 12). The woman of Tzarfas had measured out the exact amount of flour — she told him that she had “a handful of flour” — yet Eliyahu nonetheless told her, “So says Hashem, G-d of Yisrael, ‘The jar of flour shall not finish, and the flask of oil shall not lack, until the day Hashem sends rain’” (ibid. *pasuk* 14). The words of the man of G-d brought blessing, which evidently rested even on something that had been measured or counted. Why should this happen? If counting keeps blessing away, what difference does it make who is doing the blessing?

☞ Counting Denotes Detachment from the Source of Sustenance

THE SEFAS EMES offers a profound explanation of the entire topic. Blessing is distanced from anything that has been counted, measured, etc. because each counted or measured unit stands on its own — it has become separate and assumed its own identity. As long as an item remains uncounted and unmeasured, it is part of the collective, the overall amount of this commodity. As such, blessing can rest upon it, because the collective is always attached to the root and source of blessing from where life force is bestowed upon everything in creation.

We shall now explain this idea further: Detachment from the source of life flow interrupts the flow of blessing. Counting interferes

with blessing because it denotes an item's detachment from the source of blessing.

The collective is a source of life flow, akin to a wellspring. Water contained in a wellspring cannot be measured or counted. Neither can the vitality of a tree trunk drawing its sustenance from the ground that nourishes the tree's branches and leaves be measured. Any collective represents infinite supply; a wellspring doesn't contain a specific amount of water because it constantly flows.

When we measure something, the measured units assume an independent identity and as such have parted company from the collective and from their attachment to the source of life flow. Water that can be measured is water that has been drawn from the well, detached and separated from the collective flow. Branches and leaves that are counted stand on their own and are viewed as a separate realm from the tree.

In other words, by counting something, a person assigns each unit separate and independent importance, thereby detaching it from its source of vitality, whereas blessing rests wherever there is connection to this source.

This is why the kohanim themselves should not be counted, but their fingers, which have no independent existence or importance, in contrast to their heads, which have particular distinction.

☞ “The Man Who Is Faithful Will Be Greatly Blessed” — Because the Flow from the Wellspring of Bounty Continues

THE SEFAS EMES explains accordingly that when a G-dly individual — such as Moshe or Eliyahu — conducts the counting, no detachment from the Source of blessing takes place, for “the man who is faithful will be greatly blessed.” Faith in Hashem is the source of blessing. Faith in Hashem represents attachment to the Source of bounty and life flow, because the person who believes in Hashem doesn't feel that whatever falls to his lot is thereby automatically

and permanently his. It is written, “[You] open Your hand and satisfy all life — with favor” (*Tehillim* 145:16). The word “open” is the present continuous form of the verb, implying that man’s desires are satisfied moment by moment from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s open, holy, and generous Hand. Hashem’s provision of sustenance to the world was not a one-time installation of a system that continues running thereafter on its own; it is an ongoing, continuous bestowal. This conviction keeps a person firmly attached at every moment to the source of Divine bounty. For such a person, enumerating or measuring that which he has received in no way represents detachment from the wellspring of bounty, and blessing continues resting upon it.

☛ “He Who Hastens to Enrich Himself” Believes That His Own Efforts Determine the Extent of His Portion

BY CONTRAST, THE Midrash associates “he who hastens to enrich himself [who] will not escape” with Korach, of whom it is written, “Korach took” (*Bamidbar* 16:1). Korach believed that a person must help himself, in the sense of grabbing as much as one can. Korach was a *levi*, but he sought the station of the priesthood, believing that in order to obtain something, one must demand it. This represents complete detachment from the Source of bounty. Such a mindset breeds blight and loss. All of Korach’s possessions were swallowed by the ground as a lesson that it was not “Korach [who] took,” but was “Hashem [who] gave and Hashem [who] took back.”

In this context, the Sefas Emes quotes the Mishnah’s maxim, “Who is wealthy? He who rejoices in his portion” (*Avos* 4:1).

This Mishnah is not referring to managing on a minimum; there are people whose portions are very sizeable. A person’s happiness in his lot is not a function of its size but of his conviction that this is his portion — this is the lot that Hashem has designated for him. This is the portion he desires because it is his; this is what Hashem has prepared for him. He believes that only that which Hashem has

given him is part of his portion, and that which he doesn't have is not part of it, and he therefore has no desire to possess it.

There is a simple way to distinguish between the person who believes that Hashem determines the extent of his portion and the person who imagines that he is solely responsible for the extent of his attainments. The latter lives his life in constant pursuit of further gain. He feels that everything is up to him and that he therefore needs to be on constant guard to demand that to which he feels entitled and to act swiftly so as to never miss an opportunity. By contrast, the person who acknowledges his duty to make effort but who believes that the results ultimately are not in his hands neither lives in constant pursuit nor is constantly driven. Any effort he makes may be important, but it is never critical, for he anyway can do no more than make an effort, and the result is never in his hands. Whatever is not part of his destined portion will anyway never be his. He does not “hasten to enrich himself” — he doesn't rush to constantly increase his possessions. All he desires is that which is designated for him; he has no desire whatsoever for money that he is not meant to have and that is not part of his portion. The person who “hastens to enrich himself” lacks faith and “will not escape,” meaning that no blessing will rest upon his endeavors.

☞ Why Are Assets known as *Nechasim*, Denoting Concealment, Rather Than *Niglim*, Meaning “Revealed”?

IN THIS CONTEXT, the Sefas Emes quotes a beautiful insight from his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim* that elucidates the Gemara's statement (*Beitzah* 15b), “The person who wants his assets to endure should plant an *adar* (Rashi: a type of large tree) among them, as it says, ‘*Adir bamarom Hashem* (Hashem is mighty on high)’ (*Tehillim* 93:4).” The *Chiddushei HaRim* explains as follows: The plain meaning of the Gemara's statement is that if he plants an imposing tree on his property, it will become something for which he is

known — people will say, “*Ploni* has an *adar* in his field,” and the field will be known as his. Thereafter, even if he travels abroad and someone else takes unlawful possession of his field, there will be many people who can testify that the field belonged to him. He will be able to argue that had he sold it to the squatter, people would have heard about the change in ownership, and the land would now be known as the purchaser’s property. And since this has not occurred, the field must still be his.

However, the *Chiddushei HaRim* is not entirely satisfied with this approach, because the Gemara’s wording, “he who wants *his assets* to endure” indicates that this strategy protects all his assets, not just the field in which the large tree stands.

He therefore cites Chazal’s comment in the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 22:8) that the word *nechasim* (property or assets) is derived from *kisuy*, meaning something covered or concealed, because one person’s property disappears and goes missing from him, passing into another person’s ownership and becoming visibly his.

But then why is property not referred to as *niglim*, meaning “revealed,” denoting its revelation as the new owner’s property? Why refer to its disappearance from the former owner? Surely, a term for property should relate to its present owner rather than its eventual transference from him to another owner?

The *Chiddushei HaRim* concludes that the reason why *nechasim* is referred to as “concealed” must therefore be that blessing only rests upon something hidden, and keeping property and other assets hidden and out of sight is the way for their current owner to preserve his ownership of them. This is the source of blessing and the key to the ownership of *nechasim*.

Terms of concealment are used when referring to property because the level of a person’s control of his property is determined by the extent of his disinterest in seeking others’ property and whatever is concealed and hidden from him, because these things are not his rightful portion.

A person must maintain the awareness that all his successes

and all his assets come to him solely through *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This is the meaning of Chazal's advice to "plant an *adar* in them," the "*adar*" alluding to "*Adir ba'marom Hashem*." In other words, he should extend his belief that his power is not his own to his property as well, instilling this attitude into his dealings. So long as he remains aware that the process of Divine bestowal never ends and that nothing he currently possesses is truly and permanently his, his property will endure in his possession.

In other words, the person who believes that he possesses something of his own in fact has nothing, while the person who believes that he truly has nothing will hold onto his property.

☞ "The Man Who Is Faithful" Instills

Blessing into Each and Every Separate Unit

ACCORDINGLY, THE SEFAS Emes explains why Moshe decided to count and quantify the donations for the *Mishkan*.

When "a man who is faithful" counts assets, not only he is not detaching them from their source of life flow and vitality, he is also suffusing each item with his faith that it has no independent standing and that in the absence of Hashem's will that it should endure, it is altogether insubstantial. Therefore, its inclusion within the collective and in the source of life flow and bounty remains unaffected even after it has been counted. Through the faith of the man of G-d, each counted item retains its inner vitality, which is the source of blessing and bounty. Rather than distancing blessing, being counted by a man of G-d perpetuates it.

SUMMARY

The Sefas Emes advances the idea of blessing being a function of an item's connection to the source of its life flow.

Counting invests each unit with independent significance, denoting its detachment from the infinite wellspring from which it originally issued. Counting therefore interrupts its connection to the Source of blessing.

However, “A man who is faithful will be greatly blessed (i.e., channels great blessing).”

The belief that a person’s connection to his property is unrelated to the extent of his grasp, but depends solely upon *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s determination at any given moment according to the principles of Divine reward and punishment, leads him to acknowledge that his current possession of his assets doesn’t result from a process that has concluded with him permanently possessing them, but is part of an ongoing process that is subject to fluctuation and change. This awareness keeps him connected to the source of Divine bounty such that counting his assets will then inculcate this belief into every individual item, thereby extending bounty and blessing.

Vayikra

The Call That Preceded the Sacrifices

☞ Why Are We Told about Hashem's Call That Preceded His Utterance Particularly Regarding the Sacrifices?

THE OPENING WORDS of the section that the Torah devotes to enumerating the laws of the sacrifices have no parallel in any of the other commandments. The Torah writes, “He called to Moshe; Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, to say” (*Vayikra* 1:1). This “call” prefaced all the ensuing mitzvos regarding the sacrifices, but what was its significance?

Rashi explains (ad loc.), “Every [Divine] utterance and every speech was preceded by a call, expressing fondness, the language used by the *malachim* that serve, as it says, ‘They call to each other’ (*Yeshayah* 6:3).”

In that case, why isn’t this call mentioned regarding any other mitzvah? What is the significance of its mention in regard to the sacrifices in particular?

Additionally, we need to understand the meaning of Rashi’s comment that “calling” is “the language used by the *malachim* that serve, as it says, ‘They call to each other.’” Why is “calling” the method of communication preferred by the *malachim*?

☞ People in the Role of *Malachim*

IN THE MIDRASH (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:1), Chazal elucidate another *pasuk* that speaks about *malachim*: “Bless Hashem, His *malachim* of mighty strength, who do His bidding” (*Tehillim* 103:20). The Midrash wonders whether this refers to the heavenly *malachim* or to human beings: “What is the *pasuk* talking about? If it is speaking about the inhabitants of the Upper Worlds, it is already written [in the following *pasuk*], ‘Bless Hashem, all His hosts, His attendants who fulfill His will.’” In other words, since the latter *pasuk* speaks separately about the heavenly *malachim*, the earlier *pasuk* must be referring to humans. The Midrash therefore concludes that indeed, “It can only be referring to the inhabitants of the lower world (i.e., human beings). Since the inhabitants of the Upper Worlds can carry out *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s missions, in reference to them it is written, ‘Bless Hashem, *all* His hosts,’ whereas regarding the inhabitants of the lower world, who cannot fulfill His missions, it says [only], ‘Bless Hashem, His *malachim*’ but not ‘*all* His *malachim*.’”

Here, we find humans referred to as *malachim*, of whom the *pasuk* says, “Bless Hashem, His *malachim* of mighty strength, who do His bidding.” However, since not all people are *malachim*, it doesn’t say “*all* His *malachim*,” though indeed human beings in general are termed *malachim*.

How are we to understand this? In what sense can a human being be called a *malach*?

And how is this discussion relevant to the concept of Hashem calling and the laws of the sacrifices, which is the context in the Midrash?

☞ Heavenly Attendant, Human Messenger

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the term *malach* shares a root with the word *melachah*, meaning a task that needs to be executed.

Thus, the term for an individual who is charged with carrying

out a specific task is an emissary or messenger — *malach* thus denotes “emissary.”

Every person is entrusted with a mission in life. Each person is born at a specific time into particular circumstances in order to fill a unique role. In this sense, man can be termed a *malach*, because he enters the world in order to carry out Hashem’s directives.

The wholly spiritual *malach* and the human being are thus both emissaries of Heaven, though there is a fundamental difference between them regarding the way they execute their missions.

A heavenly *malach* is created with one purpose only — to attend to his Creator. He has no personal identity, agenda, or self-serving bias. He has nothing of his own and no independent desire; his sole role is to carry out his Divine mission. We thus find (*Zechariah* 3:7) heavenly *malachim* referred to as being “stationary,” because they occupy a fixed, unchanging spiritual level. They are unaffected by fluctuating temptations and enticing situations. They are wholly focused on their goal, and the motivation instilled into them is stable and constant.

Human beings, by contrast, are subject to urges and desires of their own. Even while engaged in carrying out their mission, they are sometimes motivated by extraneous considerations. At such times, they do not fulfill their role in an unbiased manner.

At times, a person might overcome the influence of his personal desires and carry out a physical act purely in fulfillment of his Divine mission. We thus find the Rambam writing (*Hilchos Dei’os* 3:3) that if man attends to his physical functions with the intention of thereby being able to fulfill his Creator’s will, “he thereby serves Hashem constantly, even while he engages in transactions and even while engaging in marital relations. For his intention with everything is to provide his needs, thereby rendering his body complete for serving Hashem... this is what Shlomo said in his wisdom, ‘Know Him in all your pursuits, and He will straighten your ways’ (*Mishlei* 3:6).”

Thus, while both humans and *malachim* are emissaries, a heavenly *malach* is purely motivated all the time. It is the epitome of a faithful attendant, lacking any personal bias or extraneous agenda.

By contrast, a human being's motives are not always pure. At times, he is motivated by personal bias, and at others, he has purer motivations, depending on the extent to which he identifies with his spiritual aspect and overcomes his material and personal ambitions.

Of heavenly *malachim* it is therefore written, "Bless Hashem, *all* His hosts, His attendants who fulfill His will," for without exception, they all carry out their missions solely for Heaven's sake one hundred percent of the time. Regarding man, though, it is written, "Bless Hashem, His *malachim* of *mighty strength*, who do His bidding," but "all" cannot be said, because man doesn't consistently carry out his mission free of other considerations.

The term "*giborei koach* (of mighty strength)" denotes man's strength in overcoming his urges. Moreover, *koach* also denotes a person or a thing's inner core (i.e., its latent properties that exist in potential as opposed to having been cultivated, drawn out, and implemented in practice). The inner, spiritual content of something is the Divine will that supports, sustains, and enables it to exist. The worthy emissary thus overcomes and ignores all personal biases and instead focuses solely on fulfilling this Divine desire that is the core of his existence. *Giborei koach* thus has a double meaning: by focusing solely on his Divine inner core (his *koach*), man can summon the strength (*koach*) he needs to remain true to his mission without going off track.

☞ Man as a *Malach*

ACCORDING TO THE Sefas Emes's explanation, the continuation of this Midrash is clear: "The prophets are referred to as *malachim*, as it says, 'He sent a *malach* and took us out of Egypt' (*Bamidbar* 20:16). Was that a *malach* of G-d? It was Moshe! Why is he referred to as a *malach*? This shows that prophets are called *malachim*."

In other words, a person who carries out his mission and fulfills Hashem's instructions purely, untainted by any personal considerations, is worthy of being called a *malach* even though he is human.

☛ “He Called” — An Invitation to an Intimate Encounter

FOLLOWING THIS LINE of thought, the Sefas Emes explains the significance of term “He called.”

Being called denotes enjoying a certain closeness to the caller. *Kru'im*, people who have been called, also means invitees. At the height of his prestige, Haman boasted of his closeness to the royal couple in reference to his invitation from Queen Esther to attend her second feast, bragging, “Tomorrow, too, *ani karu lah im hamelech*, I have been called to her with the king” (*Esther* 5:12). An individual who has been called is close to the caller, the call representing an invitation to attend an intimate meeting.

While every emissary is called upon, not every emissary hears the call, and of those who do, not all manage to maintain wholly unbiased judgment. As we have explained, the distinction between a faithful and a less-than-faithful emissary depends on the answer to the question, “Does he have some personal agenda of his own, or is he motivated solely by the outcome that Heaven desires from his activity?”

“He called” thus denotes expectation on the part of the caller that the person called upon will act as his emissary in a wholly unbiased manner.

The *malachim* therefore communicate with one another by calling — “One calls to another and says...” (*Yeshayah* 6:3) — for this is the method of communication employed by all *kru'im* who conduct themselves like *malachim*, who have no personal stake beyond fulfilling their mission.

Moshe was also a “loyal servant” who was wholly without personal bias, and therefore, the Torah tells us, “He called to Moshe.”

☛ The Special Character of Hashem’s Call to Moshe

THE TORAH SAYS, “He called to Moshe,” because the only person in the world who heard Hashem’s call was Moshe.

Moshe completely negated his own persona before Hashem's desire. He was akin to a heavenly *malach* who is constantly and solely occupied with his Divine mission, without any personal interest. His spirituality was dominant over any other aspirations he may have felt.

He was therefore called to Hashem, called upon to remain close to Him and ready at all times. Moshe's state of preparedness for Divine communication brought him to his sublime level, and he was constantly ready to attain prophetic inspiration. The Rambam thus writes (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 7:6):

All other prophets cannot prophesy whenever they want, but Moshe Rabbeinu was different; whenever he wanted, he was cloaked in Divine inspiration, and prophecy rested upon him without him needing to focus his mind or ready himself for it, for he was prepared and ready always, like an attending *malach* ... and his mind was attached to the Rock of the worlds, and the splendor never departed from him, and his visage was radiant, like the *malachim*.

☞ The Call That Precedes the Laws of Sacrifices

HASHEM'S CALL TO Moshe demonstrates his extreme closeness to Him as a servant who had no agenda whatsoever of his own and whose sole aspiration was to fulfill Heaven's will. This call preceded the laws of sacrifices because the individual sent to inform Bnei Yisrael that it lay in their power to offer a sacrifice had to be someone whose entire being personified sacrifice to his heavenly mission. The significance of a sacrifice doesn't lie in offering an animal's life, but in the sacrifice's message penetrating the heart of the person bringing it. This is how the Sefas Emes explains the words, "A man who offers from [among] you" (*Vayikra* 1:2), i.e., what he offers must be "from [within] you." Every member of Yisrael must give himself and his personal desires over to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, negating them. A person's negation of his personal agenda is a type of sacrifice. Indeed, every person who offers this sacrifice is worthy of receiving Heaven's call.

SUMMARY

Every human has a mission. He must fulfill Heaven's will and carry out his mission in this world.

In this sense, a human resembles a *malach*. However, actions must be matched by pure intentions. A faithful emissary may harbor no alien goals or personal agenda. He must understand that Hashem calls him and desires his closeness as someone who wholly fulfills his mission, like a heavenly *malach* who has no agenda whatsoever of his own. With this call, Hashem extends His invitation to man to draw close to Him. The call echoes and reverberates. Moshe heard it, and anyone else can also hear it and sacrifice their personal agenda. This encapsulates the entire corpus of laws of the sacrifices and is the foundation to understanding them.

Tzav

“For a Mitzvah Is a Lamp, and Torah Is Light”

☞ Studying Is Tantamount to Offering in Practice

THE TORAH LISTS the detailed laws of the various types of sacrifice — the *olah*, the *chatas*, and the *asham* — introducing each section as the “Torah” of the particular offering. It is thus written, “This is the Torah of the *olah*” (*Vayikra* 6:2); “This is the Torah of the *chatas*” (ibid. *pasuk* 18); “And this is the Torah of the *asham*” (ibid. 7:2).

The use of this expression is puzzling, because each and every mitzvah is part of the Torah. The mitzvos of *shiluach hakein* and *shaatnez* are no less part of Torah than the sacrifices, yet the Torah doesn’t preface them by writing, “This is the Torah of *shiluach hakein*” or, “This is the Torah of the prohibition of *shaatnez*.” Why write in reference to each sacrifice that its laws are “Torah”?

Chazal’s response to this question is that the Torah intends to equate studying the laws of the sacrifice — its Torah — with having offered it in practice, such that “whoever occupies himself with the Torah of the *chatas* is considered as though he has brought a *chatas*, and whoever occupies himself with the laws of the *asham* is considered as though he has brought an *asham*” (*Menachos* 110a).

This doesn’t entirely clarify the matter, though, for it is still unclear how study of the relevant procedures can serve as a “fast track” to achieve the same result as having carried them out in practice.

Learning the halachos of *tefillin* obviously can't replace donning them, and learning the halachos of honoring parents can't replace actually giving one's parents the required honor. How do the laws of sacrifices differ from those of other mitzvos, and what is the root of this difference?

☞ The Crux of the Sacrifice Is the Introspection Accompanying Its Offering

BASING HIMSELF ON the aforementioned comment of Chazal, the Sefas Emes concludes that rather than the actual process of its offering, the purpose of the sacrifice is the instruction that its owner absorbs thereby. Learning the Torah of the sacrifice thus achieves the same result as offering it in practice.

This idea can be understood in light of the Ramban's comments addressing the question of how the slaughter of an animal as a sacrifice is effective in rectifying the soul of a person who has sinned. What connection does Reuven sinning have with snuffing out the life of an animal? How does this rectify Reuven's sin?

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 1:9) responds that the purpose of bringing a sacrifice is to convey to a person that the fate of his sacrifice ought to have been his fate, but Hashem, in His kindness, consented to take the animal's life instead of his.

As the Ramban writes, the purpose of the sacrifice is "that a person should think, while doing all this, that he has sinned to his G-d with both his body and soul and that he deserves to have his blood spilled and his body burned, were it not for the kindness of the Creator in accepting this sacrifice from him as a substitute or ransom, its blood taking the place of his blood — a life for a life — and the sacrifice's limbs coming in place of his own."

After the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the suspension of the sacrifices, this same goal can be attained even without actually offering the sacrifice through studying the laws of its offering and contemplating this message while doing so.

☞ Torah Is Eternal and Atones for Sin

FROM THE RAMBAN'S comments, it emerges that the same result achieved by offering a sacrifice can be achieved through Torah study. Chazal (*Sifrei, Haazinu* 1) indeed derive this from the *pasuk* in which Moshe likens words of Torah to "*se'irim alei desheh*, stormwinds blowing over vegetation" (*Devarim* 32:2), understanding the *se'irim* to which Torah is compared in light of the other meaning of the word *sa'ir* (goat). This is a reference to the goats that were offered for certain sacrifices: "In the same way that these goats come for sins and atone, so do words of Torah atone for sins." We find a similar statement in the Midrash: "The Torah that I am studying atones" (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4:20). In the Midrash on *Mishlei* (6:4), we also find, "Since you have become caught up in the trap of the Day of Judgment, your only recourse is to sit and study Torah, which atones for all sin."

☞ Although an *Aveirah* Extinguishes a Mitzvah, the Mitzvah of a Sacrifice Extinguishes the *Aveirah*

THE SEFAS EMES wonders how a sacrifice is able to overcome a sin that was committed previously given the principle that "an *aveirah* extinguishes a mitzvah" (*Sotah* 21a). This apparently ought to lead us to conclude that a person's sin overpowers the mitzvah of the sacrifice he offers. We shall now present the Sefas Emes's beautiful elucidation of this topic.

☞ An *Aveirah* Extinguishes a Mitzvah, but Not Torah

IT SAYS IN our *parshah*, "A continuous fire shall burn on the altar; it must not be extinguished" (6:6). In addition to the words' plain meaning, Chazal expound them as a reference to the power of Torah that overcomes the effect of an *aveirah*. When thus understood, the *pasuk* is saying that the "fire" of Torah burns and flickers "uninterruptedly" and "shall not be extinguished" by any sin. In the same vein, Chazal (*Zohar*, Vol. III, 28b) derive from this *pasuk*

that although “a sin extinguishes a mitzvah, a sin doesn’t extinguish Torah.” In other words, whereas a person loses a mitzvah’s radiance upon sinning, Torah’s luminescence is not lost as a result of sin.

In the *Zohar*’s words:

“A continuous fire shall burn on the altar” — this is Torah, of which it is said, “Aren’t My words like fire,” says Hashem (*Yirmeyahu* 23:29). “It shall not be extinguished” — certainly, because an *aveirah* doesn’t extinguish Torah, even though an *aveirah* extinguishes a mitzvah.

A person who transgresses an *aveirah* which extinguishes a mitzvah, which is a lamp, extinguishes the lamp from himself, as it says, “Man’s soul is Hashem’s lamp” (*Mishlei* 20:27), and this puts it out, for the body remains in the darkness. For Torah scholars however, it (i.e., an *aveirah*) never causes anything to be extinguished in them, (Torah) illuminates it (i.e., the soul) with several concealed Torah teachings, for *ohr* (light) has the same *gematria* (207) as *raz*, meaning a secret (or concealed) teaching.

☞ The Difference between a Mitzvah and Torah

THE SEFAS EMES examines the deeper distinction between Torah and a mitzvah, pointing to the different ways that they affect a person.

He writes, “A mitzvah’s power lies in creating a connection and attachment between a person and Hashem. An *aveirah* thus interferes with this connection, severing it; an *aveirah* extinguishes the attachment brought about by the mitzvah. Torah, however, is something that a person studies and absorbs into himself, words of Torah entering him. This cannot be negated by an *aveirah*, because the words of Torah that he took in are already attached to him.”

In other words, a mitzvah doesn’t alter a person’s inner essence; a mitzvah refines his conduct, but he himself remains essentially as he was before. Upon fulfilling a mitzvah, a person draws close to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, forming a connection and attachment to Him. A mitzvah’s radiance is not an inner, inherent light; its light arises from connecting with the Source of light.

An *aveirah* distances and separates a person from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as it says, “Your sins separated between you and your G-d” (*Yeshayah* 59:2). As a transient event taking place at a person’s periphery, a mitzvah’s influence can thus be neutralized. Fulfilling a mitzvah brings a person closer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, but a subsequent *aveirah* will reverse that gain. The light that shone as a result of his nearness to Hashem dims once he has transgressed an *aveirah* that distances him. This is the meaning of the principle, “An *aveirah* extinguishes a mitzvah.”

Torah, however, enters into a person. Torah teachings become part of his essence, bringing light into his soul. This is not light from an external, outside source (referred to in *sifrei chasidus* as *ohr makif*), but inner light. Inner light always retains its brightness — no *aveirah* can extinguish it.

☞ Different Spheres of Influence

AN *AVEIRAH* COUNTERBALANCES a mitzvah — both exert an effect on a person from outside of him and operate in the same sphere, and thus one can reverse the effect of the other.

A mitzvah is likened to a lamp, which doesn’t create its own light, but needs light to be transferred to it from an outside source nearby. When it goes out, a person is left in the darkness.

Torah, on the other hand, is an independent source of light. Nothing can counteract its power, because darkness is merely the absence of light, not an active force that destroys light. There is no such thing as a source of darkness. An *aveirah* that affects a person peripherally thus cannot extinguish the light of his Torah, which is an inner resource. Torah teachings will still illumine his soul, perpetuating his attachment to his Creator.

☞ A Scholar’s Mitzvah Is Itself Torah

THE *ZOHAR* (VOL. III, 28B) continues, “Any mitzvah of the Torah that a scholar fulfills is considered Torah in respect to them, whose influence

upon them will never be extinguished, neither by night nor by day, for they thereby fulfill, 'You shall reflect on it day and night' (*Yehoshua* 1:8)."

In other words, a mitzvah performed by a Torah scholar is more than a simple act; it also represents study and has richer content. A Torah scholar's mitzvah thus has two facets:

1. It is a mitzvah act;
2. The scholar's study and his conclusions that were involved in its performance, which are Torah.

The principle, "An *aveirah* cannot extinguish Torah" is thus relevant to the mitzvos performed by Torah scholars.

☞ The Blessing on a Mitzvah

Connects It to Its Source in the Torah

A MITZVAH PERFORMED by a scholar is Torah because he doesn't do mitzvos by rote, but studies the mitzvah's laws, details, intentions, and goal, thereby divining Hashem's path and His desire from its innermost content.

The Sefas Emes elucidates a further level of meaning. A *berachah* is made before performing a mitzvah, blessing Hashem, "Who has sanctified us with His mitzvos and has commanded us to..." This command is part of the Torah.

A Torah scholar who pays attention to the meaning of these words as he utters them thereby clarifies Hashem's desire and His instruction in the Torah to perform this mitzvah. Through making the *berachah*, the scholar thus connects the mitzvah act to its root and source in the Torah.

☞ The Difference between the

Sacrifices and All Other Mitzvos

EVERY MITZVAH ACT thus contains and is enriched with Torah, though it takes a Torah scholar to see this.

Some people fulfill a mitzvah without paying attention to its Torah content. For them, it is an external act, performed by rote. While a mitzvah performed in this manner draws a person closer to Hashem and thereby illuminates, it doesn't alter his essence. An *aveirah* can therefore extinguish it by distancing him from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the Source of light.

In contrast, the Torah scholar extracts the Torah that is the foundation of the mitzvah. Torah is absorbed into him, changing his essence and illuminating his soul with inner light that no *aveirah* can extinguish.

However, there is one group of mitzvos to whose Torah content even the non-scholar connects: sacrifices. Offering a sacrifice is a mitzvah that neutralizes an *aveirah*, an exception to the principle, "An *aveirah* extinguishes a mitzvah."

One cannot offer a sacrifice "by rote," for the entire basis of the mitzvah of offering sacrifices is the inner transformation the sacrifice brings about in the person bringing it. It is this transformation that overpowers the effect of the *aveirah* — in its absence, the sacrifice would remain an external act that the *aveirah* would counterbalance.

A sacrifice can cancel an *aveirah* because the mitzvah to bring it is Torah! We now understand very well why in connection with the sacrifices, the Torah writes, "This is the **Torah** of..."!

SUMMARY

Torah is absorbed into a person and changes him. This inner light cannot be extinguished by an *aveirah*. A regular mitzvah doesn't alter a person's essence, but it does bring him closer to the source of Divine illumination. A mitzvah performed by a Torah scholar is Torah, providing inner illumination that is not extinguished by an *aveirah*.

Offering a sacrifice is like Torah in that it brings about an inner transformation, changing the person bringing it. Thus, even if he is not a Torah scholar, its effect resembles that of Torah in overcoming his *aveiros*. In this sense the sacrifices *are* Torah.

Shemini



Sacrificing Our Personal Autonomy

☞ “To Say to Them” — To Whom?

THE TORAH LISTS all the creatures whose consumption is forbidden, prefacing the list with the following:

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, to say to them. “Speak to Bnei Yisrael, saying, ‘These are the living creatures that you may eat from among all the animals that are on earth.’” (*Vayikra* 11:1–2)

The words “to say to them” pose some difficulty — to whom do they refer? They cannot be referring to Bnei Yisrael, for the very next *pasuk* instructs, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael.” To whom do the words in the preceding *pasuk*, “to say to them” refer?

The commentators discuss this point. Rashi writes, “‘to say to them’ — to Elazar and Isamar.” This explanation is not straightforward, for the forbidden foods are forbidden to all Jews, not just to kohanim. Why should Hashem’s instructions about this mitzvah be addressed particularly to Elazar and Isamar, neither of whom are mentioned individually anywhere in the section that follows? Rashi’s explanation therefore doesn’t seem to reflect the *pasuk*’s plain meaning.

The Sefas Emes explains that “to say to them” indeed refers to Bnei Yisrael and that this conveys an instruction to communicate an additional, separate statement to the people to which the subsequent words, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael, saying,” refer. Let us explain this more fully.

☞ *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Wants Yisrael to Be Meritorious

THE SEFAS EMES cites the Gemara's statement (*Makkos* 23b), "R. Chanania ben Akashya said, '*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to provide Yisrael with merit, and therefore, He provided them with much Torah and many mitzvos.'" What does this mean? Is the sole reason for commanding any particular mitzvah the desire to give reward for keeping it? Are there any commandments that lack any reason beyond serving as a means of earning reward?

The Rivan (*ibid.*) explains:

"To provide Yisrael with merit" — so that they should receive reward for refraining from transgressing the *aveiros*; "therefore, He made them many" — for there are several mitzvos and injunctions that it was unnecessary to command, [e.g.] concerning [not eating] unclean reptiles and carcasses, for there is no one who doesn't loathe them, [and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*] only [subjected them to these prohibitions] so that they (i.e., Yisrael) should receive reward for avoiding them.

In other words, there are certain behaviors that it is unnecessary to forbid, because even without an explicit instruction, no regular person would dream of doing them. For example, no one in our society would eat creeping and crawling creatures, simply because they are disgusting. Why is it necessary to have an instruction not to eat something that almost no one would think of eating anyway? Only because the instruction's purpose is to provide Yisrael with the merit of keeping the mitzvah so that they should be rewarded for so doing. However, it still seems puzzling that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* should issue superfluous commands simply in order to bestow reward. By the same token, He could have commanded people not to swallow nails in order to give them reward or that after donning *tefillin*, a person should pick up a stone and place it on his nose in order to reward him.

What does R. Chanania's statement mean, and how does Rashi's explanation remove its inherent difficulty?

☞ Serving Oneself and Serving G-d

THE SEFAS EMES offers a profound insight.

There are two possible reasons why a person performs a particular act: either because he understands that it is necessary, or because he was instructed to do so.

In the first case, he is charting his own course, retaining his autonomy and freedom as an individual. In the second, he is following instructions, having consented to give up his freedom. He submits to authority and accepts the discipline imposed upon him. There is a world of difference between the two.

In the first instance, the person is serving himself; in the second instance, he is serving the power to which he has submitted. A person who serves himself isn't serving G-d. He is his own servant.

☞ The Purpose of the Commandments

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU has given us Torah and mitzvos as a means of attaining the status of being servants of His.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu has no need for our actions; rather, He wants to provide every Jew with the opportunity to attain the greatest possible privilege: being a servant of G-d. This state of being denotes having attained the greatest possible degree of freedom from serving oneself and one's own desires. This is David Hamelech's intent in the *pasuk*, "I am Your servant, son of Your maidservant — You have unlocked my bonds" (*Tehillim* 116:16). Only the person who is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s servant by virtue of his forebears also having served Him — "servant, son of Your maidservant" — is truly a free man.

Therefore, a person who performs mitzvos because he comprehends them and finds them worthwhile and beneficial and decides that they serve his interests is entirely missing the point. He is perpetuating his personal autonomy, which amounts to serving his own desires instead of becoming a servant of G-d.

The best example of this is regarding the consumption of forbidden foods. If a person avoids eating them because they are unappetizing or unhealthy, or because he happens to find them repulsive, it is his own desires that determine what enters his digestive system, the criterion influencing his decision being what he thinks of as good and beneficial. He remains a pleasure-seeker even if he refrains from consuming certain foods, because it is his own enjoyment that ultimately dictates his decisions. By contrast, the person who refrains from eating *those very same foods* solely because of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* command thereby trains himself in obedience to His Creator. He doesn't eat what he wants to eat, but what he is instructed to eat. His considerations are spiritual, and he occupies a higher plane — he is a servant of Hashem!

☞ Relinquishing Our Grip on the Steering Wheel Even When the Road Ahead Is Clear

WHEN VIEWED IN this light, R. Chanania ben Akashya's statement conveys a highly novel idea:

It would have been possible to limit the commandments to actions that unless otherwise instructed a person would have acted otherwise.

This would not have involved too much of a challenge, for man has a natural propensity to accept the authority of a Higher Power that understands better than he does what is proper and appropriate. For example, we follow doctors' instructions and take the medication they prescribe even without understanding how its ingredients work and why it is effective. This is not considered a sacrifice of personal autonomy, but as acknowledgement of the sense in following the advice of the person whose knowledge is greater than our own. Since the decision of whether or not to act as we have been advised ultimately remains our own, following our superiors' advice doesn't constitute sacrificing our personal freedom.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires much more than this from us. He

provides man with instructions whose necessity man himself understands, expecting that man obey them solely because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has commanded him to.

The purpose of these commandments is not the action in and of itself — which a person would anyway have done — but relinquishing our personal autonomy. This presents a formidable challenge, because when a person knows his way forward, he doesn't easily give up his hold on the steering wheel.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to provide Yisrael with the opportunity to surrender their personal freedom. He therefore gave them mitzvos concerning matters whose necessity is clear and obvious. He instructs us to perform these mitzvos not because we want to do these things and not because we understand them, but solely because we have been so commanded.

Chazal accordingly say (*Toras Kohanim* 11:22), “A person should not say, ‘I could never wear *shaatnez*; I couldn’t stomach eating the flesh of swine; I couldn’t contemplate having relations with a close relative.’ Rather, [he should say], ‘I certainly could do all of those things, but what can I do, for my Father in heaven has decreed that I must not!’ It therefore says, ‘I have separated you from the nations to be Mine’ (*Vayikra* 20:26) — a person thus avoids sinning and thereby accepts upon himself the yoke of Heaven’s rule.”

☞ Holy Yet Destined for Gehinnom

THIS APPROACH ENABLES us to understand the Gemara (*Berachos* 8b) that says, “R. Gamliel said, ‘In three matters, I approve of the Persians: they conduct themselves modestly when eating, when relieving themselves, and in marital relations.’” These were evidently cultured people whose conduct was on a higher level and whose behavior even when engaging in the most physical human functions reflected modesty and chastity. We might expect them to be worthy of some reward for this. Yet amazingly, the Gemara continues by citing the *pasuk*, “I have commanded My designated ones” (*Yeshayah*

13:3), along with R. Yosef's accompanying comment, "This refers to the Persians, who are designated and destined for Gehinnom." How are we to understand this juxtaposition of praiseworthy conduct with imminent punishment?

The only way to explain it is that man is not judged solely by his actions, but also by his intentions.

Even when a person performs a worthy deed, if it results from him reaching his own conclusion that this is worthy and appropriate conduct, he is nevertheless a servant to his own understanding and his own urges and desires. His urges may be refined, but they are nonetheless urges. Personal desires are by definition inferior because they are material. The person who is subservient to his urges cannot be spiritual and sublime. It is similarly obvious that no reward is deserved by the person who serves himself. Divine reward is given only to the person who serves his G-d.

☞ "You Shall Sanctify Yourself"

THE SEFAS EMES cites Chazal's remarks (*Yoma* 39a) in connection with the *pasuk*, "And you shall sanctify yourselves, and you will be holy" (*Vayikra* 11:44): if a person sanctifies himself in this world ("you shall sanctify yourselves"), he merits being made holy in heaven ("and you will be holy") as well.

As the Gemara expresses it: "When a person sanctifies himself a little, Heaven sanctifies him a lot; when he sanctifies himself in the lower world, he is sanctified in the upper world; by sanctifying himself in this world, Heaven sanctifies him in the World to Come."

How does a person sanctify himself in this world? The Sefas Emes explains that this comes about "by not being attached to physicality. Rather, all of [a person's] actions should only be connected to their inner content, which is the life source of each thing. The inner content of an item is distinguished from its physical substance and material aspect, despite the inner content also assuming material form. This too should be a person's intention when performing any action."

This means that if a person's intention is to fulfill his own desire, his deed is physical in nature, whereas doing the very same deed in order to fulfill Heaven's desire lends it a spiritual quality.

For example, a person can behave in a self-effacing manner despite his conduct not being the slightest bit spiritual in character, as in the case of the Persians. In fact, it might indicate his degradation. Another person's self-effacement, however, can envelop him in holiness and elevate him.

The person who, while eating, thinks of himself is feeding his "horse," i.e., his body. In contrast, the eater whose mind is occupied with spiritual matters and the intention to fulfill Heaven's will is a spiritual individual.

We are commanded to "sanctify yourselves" by imbuing our deeds with an inner, spiritual dimension.

The automatic consequence of this is, "You shall become holy," as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* draws this person, whose conduct demonstrates that he considers himself His son who yearns for Him, into His embrace.

Indeed, the crux of the matter is neither the physical deed nor its outcome, but the integrity of a person's intentions.

Man's level is a function of where his thoughts are; he is defined according to the purity of his intentions.

☞ One Utterance Relates to Deed and Another Relates to Motivation

THE SEFAS EMES rounds out this idea by returning to the *pasuk's* words "to say to them," whose meaning was not readily apparent.

"To them" refers to Bnei Yisrael. Although the very next *pasuk* begins with the words, "Speak to Bnei Yisrael," a very different message is conveyed by the first utterance.

The second utterance, "Speak to Bnei Yisrael," relates to the realm of practice, i.e., to conveying in practice the instruction regarding what to eat and what not to eat.

The first utterance, however, relates to establishing a firm connection between the command and the Commander. The sole reason for us to refrain from forbidden foods is Hashem's instruction to the people.

Once there is an utterance of "say to them," i.e., once G-d has instructed man, the reason for accepting these directives and the entire basis of their fulfillment is G-d's word. This prohibition is stronger than any feeling of revulsion and any personal desire, for it reflects G-d's desire.

SUMMARY

The Torah's prohibition against consuming forbidden foods provides a golden opportunity for emphasizing to every Jew that his actions should not reflect his own agenda, but should accord solely with his Creator's wishes. Therefore, even matters that are self-understood are subject to the Torah's command, teaching us that a person shouldn't be following his own desires and preferences, but should break free of them in order to carry out his Creator's wishes. Even in regard to the food a person puts into his mouth, he shouldn't be doing what he wants, but what he is commanded. Therefore, right after the section dealing with the sacrifices, our *parshah* of forbidden foods stresses that a person must sacrifice his personal autonomy. This is the most difficult sacrifice to make, but it is also the greatest of privileges.

"*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to provide merit to Yisrael — therefore, He provided them with much Torah and many mitzvos."

Tazria

“You Have Formed Me Last and First”

☞ Why Is Animal Life Discussed before Human Life?

STARTING WITH THIS *parshah*, the Torah details the holiness of the individual and his cleanliness from every type of physical impurity, as it says, “Hashem spoke to Moshe to say, ‘Speak to Bnei Yisrael to say, a woman who conceives and gives birth to a male shall be impure for seven days; like the days of her menstrual flow she shall be impure’” (*Vayikra* 12:1–2).

However, this exposition of human purity and impurity comes only after the previous *parshah*’s listing of the signs and species of kosher and non-kosher animals, fowl, and fish. Chazal note this apparent precedence of what is of secondary importance — for surely, man represents the pinnacle of creation, and his affairs should therefore have been dealt with first. In this context, Rashi cites the comments of the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 14:1): “R. Simlai said, ‘Just as man’s creation came after that of all animal and bird life, so are the laws pertaining to him detailed subsequent to those of animals and birds.’”

The problem remains, though. Why is animal life dealt with before human life? Rashi’s comments actually compound the difficulty, for we must now seek an explanation as to why animals were created before man.

☞ A Gradual Process That Climaxed with Man's Creation

CHAZAL ADVANCE A reason for man's creation following the rest of creation.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 38a) tells us that this was in order that man should enter a world that was ready for him and awaited his arrival. The Gemara likens this to a person who finishes building a house, furnishes it, and then prepares a meal — and only then invites his guests to enter. In other words, the various stages in the world's creation followed a certain process which climaxed with man's appearance only after everything was ready for him, for creation's purpose is to serve man. However, this makes it even harder to understand why the laws of forbidden creatures should come before the laws governing man's purity, since the presentation of these laws isn't related to the creative process that climaxed with man's appearance.

☞ Man and Flea

THESE QUESTIONS CAN be answered by better understanding the nature of man's prominence. Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* 14:1) interpret the *pasuk*, "You formed me last and first" (*Tehillim* 139:5) as referring to the last day of creation and the first day of creation. Man's two components — spiritual and physical — were created on different days.

The creation of man's spirit preceded the rest of creation.

We thus find that Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:4) understand the *pasuk*, "And G-d's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the water" (*Bereishis* 1:2) as referring to "the spirit of Mashiach," i.e., the spirit of the most sublime member of mankind, which preceded the creation of the rest of the world.

Man's body, however, was only created after the rest of the world, on the sixth day of creation. Accordingly, the Midrash remarks, "If a person is worthy, he is told, 'You preceded all of creation,' but if not, he is told, 'A flea preceded you.'"

It isn't clear what the latter message conveys. Surely, as a member of the human race, man's superior intelligence and abilities render him the crown of creation irrespective of his individual worthiness. Moreover, how is it possible to focus solely on whichever facet of man's creation is relevant to his performance? Surely it holds true for every person — irrespective of his deeds — both that his spirit was created before everything else and that his body was created only after everything else.

☞ Man Takes Possession of Two Worlds

IN ORDER TO explain this, we must first mention an additional interpretation of Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:4) on the *pasuk*, "You formed me last and first." They state that man was formed such that he has the opportunity to take possession both of the world which came into being last and is secondary and of the world that came first and is most important. In Chazal's words, "If he merits, man takes possession of two worlds: this world and the World to Come."

While we readily understand man's opportunity to acquire the World to Come, the Sefas Emes asks what virtue on man's part is implied by being able to take possession of this physical world.

He answers that the virtue lies in man's ability to forge a connection between this lower world and the heavenly, Upper World.

The Hebrew term employed here for taking possession is *nochel*, which is related to the noun *nachal*, meaning a stream, which denotes the continual flow of a source of water to another place, bringing water from one to the other.

Inheritance is referred to as *nachalah* because a son is a continuation of his father, and the latter's assets pass from their source to the next link in the chain.

Therefore, when we speak of man being *nochel shnei olamos* (taking possession of two worlds), it is in the sense of drawing the World to Come right into this world.

The word *olamos* (worlds) is related to *he'eleim* (concealment). By uncovering the root and source of the Divine vitality that sustains everything in creation but that remains hidden, man succeeds in taking possession of two worlds, i.e., of being *nochel*, creating a connection to a Source of heavenly sustenance that connects two worlds.

This idea also elucidates Chazal's well-known statement (*Sanhedrin* 90a), "All of Yisrael have a *cheilek l'olam haba*, a portion in the World to Come." Even the worst *rasha* is given a portion in this world that contains the potential for spiritual illumination in the next world. For every Jew, this physical world contains some inner, spiritual dimension which is illuminated by a hidden, concealed light which is not readily apparent. Since every Jew plays a role in revealing this Divine light of the World to Come glowing within physical existence, each of them has a share in it.

☞ Man's Capabilities and the Purpose of His Creation

BRINGING TO THE fore the Divine light hidden within physical existence is no incidental accomplishment of which man just happens to be capable — it defines his entire mission and constitutes his *raison d'être* as a human being, comprised of a Divine soul and a physical body placed into and active within a physical world where he is able to communicate with his Creator. The purpose of this body-soul partnership is to enable man to inhabit a physical world and thereby elevate every part of it by revealing the Divine light concealed within every detail of creation and demonstrating that everything was created and is maintained solely through G-d's word reverberating within it. This is the sense in which man takes possession of two worlds — by bringing to light their intimate connection and interdependence through their common Divine Source.

Accordingly, Chazal's next understanding of the *pasuk's* words, "You formed me last and first" as meaning "last in creation, but first

in [G-d's] intention" are readily understood, for man is indeed the pinnacle and purpose of creation.

The Creator had man in mind from the beginning — and man's spirit preceded all else — for without man, there would be no purpose in creating a physical universe. Man was created last, however, because he is the means through which all the rest of creation fulfills its purpose.

Therefore, the person who devotes himself to revealing the Divine light and to elevating physical existence by instilling holiness into every realm of matter fulfills the purpose of his creation and can be regarded as the pinnacle of existence. He deserves to be told, "You preceded all of creation," for he is realizing the plan that was intended for creation from the outset and exemplifies the spirit of man that was brought into existence before any physical matter.

The individual who doesn't live up to this expectation, though, is aborting the goal of creation and amounts to an insignificant parcel of physical matter that arrived on the scene last of all. He therefore deserves to be told, "Even a flea preceded you."

☞ Revealing Spiritual Radiance in Both Worlds

THE SEFAS EMES uncovers further layers of depth within this topic, pointing out that since the word *olam* denotes something hidden and concealed, and Chazal speak of man taking possession of "two worlds," there must be an element of concealment in both of these worlds. Indeed, both this world and the World to Come are characterized by obscurity and opaqueness:

- Something can be hidden, lying beyond the reach of our physical senses, because it is spiritual, abstract, and sublime — this characterizes the World to Come.
- Something can be hidden, going unnoticed because of the outer covering of physicality that conceals its inner, spiritual core — this characterizes this world.

Man's mission is to remove the thick, opaque layer of material substance and reveal the spiritual radiance hidden beneath it.

By uncovering the spirituality concealed within this world — through engaging in spiritual pursuits and aspiring to spiritual goals despite living within a physical world — a person can merit attaining insight into the abstract, spiritual world even while living in this world, encased within his physical shell. By accessing the light of the World to Come, a person can pierce the layers of obscurity enveloping this world; by peeling away the covering of physicality, he can access the light of the World to Come.

This, explains the Sefas Emes, is what Chazal mean when they speak of man taking possession of two worlds — he uncovers the hidden, inner content of both this world and the next.

☞ Man's Importance Is the Reason His Laws Come Last

IN LIGHT OF this approach, it should be abundantly clear why the laws of pure and impure creatures are presented before the corresponding laws pertaining to humans: Creation has a spiritual goal — the revelation of the Divine radiance within physical existence.

When the physical world was created, man was created last — not because his physical aspect represents the climax of the physical creation, but due to the crucial importance of his role in the world attaining its ultimate purpose.

If this consideration determined man's position in the sequence of the physical creation, all the more so it should determine his position in the Torah's exposition of the laws of purity and impurity, which serve to advance the fulfillment of the world's spiritual purpose. These laws govern a human being's ability to attain holiness while being part of physical existence. Due to man's importance in bringing about the fulfillment of the entire creative process, it is doubly significant that the laws pertaining to him should be placed last.

SUMMARY

Man indeed represents the pinnacle of creation, which reached its climax with his appearance due to his superiority over all other creatures on account of his intellect and capacity for abstract thinking, self-awareness, and moral discernment, including his ability to choose between good and evil. However, man's importance goes way beyond all his unique qualities; he is able to use physical existence as a means of revealing the Divine light hidden within it, thereby achieving the purpose of creation.

Metzora

Life and Death Hinge Upon Speech

☞ The Severity of Besmirching a Person's Reputation

THE TORAH WRITES, “This shall be the law of the *metzora* on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the *kohen*” (*Vayikra* 14:2).

The *metzora* doesn't seek the advice of doctors. He goes to the *kohen*, because his condition is not a physical illness, but the consequence of a spiritual malaise. Chazal tell us (*Arachin* 15b) that the word *metzora* is a compound of the words *motzi (shem) ra*, a spreader of libel, a person who circulates evil reports about others. The severity of this sin is great indeed, for it leads to the sinner suffering physical affliction. The Gemara (ibid.) states further, “The sins of all who speak *lashon hara* are as great as the three cardinal sins: idolatry, immorality, and murder.” These are the three most serious sins, to the point where a person is obligated to give up his life to avoid transgressing them (*Sanhedrin* 74a), yet *lashon hara* is equivalent to all three of them together.

How are we to understand this? What is the terrible severity of speaking *lashon hara*?

☞ The Mouth Is the Portal to Physical Survival

THE SEFAS EMES asserts that insight into man's spiritual makeup can be gleaned from considering his physical makeup. The heart and

lungs constitute the pair of organs most crucial to sustaining physical life.

The heart powers the circulatory system, which pumps blood to every part of the body. The heart is thus the seat of life, as it is written, “For [regarding] the life of any creature, its blood represents its life force” (*Vayikra* 17:14). Physical survival is dependent on the circulation of blood.

The lungs draw oxygenated air into the body and expel deoxygenated air. Their function is as vital to life as that of the heart. The air that a person draws into his body through his mouth provides life-giving oxygen to the blood that the heart circulates throughout the body.

The mouth is thus the portal of physical survival, for the oxygen it draws in reaches every corner of the body. As far as physical life is concerned, then, the mouth is the gateway to life.

☞ The Mouth Is the Portal to Spiritual Survival

A PERSON’S SPIRITUAL well-being parallels his physical wellbeing; here too, the mouth is the gateway to sustaining the soul.

The Jewish nation’s survival is dependent upon the spoken word. On the words of the *pasuk*, “And I am a worm, not a man” (*Tehillim* 22:7), Chazal comment (*Midrash Tehillim*, *ibid.*), “This worm strikes at the cedars using its mouth; despite being soft, it smites that which is hard. So it is with Yisrael — all they have [at their disposal] is their mouths and their prayers with which they strike at the idolatrous nations who are likened to cedars.” Yisrael deliver this strike by mouth, not with their brain or heart, because praying and studying Torah in one’s mind is insufficient. Words of Torah and of prayer must be enunciated verbally.

It is written, “For they (i.e., Torah teachings) are life *l’motzeihem* (for those who find them), and they provide healing to his entire body” (*Mishlei* 4:22). Chazal see an additional interpretation here: “Do not read it *l’motzeihem* but *l’motzi’eihem*, meaning ‘for

those who speak them aloud' and enunciate them with their mouths" (*Eiruvim* 54a).

The Gemara (*ibid.*) continues, "Shmuel told R. Yehudah, 'Open your mouth and read Scripture [aloud]; open your mouth and review [the Oral Torah aloud] so that you retain what you learn and so that you enjoy longevity.'"

In other words, a person merits life by enunciating the Torah he studies verbally rather than by just meditating on it in his mind.

Indeed, it's not enough merely to study Torah with one's mind. A person must live the Torah he studies by engaging his physical senses so that his entire being absorbs it. This can be achieved by verbalizing his Torah study, reading, reviewing, and explaining aloud, even when studying alone. The act of verbalizing engraves the words of Torah into his heart. Torah, of which it is written, "For it is your life and the length of your days" (*Devarim* 30:20), travels by way of a person's mouth to his heart, from where it is absorbed by his entire being.

Like the oxygen drawn into a person's lungs, the breath of his speech penetrates his heart and becomes part of his very being. The act of breathing draws life-sustaining sustenance into the circulatory system, and speech infuses life into the soul. The mouth is indeed the gateway to both physical and spiritual survival.

☛ "Words That Come from the Heart Enter the Heart" — Of the Speaker

THERE IS A well-known saying, "Words that come from the heart enter the heart," which means that a person's message will be absorbed by his listeners if when he delivers it, it is already engraved upon his own heart and is sincerely meant. The more the speaker himself identifies with what he is conveying, the more inclined the listener will be to give it serious consideration.

According to the Sefas Emes, the effect of a person's speech is even more far-reaching. When the speaker's words come from his heart, they penetrate *his own* heart.

Here too, the Sefas Emes points out the parallel between the circulatory system on the physical plane and the absorption of Torah teachings through verbalizing them in the spiritual realm.

The circulatory system starts with the heart, from where blood is pumped to every corner of the body and then returns to the heart, from where all the blood will be pumped out again.

Likewise, every word of Torah a person utters with complete conviction enters the speaker's heart, and he himself discovers new insight and meaning in it beyond that which he previously grasped.

This process mirrors the one described in *Koheles* (1:7): "All the rivers flow into the sea, but the sea is not filled, for to the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again [in a constant cycle]." In other words, the ultimate destiny of anything that flows from its source and spreads is to return to its source, bringing with it a new and more intense experience.

☛ Bringing Out Evil from the Heart's Recesses — And Reabsorbing It

THE FAR-REACHING POWER of the mouth also holds true regarding sin. Speaking has a cyclical effect; speech externalizes the heart's feelings, but once they have been verbalized, the heart reabsorbs and amplifies them.

It is written in *Koheles* (10:2), "The wise man's heart [leads him] to the right, while the fool's heart [leads him] to the left."

In the same way that a person experiences an inner urge to do good and identify with holiness, his heart is also subject to a corresponding attraction to evil. This maintains his ability to choose between good and evil, both of which are active in his heart.

In his *Agra D'pirka* (311), R. Tvi Elimelech of Dinov (the author of *Bnei Yissasschar*) writes that there are two spaces in the heart, one for the *yetzzer hatov* and the other for the *yetzzer hara*. Similarly, in his work *Agra D'kallah* (*parshas Vayikra*), he writes, "The dwelling of the holy soul is the space in the heart on the right; it is full of spirit. That

is where the *yetzer hatov* resides, as it says, 'The wise man's heart is to the right.' The dwelling of the animalistic soul... however, is on the heart's left side, and it is full of blood."

The Sefas Emes thus notes that bringing some inner trait to the fore by verbalizing it, conveying it from the heart to the mouth as a means of impressing its imprint upon a person's entire being, is as relevant to evil as it is to good.

As noted above, Chazal understand the word *metzora* as denoting *motzi ra*. By bringing out the evil that exists within himself by verbalizing it, a person perpetuates his inner evil, placing its imprint upon his entire being. His breath integrates into his entire being a spirit of folly that urges him to sin. *Motzi ra* thus implies drawing out the evil that hitherto lurked within the recesses of his heart, empowering it and rendering it an active part of his persona.

☞ A Person's Mouth Connects His Heart with His Soul

THE MOUTH TAKES in life-giving oxygen and sends it to the lungs, from where the heart draws blood enriched with vitality and sends it off to every corner of the body, thereby sustaining life.

An identical process takes place on the spiritual plane. The words a person speaks and the content that issues from his heart's inner recesses are absorbed by his soul, transforming his entire being, suffusing him with either holiness or impurity.

Talking about holy matters elevates the soul and sanctifies the entire person, whereas sinful and lewd chatter denigrates the soul and befouls the person's whole being. The mouth thus functions as a connection between the heart and the soul, for better or worse.

☞ Life and Death Hinge Upon Speech

IN LIGHT OF this profound idea, the *pasuk*, "Death and life lie in the power of the tongue" (*Mishlei* 18:21) takes on new meaning.

This *pasuk* is usually understood as conveying the tremendous power invested in speech, for simply with his words, a person can either bring calamity upon himself and others or can rescue them. This interpretation looks at the effect of a person's speech on his environment, which in turn has consequences for the speaker. Chazal extend this idea, expounding that a person has the ability to use his mouth for uttering words of holiness that bring increased life or for sinful speech that has the opposite effect. We thus find in the Midrash (*Tanchuma, Metzora* 2):

Everything hinges upon the tongue: the person who has used his tongue to occupy himself with Torah merits life, for the Torah is a tree of life, as it says, "It is a tree of life for those who hold onto it" (*Mishlei* 3:18), and it is the remedy for [speaking] *lashon hara*, as it says, "The tree of life heals speech, whereas distorting it leads to a broken spirit" (*ibid.* 15:4). However, if he engaged in speaking *lashon hara*, he is deserving of the death penalty.

The Sefas Emes tells us that the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* 18:21 is teaching us much, that depending upon how he uses his faculty of speech a person can transform himself, for better or worse.

"Life lies in the power of the tongue" — through Torah study, for by enunciating words of Torah, a person suffuses his entire being with Torah, which is an elixir of life.

"Death lies in the power of the tongue" — through *lashon hara*, for by speaking evil, a person brings his entire being under the sway of his inner urge towards evil, thereby destroying his inner self and bringing death upon himself.

☞ The Three Cardinal Sins Are Evil Deeds; *Lashon Hara* Is the Speaker Himself Being Evil

THE TERRIBLE SEVERITY of speaking *lashon hara*, which is on par with that of idolatry, immorality, and murder, is now understood. At first glance, equating these sins with each other seems surprising,

because the damage a person inflicts on a victim of murder or immorality is far greater than the damage he does by speaking ill of him to someone else. The Sefas Emes explains, however, that the severity of *lashon hara* isn't a function of the ruination it brings on the other person, but of the ruination it wreaks on the sinner himself.

Although idol worship damages the sinner in an area that is crucial to the purpose of his existence as a Jew, engaging in immorality brands him a lecher, and killing another renders him a murderer, all these sins can have the character of outward actions. They are truly horrendous, but they do not necessarily reflect the villainy of the perpetrator. They can happen — though they should never happen — but they can be incidental occurrences that don't reflect their perpetrator's essence. Speech, by contrast, has a profound effect upon the speaker's inner world.

“This is the law of the *metzora*’ — the *motzi ra*.” With his speech, the person who speaks *lashon hara* externalizes the evil lurking within himself, suffusing his inner being with it, absorbing it, and totally ruining himself.

This explains the terrible severity of maligning and besmirching others that puts it on par with the three sins for which a Jew is expected to sacrifice his life. Whereas those sins involve destructive deeds, with *lashon hara*, the perpetrator himself becomes profoundly corrupted.

SUMMARY

The Sefas Emes explains that speech has the dual effect of both externalizing what lies within a person and then re-internalizing it.

Speech begins in the heart's inner recesses and is then expressed verbally, at which point it is again taken into the heart,

influencing the speaker's essence and defining him. Therefore, on the side of good, by verbalizing the Torah he studies, a person engraves it upon his heart and infuses life into his spiritual "circulatory system." On the other hand, by speaking *lashon hara*, he draws out the evil that was hidden in his heart, placing its imprint upon every facet of his being and thereby ruining his entire inner essence. The speaker of *lashon hara* pollutes himself, which accounts for the great severity of the "*metzora* — *motzi ra*." A person's own life hinges upon how he handles his power of speech.

Acharei Mos

Fulfilling the Mitzvos

☞ Accepting the Yoke of Heaven's Rule as a Precondition for Fulfilling the Mitzvos

AMONG HASHEM'S COMMANDS to Bnei Yisrael following the deaths of Aharon's sons are to maintain personal purity and to fulfill His mitzvos. The Torah writes:

Hashem spoke to Moshe, to say, "Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'I am Hashem, your G-d. You must not act in the same manner as the people of the land of Egypt where you lived, nor may you act in the same manner as the people of the land of Canaan to where I am bringing you, and you must not follow their customs. You shall carry out My laws and keep My statutes so as to adhere to them; I am Hashem, your G-d. You shall keep My statutes and laws which a person shall do and thereby live; I am Hashem.'" (*Vayikra* 18:1-5)

What purpose is served by the declaration, "I am Hashem, your G-d?" Why was it necessary for Hashem to preface these mitzvos by introducing Himself again as their Commander?

Rashi explains, "I am Hashem, your G-d' — I am He who said at Sinai, 'I am Hashem, your G-d' (*Shemos* 20:2), and you accepted My rule upon yourselves; given this, [now] accept My decrees."

The source for this explanation is the Midrash (*Mechilta, Yisro, Masechta D'bachodesh*, 6):

This can be likened to an earthly king who entered a country. His servants told him, "Impose decrees upon them." He told them, "No.

Only when they accept my rule shall I impose decrees on them. If they don't accept my rule, they will certainly not accept my decrees." So said *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to Yisrael, "I am Hashem, your G-d...I am He whose rule you accepted in Egypt." They said to Him, "Yes." "In the same way that you accepted My rule, accept My decrees: You shall have no other gods" (*Shemos* 20:3).

In other words, the prerequisite for observing the mitzvos is to acknowledge the standing and authority of their Commander. Mitzvos cannot be fulfilled without believing in and accepting the authority of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The question is: why not? If a Jew observes Shabbos or dons *tefilin* solely because this was the practice of his father and grandfather, etc., is there no value to such practice? Doesn't every mitzvah have some spiritual effect, and this at least is being fulfilled regardless of the person's intent?

☛ Accepting the Yoke of Heaven's Rule

Comes before Accepting the Yoke of Mitzvos

THE SEFAS EMES cites the Mishnah that says, "Why [when saying *kerias shema*] does the *parshah* of *shema* precede that of *v'haya im sham'o'a*? So that a person should first accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven's rule and then accept upon himself the yoke of the mitzvos."

Based on this, the Sefas Emes concludes that this applies to each and every individual mitzvah: "When performing a mitzvah, a person's intention should be to submit [thereby] to the yoke of Heaven's rule. This is the principal element of the mitzvah and its purpose."

This requires that we differentiate between a mitzvah's rationale and the reason that we are performing it. The immediate reason that a person eats is because he feels pangs of hunger, but the deeper, underlying reason he eats is because he cannot survive without eating. In the same way, every mitzvah has a rationale that invests its performance with tremendous value. However, the underlying reason for fulfilling the mitzvah is straightforward — in order to carry out the

will of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the Commander, Who has instructed us to fulfill His mitzvos.

Before performing any mitzvah, it is therefore important to acknowledge the existence of the Commander and our absolute subservience to Him. Only after that can we carry out His wish by fulfilling that which He has commanded us to do.

☛ The Mitzvos's Rationale vs. the Reason for Fulfilling Them

THE SEFAS EMES points out that a person sometimes misses the forest for the trees. He might perform a mitzvah according to every detail and requirement, taking meticulous care for its every halachah from beginning to end and thoroughly understanding its rationale, yet still lose sight of its main purpose, namely, accepting the yoke of Heaven's rule by fulfilling the mitzvos and doing everything that Hashem, Master of universe, has commanded us.

Accordingly, the Sefas Emes explains that this section, with its commands relating to personal purity and morals, is placed in the *parshah* whose opening *pasuk* contains the words "after the death of the two sons of Aharon" (*Vayikra* 16:1), because this shortcoming in discerning the overarching nature of the mitzvos lay at the root of their sin. In the account of their deaths, the Torah tells us, "Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and placed incense upon it, and they offered up an unauthorized fire before Hashem that He had not commanded them" (ibid. 10:1). Aharon's sons were well-versed in the rationale and profound meaning of each mitzvah, and they thought that their actions would be pleasing to Heaven. But they forgot the main point. The purpose of doing a mitzvah is to acknowledge that we are carrying out the desire of the Commander. We don't perform mitzvos because of their reasons, but because of their underlying purpose — because this is what Hashem has commanded us to do. Therefore, in the absence of a command, we refrain from doing them.

☞ Focusing on the Purpose and not Getting Sidetracked by the Rationale

CHAZAL TELL US (*Shabbos* 113b) that only Nadav and Avihu's souls were burned, while their bodies remained undamaged. In the Gemara's words, "The soul was burned while the body remained intact." While their outward aspect endured, their inner content disappeared. This punishment mirrored their sin. From the perspective of the mitzvah deed and its rationale, they acted appropriately. What was missing was the deeper reason that is the basis for performing every mitzvah — the need to negate oneself and submit to Hashem's command.

From the punishment suffered by Aharon's sons, we learn that Hashem regards the fulfillment of His command as being of greater importance than a mitzvah's rationale. Performing mitzvos must be aligned with the sole purpose of fulfilling Hashem's will, and therefore, no action should be taken that contradicts Hashem's command, even if it is in line with the mitzvah's rationale. For example, a person might insist on fasting on Yom Kippur despite it being forbidden by halachah for him to do so because he will thereby be endangering his life. He may fast all day like a *malach*, his mind wholly occupied with sublime, spiritual thoughts, but he is nonetheless transgressing Hashem's command, which in his case is that he must eat. He is focusing on the rationale for fasting but is getting carried away and losing sight of the purpose of the entire mitzvah, which is to fulfill Hashem's will.

☞ While Purpose Is Essential, Rationale Is Also Important

NOW, OUR ASSERTION that the purpose of every mitzvah is the fulfillment of Hashem's will seems to imply that no other factor is significant. However, understanding a mitzvah's rationale is clearly also important. Both are vital. Their relationship to one another can be likened to that of the body and soul. Neither can be done away

with, for just as without the soul there is no life, without the body there is no life either.

In his *Sifsei Kohen* on the Torah (*Shemos* 28:7), R. Chaim Cohen (a disciple of the Arizal) writes that the *pasuk* “comes to warn and tell us that when a person does a mitzvah, he shouldn’t do it as a matter of routine, but should perform it for the sake of the mitzvah and should think in his heart of the matters to which that mitzvah alludes. His thoughts will then be fervently attached to the attribute to which it alludes, and that mitzvah will then have a soul. For through the action he performs it is like a body, for he performs it with his physical limbs, and it assumes a physical dimension; and with his thoughts, with its allusion and by having intention for it, he thereby imparts to it a soul, such that the mitzvah has both a body and a soul — a body from his deed and a soul from his thoughts.”

☞ “Which a Person Shall Do and Shall Live Thereby”

THE SEFAS EMES reveals further depth within this idea, writing that since the source of all existence and all life is Hashem’s word, anything that contravenes Hashem’s command detaches itself from the root of its own existence.

In reminding us of the underlying purpose of all the mitzvos, the Torah tells us, “You shall keep My statutes and laws which a person shall do and live thereby.” (*Vayikra* 18:5). The purpose of the mitzvos is to draw vitality from the Source from which all creatures draw vitality through fulfilling the will of Hashem, Whose word imparts life to them. The individual who does not keep the mitzvos distances himself from this flowing source and from the root of life, sentencing himself to death for the simple reason that he places distance between himself and Hashem’s word which would provide him with life.

Chazal say (*Berachos* 18b) that even during their lifetimes in this world, evildoers are referred to as “dead,” because they have separated themselves from the root of their vitality. They can be compared to

a person who has been thrown off a tall building. He is about to be crushed, and his attachment to life is already tenuous. Death hovers about him, a foregone conclusion. It is built into his essence and identity, for he has cut himself off from his source of life. Performing mitzvos draws vitality to everything in the world, for as we have said, without any connection and attachment to their root in the Upper World, sinners are referred to as “dead,” whereas by doing mitzvos, man is invested with the power and ability to bring everything closer to the root from where it draws vitality.

☛ “There Is Nothing in the World That Is Unconnected to the Fulfillment of a Mitzvah”

THE PURPOSE OF doing any mitzvah, which transcends its every rationale and details, is carrying out Hashem’s will.

A supremely important corollary of this principle is that there is no such thing as a neutral act. Every single thing a person does must be either something which Hashem wants, in which case it is a mitzvah, or something that He does not want, in which case it constitutes a sin. Thus, in the words of the Sefas Emes, “There is nothing in the world that is unconnected to the fulfillment of a mitzvah.” The person who conducts himself with the intention of carrying out Hashem’s wishes fulfills a mitzvah even by drinking a glass of water.

☛ Fulfilling Mitzvos vs. Watching for Mitzvos

SINCE NOTHING A person does is neutral, and his every move must be aligned with carrying out Hashem’s will and command, he must focus his thoughts and intentions on being constantly ready to fulfill *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s wishes. The Sefas Emes points out accordingly that it isn’t sufficient to fulfill mitzvos — a person needs to be a *shomer mitzvos*, i.e., on guard for mitzvos. *Shemirah* (guarding) denotes waiting and watching, in which sense it is used in the *pasuk*, “And his father guarded the matter” (*Bereishis* 37:11). As Rashi there

explains, “He waited in anticipation [to see] when it would happen.” Similarly, the term *shomeres yavam* refers to a woman whose husband has died childless who anticipates his brother taking her as a wife in fulfillment of the mitzvah of *yibum*. This anticipation is referred to as *shemirah*, for both the watcher and the anticipator have their sights set upon a particular goal. *Shemiras mitzvos*, which usually denotes mitzvah observance, can thus be understood more broadly as a person’s constant anticipation of opportunities to carry out Hashem’s will. This anticipation maintained by the *shomer mitzvos* is very important, for when a mitzvah presents itself, he will be sure to fulfill it properly with the intention of carrying out Hashem’s will and His command.

SUMMARY

The simple act of performing a mitzvah is insufficient in and of itself. One can gain insight into the act’s meaning and rationale, but this too is insufficient. There must also be awareness of the purpose of carrying out the mitzvah, which is to fulfill Hashem’s wishes and command. This is imperative.

Living in constant anticipation of carrying out Hashem’s command constitutes *shemiras mitzvos*. The person who submits to the challenge of fulfilling Hashem’s will transforms every regular action of his into a mitzvah. With his fulfillment of Hashem’s commands, he brings life to his surroundings, for it is Hashem’s word that sustains everything. The Torah therefore tells us that by observing the mitzvos, a person “shall live thereby,” for this bestows life and happiness upon him.

Kedoshim



G-d Desires Man's Holiness

☛ Is Man Capable of Attaining Holiness?

THE JEWISH NATION is commanded to observe the mitzvos and, beyond that, to be holy.

At the beginning of this *parshah*, Moshe is told, “Speak to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I, Hashem, your G-d, am holy’” (*Vayikra* 19:2). In the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:2), Chazal observe that the words “You shall be holy” are not merely an instruction to Yisrael to be holy, but also imply a blessing to them that they can attain this level. In other words, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* promises Yisrael that they will indeed be holy. We find similarly in the *Zohar* (Vol. III, 81a): “*Kedoshim tihyu* (You shall be holy)’ — it doesn’t say, ‘*heyu* (be, i.e., an imperative),’ but *tihyu* (you will be, i.e., simple future tense), meaning ‘with certainty.’”

How does this holiness manifest itself? How is it possible for a Jew, a flesh-and-blood human being with a physical body, to attain the holiness of Hashem?

☛ Yisrael's Firm Bond with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Serves as the Basis of Their Holiness

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the words immediately following the command to be holy — “for I, Hashem, *your G-d*, am holy” — imply the existence of a special relationship between *Hakadosh Baruch*

Hu and the Jewish nation that is the source and basis of the latter's holiness. We find similarly in the first of the *Aseres Hadibros* that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* addresses Yisrael as, "I am Hashem, *your* G-d" (*Shemos* 20:2), rather than 'I am Hashem, [who is] G-d.' In other words, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told us that He is our special, "personal" G-d, conveying to us that His relationship with us differs from the manner in which He relates to all the other nations.

Herein then lies the source of Yisrael's holiness, though it is still unclear in what way this holiness is manifest.

☞ "Follow My Example"

THE SEFAS EMES explains that when the *pasuk* commands us to be holy "*ki kadosh ani Hashem...* for I, Hashem your G-d, am holy," the word, "*ki*" is to be understood as the reason for the command that we should be holy. The explanation is as follows:

Hashem supports and sustains every physical object in the world at every moment despite His sublime holiness and separateness from His creations.

This demonstrates that the physical and spiritual realms are not mutually exclusive. The most sublime Being can channel life even into the coarsest and most mundane object. There is Divine presence even in a log of wood or a smoking ashtray.

The nations of the world experience hidden Divine providence; they have no perception of the Living G-d. Everything they witness appears natural and part of the world's physical order. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* relates to the Jewish nation with open, revealed providence, for its members are His children. It becomes obvious to anyone witnessing this open providence that the Creator did not abandon His world after creating it, but rather continues sustaining every item in it — every clod of earth and blade of grass — at every moment. It becomes apparent that rather than being detached from the physical world, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is ever present within it, sustaining it and elevating it.

Every Jew can thus learn from the workings of Divine providence that he too can sanctify his every deed, imbuing even his physical actions with holiness despite the framework of nature. There is no contradiction between the body's physicality and the extraordinary capacity of the soul — a “spark of Divinity” — to yearn for holiness and imbue even bodily, physical acts with spirituality and elevation.

In telling Bnei Yisrael, “You shall be holy, for I, Hashem, your G-d, am holy,” *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* conveys to us the message, “Perceive the nature of My holiness and emulate it.”

☛ The Goal Is Clear, but How Can It Be Achieved?

HAVING ESTABLISHED OUR goal, the question becomes how to achieve it. What path can a human being follow that will render him holy? Holiness, by definition, denotes separateness. Sanctifying something or someone dedicates it exclusively to a particular purpose. Dedicating a book to an individual designates it as his alone. Similarly, the act of betrothing a woman is referred to as *kiddushin* because it separates her from everyone else and designates her to her husband alone. Sanctifying an object for use in the Beis Hamikdash is similarly referred to as *hekdesh* because this dedicates it solely for use towards the holy service. How is it possible for man to separate himself from his physical dimension and remain solely devoted to spiritual pursuits? Every human being has a body that has physical needs, and it is impossible to totally dissociate from them. How can man render himself holy?

☛ Pathway #1 — Becoming Subsumed into the Collective Body of Yisrael

AS A PRIVATE individual, every person has shortcomings that result from his physicality. Man is material and thus experiences difficulty in attaining holiness.

The *Zohar* elucidates the *pasuk* in *Iyov* (23:13), “And He is (i.e.,

associates) with one, and who can reverse His path?” with the comment, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* associates exclusively with that which is unified.”

In other words, a corollary of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s unity is that His holiness should rest upon the one nation that is single and special. The Jewish nation is referred to as “one nation in the land” (*amidah* for Shabbos Minchah) — no other nation is comparable to it. The *Shechinah* therefore rests upon the Jewish nation as a whole, thereby sanctifying it. Hashem’s promise that with the construction of the *Mishkan*, “I shall dwell among them” (*Shemos* 25:8) refers to the nation as a whole. In our context as well, the Torah says, “Speak to the *entire community* of Bnei Yisrael and say to them, ‘You shall be holy...’” Rashi comments, “‘Speak to the entire community of Bnei Yisrael’ — this teaches us that this section was addressed to the people when they were all gathered together (i.e., as one unit).” The command to be holy was given to the nation as a whole because it is as a nation, not as individuals, that we are imbued with G-d’s holiness.

The Sefas Emes nonetheless posits that an individual can also absorb this collective holiness. How so? If he negates himself to the collective.

When we say that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* imbues the Jewish people with His holiness, this means that this holiness rests upon every individual unit of life that gathers and coalesces as one national unit — “like one person, with a single intention” — in self-effacement before Heaven. The individual’s path to holiness thus involves negating himself to the entirety of the nation and thereby becoming part of its holiness. The main way to acquire holiness is thus through an individual including himself within *Klal Yisrael*. This is one way to become holy.

☞ Pathway #2 — “Who Has Sanctified Us with His Mitzvos”

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU has provided His nation with an additional way of attaining holiness and sanctifying the mundane.

This way involves fulfilling the mitzvos, which are physical acts that a person does but are able to invest his mundane aspect with holiness, elevating him above the limitations of his physicality and imbuing him with spirituality. Performing any mitzvah act involves a person surrendering his own desires in favor of those of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (as explained in *parshas Shemini*). The mitzvos confer holiness upon each of the 248 limbs of the human body. Chazal tell us that each of the 613 mitzvos correspond to the human existence: each of the 248 positive mitzvos corresponds to one of the body's limbs, and each of the 365 negative mitzvos corresponds to one day of the solar year. The purpose of positive mitzvos is to sanctify the totality of man's physical existence, and the purpose of the negative mitzvos is to sanctify the totality of time.

Before performing a mitzvah, we bless Hashem "Who has sanctified us with His mitzvos," because the mitzvos imbue man with holiness, refining the coarseness of his physicality and imbuing him with the illumination of spirituality. Through each mitzvah he does, man fulfills Hashem's command, thereby drawing out and bringing to light the holiness within his physical acts.

Fulfilling a mitzvah entails man negating himself before Hashem's will, forgoing his personal autonomy and his desires. This is the purpose of every mitzvah, and with the realization of this purpose, man breaks free of subservience to his physical constraints and imbues himself with holiness.

SUMMARY

Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives every Jew an objective: just as He, the epitome of holiness, constantly imbues the physical with holiness and sustains it, so too a Jew must elevate and sanctify the material world. There are two pathways for achieving this:

One involves subsuming oneself into *Klal Yisrael*. Although no individual is able to divorce himself from his body and refrain from attending to his physical needs, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has nonetheless brought His holiness to rest upon *Klal Yisrael* as a whole, and any individual who nullifies himself to the collective automatically becomes imbued with its holiness.

The second way is to fulfill mitzvos, with the person performing them negating his personal agenda and solely intending to fulfill Hashem's command as he does so. In this way, for example, one's concern for a colleague's physical wellbeing assumes a spiritual character. Through the mitzvos, a person can imbue every realm of his life — the temporal as well as the spatial — with holiness. The wording of the blessing we make on a mitzvah — "Who has sanctified us with His mitzvos and has commanded us" — is thus particularly apt.

In these ways, a Jew is able to assume the holiness of his Creator. That he shall do so is both a Divine command and a Divine promise.

Emor

Hakadosh Baruch Hu Purifies Yisrael

☞ “Say” and “You Shall Say”

ALL MALE *KOHANIM* are commanded to avoid all of the various ways of contracting the impurity imparted by a dead body. The Torah states, “Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Say to the *kohanim*, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them [that a *kohen*] must not become impure through a [dead] person among his people” (*Vayikra* 21:1).

This *pasuk* contains an apparently superfluous double expression: “say” and “you shall say.” What is the significance of this extra command?

☞ Pure Utterance and Pure Deed

THE SEFAS EMES cites Chazal’s comments (*Vayikra Rabbah* 26:1) in connection with this instruction:

R. Tanchum, son of R. Chanilai, began [speaking about this *parashah* by citing the following *pasuk*]: “It says, ‘Hashem’s utterances are pure utterances’ (*Tehillim* 12:7). Hashem’s utterances are pure, whereas the utterances of flesh and blood are not pure. In the way of the world, when a human king enters a province, all the inhabitants of the province praise him. Finding pleasure in their praises, he tells them, ‘Tomorrow, I shall build you edifices and bathhouses;

tomorrow, I shall channel a stream of water to you.’ [But] the next day, the king slept in and didn’t fulfill his pledges. Where is he and where are his utterances? *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, however, does not act in this way.”

In other words, the utterances of flesh and blood are mere words and empty promises, for there is no guarantee that they will fulfill them. Only *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s utterances are pure, for “He uttered, and it came into being” (ibid. 33:9). The Midrash thus concludes that the utterances of man are not pure.

However, the relevance of these observations to Moshe’s utterance to the *kohanim* to remain pure is unclear. The subject of the utterances referred to by our *pasuk* is the command to maintain physical purity by refraining from contracting the impurity of a dead body.

What connection is there between Moshe’s instruction to the *kohanim* and the purity (or lack thereof) of the utterances of flesh and blood?

☛ How Can Flesh and Blood Attain Complete Purity?

THE SEFAS EMES then raises a fundamental question of his own:

The word for impurity, *tumah*, is related to the word *atum*, meaning opaque or blocked. Light cannot penetrate an opaque barrier, and thus *tumah* denotes a benighted, darkened state.

By contrast, the word for purity, *tohar*, is related to *tzohar* (these words’ initial letters, *tes* and *tzadi*, respectively, are interchangeable). *Tzohar* denotes an opening or aperture through which light can shine. The word *tohar* is used in this sense in the Mishnah (*Yoma* 5:6) that speaks about *taharo shel mizbei’ach*, meaning the area of the altar’s upper surface that remains clear and is unobscured by ash.

Purity is an absolute concept; there is no such thing as attaining “halfway purity.” If anything at all is obscuring a lens, light cannot penetrate.

For Divine illumination to penetrate a person, no “ash” or other obscuring matter can be covering or sullying a person’s soul.

Since a person is after all human, and his soul dwells in a body, how can it be demanded of him that he achieve and maintain purity?

In the words of the Sefas Emes, “How is it possible for flesh and blood to become properly (i.e., wholly) pure?”

☞ Hashem’s Word Imbues Man’s Physical Substance as Well as His Soul

IN RESPONSE TO this problem, the Sefas Emes asserts that man is able to become pure by accessing the kernel of Divine holiness within himself by virtue of which he was created and continues to exist. To explain:

Every creature came into being through G-d’s word, as the Mishnah (*Avos* 5:1) says, “The world was created with ten utterances.”

Man can take already existing matter (e.g. wood) and use it to create something (e.g. a table). This type of creation is referred to as *yeish miyeish*, creating something from something else that already exists. However, man cannot endow his creation with the ability to endure. Its endurance is not dependent upon him; the matter from which he made the object existed before he made the object and will continue existing even after its “creator” is gone. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, on the other hand, created *yeish mei’ayin*, something from nothing, i.e., where nothing whatsoever had previously existed. Every created entity derives its existence from Hashem’s utterance that brought it into being and sustains it. Hashem’s word is thus necessary so that matter endures.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s utterance thus maintains man’s existence, constantly reverberating within him. Therefore, it isn’t only man’s soul that is a Divine spark; his physical body, too, serves as an outer sheath for G-d’s utterance that keeps man in existence, sustaining him at every moment. It is this Divine utterance that enables man to attain purity, for even his physical component is an expression of Hashem’s word that dwells within him.

Man has the ability to attain complete purity if he attaches

himself to Hashem's word that reverberates within him. Man can purify both his body and his soul if he negates himself to Hashem, Who dwells within him, conferring existence not only upon his soul, but also upon his body.

☞ “Say” and “You Shall Say” — Drawing Hashem's Utterance into Man's Physical Aspect

AS NOTED EARLIER, purity must be absolute; it cannot exist halfway. The level of transparency of an object determines the amount of light that passes through it. The coarse, physical matter composing the human body blocks and obscures the passage of Divine radiance. Man can nevertheless elevate his body to the level of his soul by introducing into it the holiness that already lies within him by virtue of G-d's word that sustains the body itself.

Accordingly, the Sefas Emes explains the double expression “say” and “you shall say” as referring to two distinct stages:

- “Say” denotes G-d's original word dwelling within man, creating and sustaining him;
- “You shall say” — denotes man's subsequent attachment to Hashem's word and his self-negation to this source of holiness that already exists within him.

Chazal therefore draw a parallel between Hashem's command in this *parshah* to maintain physical purity and the *pasuk* in *Tehillim*, “Hashem's utterances are pure utterances.” The point conveyed is that “Hashem's utterances” are actually the means whereby man is able to attain purity, even in his physical state.

☞ Hashem's Word Renders Body and Soul a Single Unit

A HUMAN BEING'S attainment of purity therefore signifies the merging of body and soul such that they form a single, transparent unit

through which the Divine light can be perceived. As explained, this state can be attained through the Divine utterance that created man and whose continued reverberation sustains him on an ongoing basis.

This idea affords us further insight into the meaning of the *pesukim* from *parshas Ki Savo*, in which Moshe describes the relationship between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and Bnei Yisrael: “Today, *es Hashem he’emarta*, you have distinguished Hashem to be your G-d and to follow His ways, to keep His statutes, commandments and laws and to heed His voice. And today, *VaHashem he’emircha*, Hashem has distinguished you to be His treasured people, just as He told you, and to keep all His commandments” (*Devarim* 26:17–18).

Chazal (*Berachos* 6a), interpret this “distinction” as follows:

Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yisrael, “You have rendered Me a single unit in the world (i.e., have demonstrated My Oneness), and I shall render you a single unit in the world. You have rendered Me a single unit in the world, as it says, ‘Hear, Yisrael, Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One’ (*Devarim* 6:4), and I shall render you a single unit in the world, as it says, ‘And who is like Your People, a single nation in the land’ (*Divrei Hayamim I* 17:21).”

The terms *he’emarta* (you have distinguished) and *he’emircha* (He has distinguished you), which are derived from *amirah*, meaning an utterance, refer to each party’s distinction of having been rendered a single, unparalleled, and unique unit. On the individual level, this distinction and singularity come about through Hashem’s utterance that sustains man. This utterance enables man to render himself a single, complete unit comprising body and soul that together, having attained purity, reflect the Divine light that dwells within him.

☞ “Say” and “You Shall Say”

Correspond to Shabbos and the Weekdays

BY CLINGING TO the Divine word that sustains him, man can thus render himself an integral unit comprising body and soul.

The double expression “*emor*” and “*v’amarta*” denotes the process whereby this happens. First comes *emor*, Hashem’s word, and then comes man’s input, drawing out his inner core of holiness and instilling it into his surrounding environment that becomes subsidiary to it. The Sefas Emes draws a parallel between this action and man’s similar role vis-à-vis Shabbos’s holiness and the work undertaken during the six weekdays. Shabbos, which is a core of abstract holiness, occupies the central point of the week. Man’s task is to draw its radiance outward into the six mundane weekdays so that Shabbos’s holiness spreads to the weekdays. In this way, the spiritual vitality of Shabbos extends into every mundane activity carried out during the six weekdays.

☛ “Say” and “You Shall Say”

Correspond to Pesach and the *Omer* Period

THE SEFAS EMES further employs this idea to elucidate man’s role during the period of *sefiras ha’omer*. The prayer that is said in many communities following the nightly counting of the *omer* opens with the words, “Master of the world, You have commanded us through Moshe, Your servant, to count the *omer* in order to purify us from our outer coverings and from our impurities.” The Sefas Emes explains this as follows:

Our nation’s departure from Egypt rendered us free from all forms of slavery, including the individual’s enslavement to himself and his physical desires, which hinders his spiritual development. This freedom from physical desires confers holiness on a person, which he merits as a gift from Heaven with no effort necessary on his part. This phenomenon is referred to as *isarusa d’leila*, a spiritual arousal initiated from Above, independent of a person’s level or merit. Although just prior to their redemption, Bnei Yisrael had been mired in the forty-ninth level of impurity, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* nonetheless came “to take to Himself a nation from amid a[nother] nation” (*Devarim* 4:34).

However, once this spiritual “high” passes, it is time for each individual to work on himself. He must now take the core of holiness within himself that radiates Divine light in all its purity and clarity and transform it into a beacon such that its effect spreads outwards. The time for this work is the period of *sefiras ha’omer*, when a person relates to his physical existence as a mere husk surrounding G-d’s word resounding within and sustaining him. His body becomes secondary to this inner core of holiness, thus enabling it and his soul to function together as a single unit. He becomes cleansed of his impurity and is suffused in spiritual radiance. The period of Counting the Omer thus also involves the process alluded to by the words *emor v’amarta*, whereby man takes the Divine utterance to which he was exposed at the time of our departure from Egypt and the freedom it confers and disseminates it through his own efforts to every realm and level of life.

SUMMARY

Purity is an absolute state wherein Divine radiance is clearly apparent through a transparent, unsullied medium. Despite containing a coarse, physical element, man can still attain purity by attaching himself to the inner Divine word that sustains him, thereby creating a single, pure unit of body and soul together. This process is alluded to by the words *emor v’amarta*. First comes the Divine word that sustains even a person’s physical aspect every moment, and his task is to then take this inner core of holiness and introduce it into his external environment, rendering everything secondary to it.

By negating himself to the Divine spark dwelling within him and sustaining both his soul and his body, man can create a single, pure body-soul unit.

Behar

Fanning a Coal into a Flame

☞ *Shemittah*'s Juxtaposition to Har Sinai

THE TORAH COMMANDS us to let the land of Eretz Yisrael lie fallow during the *shemittah* year:

Hashem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai, to say. "Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'When you come to land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a rest period for Hashem.'" (*Vayikra* 25:1–2)

The words "at Har Sinai," specifying where the mitzvah was given, do not appear in connection with any other mitzvah in the Torah.

Addressing this point, Rashi quotes the Midrash that asks, "What is *shemittah*'s connection to Har Sinai? Weren't all the mitzvos said at Sinai?"

The Midrash answers, "Just as *shemittah*'s principles, details, and minutiae were said [in their entirety] at Har Sinai, so too with all the other mitzvos — their principles and minutiae were [all] said at Sinai."

However, this answer just seems to make the question stronger, for the thrust of the Midrash's answer is that *shemittah* is indeed no different from any other mitzvah and is in fact representative of all the other mitzvos. If so, the question returns in full force: why do the words "at Har Sinai" appear particularly in regard to the mitzvah of *shemittah*? What is this mitzvah's deeper connection to Har Sinai?

☞ Life and Death Lie in the Power of the Mouth

THE SEFAS EMES cites the comments of a Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 33:1) on this *parshah* (though in regard to a different topic), elucidating the *pasuk*, “Death and life are in the power of speech” (*Mishlei* 18:21). In this Midrash, Chazal provide several examples of life and death being dependent on a person’s mouth:

Achilles’s Targum renders:* *mitztera* and *mochirin* (a double-ended eating implement bearing a ladle at one end and a sharp blade at the other): death (the blade) on this side, and life (the spoon) on the other.

Bar Sira said: a coal is in front of a person; if he blows on it, he ignites it, whereas if he spits on it, he extinguishes it.

R. Yanai said: a roll of *tevel* is in a person’s mouth; if he eats it before he takes *maaser*, [he is deserving of] death, and thus death depends on the mouth, whereas if he designates *maaser* verbally and then eats it, life lies in the power of his mouth.

What is this Midrash adding to the *pasuk* in *Mishlei*? What new insight do these examples provide to the apparently straightforward idea that with his power of speech, man is capable of either wreaking the most grievous harm or bringing about the greatest salvation?

Moreover, whereas the relevance of R. Yanai’s example to the mouth is clear, since it deals with the mouth’s unique ability to convert *tevel* into *maaser* with a simple declaration, in the previous example of the coal, the mouth seems incidental, possessing no advantage over fanning or putting out a coal with one’s hand or foot. A person can also use his hand to fan or to smother a fire, yet we don’t consider that a reason to say that life and death are in the power of the hand. The mouth apparently has some special property in this regard, so why give as an example a simple physical movement?

* This translation was authored by a convert who was student of R. Akiva. In the Midrash, R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua speak highly of it.

☞ The Mouth Funnels Spiritual and Material Bounty for Both Good and Evil

THE SEFAS EMES provides an original and spectacular exposition of the second example cited by the Midrash:

Hakadosh Baruch Hu sustains the world on an ongoing basis. Even after creating the world where nothing had previously existed, He maintains its existence at every moment through His command, as it says, “Forever, Hashem, Your word stands in heaven” (*Tehillim* 119:89).

Hashem’s word with which the world was created is the Torah. Chazal (*Zohar*, *Hakdamah* 5a) say: “Through the Torah, *Kudsha Brich Hu* created the world.” The Torah is referred to as “fire,” as it says, “Isn’t My word like fire,” says Hashem” (*Yirmeyahu* 23:29). Since everything was created and survives through Hashem’s word that is revealed in the Torah, the power of Torah’s fire exists within each and every creature in creation. This fire is not apparent, however. It is concealed and contained, like the fire within a glowing coal.

The Gemara (*Bava Kamma* 9b) draws a distinction between a *gacheles* (coal) and a *shalheves* (flame): a coal is a lump of charcoal containing a glowing fire. To draw the fire out, the coal must be fanned so that the flame bursts forth. By contrast, a *shalheves* already is a flaming fire.

The power of Torah that sustains every creature is akin to the fire inside a *gacheles*, because it must be sought and drawn out. A person has to blow on and fan it in order to discover its potential.

It is man’s task to bring to light every creature’s inner Torah vitality, which lies concealed within it like the fire contained within a coal. Drawing out this vitality of the Torah within each creature is dependent upon man’s faculty of speech, which is his unique quality and the source of his own vitality. This is Chazal’s intent in stating that man’s life is dependent on his mouth and in the example of a coal that a person must blow on to ignite.

In connection with man's creation, it is written that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* "breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man thus became *nefesh chayah*, a living being" (*Bereishis* 2:7). *Targum Onkelos* translates *nefesh chayah* as "*ruach memalela*, an articulate (i.e., speaking) spirit," while *Targum Yonason ben Uziel* adds several words: "*l'ruach memalela l'anharus aynin ul'mitztus udnin*, a speaking spirit, investing his eyes with sight and his ears with listening."

Man's vitality and his elevated soul thus find expression in his faculty of speech.

Man's mouth is not merely an organ of communication. It is the means by which he expresses abstract concepts that he comprehends with his mind and spirit. The faculty of speech enables man to articulate noble and inspiring thoughts and to convey abstract ideas. It enables him to bring to life his grasp of natural phenomena and is the means by which he can uncover the burning Torah fire glowing within every one of them. By using his mouth in this way, man draws out each thing's inner vitality, and the fire glowing within and sustaining it bursts into burning, open flame.

The faculty of speech thereby transforms glowing coal into flame.

On the other hand, man is also capable of spitting on the coal. If the issue of his lips is coarse and crass, devoid of any inspiration and elevation like the spittle that issues from the body, he thereby coarsens his material environment, snuffing out and deepening the concealment of its inner, spiritual content.

A person's mouth thus represents his two aspects: his physical side and his spiritual side. His mouth serves as a funnel, channeling outward the content of both his comprehending, spiritually sensitive element as well as his corporeal, physical dimension.

The mouth thus serves as man's purveyor of both life and death:

It purveys death by conveying his physical dimension with its limited and relative existence that comes to an end when its time arrives.

It **purveys life**, on the other hand, by conveying his spiritual dimension that endures eternally and gives expression to the power of vitality within Hashem's word.

Indeed, "Death and life lie in the power of the tongue." The vitality within everything in existence is independent of man, for everything was created and endures solely through Hashem. Man, however, possesses the ability to uncover the living core within everything in creation. At the same time, though, he is also capable of further concealing this vital spiritual core. How he uses his power of speech determines whether a given item will have a positive or a negative impact.

Man's speech is thus the organ of interpretation of any given phenomenon — how he uses it depends entirely upon him.

☞ *Maaser* as an Example of the Power of the Mouth

THE SEFAS EMES proceeds to elucidate the third example of the mouth's power in relation to the consumption of the "roll of *tevel*."

By separating the specified tithes from his bread, a person acknowledges that all physical existence flows from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s Hand and that it depends on His word to sustain it. The existence of the entire harvest is thus dependent on the *maaser*, which is the part designated for holiness. It is this part that imbues the rest with vitality. By separating the *maasros*, a person thus draws life from the designated produce's inner core of vitality to the whole harvest. The whispering Torah coal that sustains the world becomes a crackling flame. If, however, he eats from the produce without separating the *maaser*, he coarsens the mantle of physicality that lies atop existence, giving the illusion that the latter has independent life and endurance. As this cover grows heavier, the whispers of the spiritual fire concealed within the coal grow quieter and quieter. Life's spiritual vitality dims.

☞ “The Land Shall Rest” — *Shemittah*’s Purpose Is to Annul the Land’s Earthly Dimension

THIS PROCESS OF drawing out the hidden, inner holiness that each Jew implements in his own life ultimately takes place on a national level. The purpose of the world’s creation is that Yisrael should bring about the rectification of the physical, natural world by uncovering its inner holiness. The goal is the transformation of the world’s glowing coal into open flame, a fire burning with Hashem’s word contained in the Torah, which is the basis of creation and maintains everything in existence.

This is the essence of the mitzvah of *shemittah*.

Just like the person who separates *maaser* from his bread, the person who ceases agricultural work in the seventh year acknowledges that it is not the ground that provides his produce, but *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, for “the land and all it contains belongs to Hashem” (*Tehillim* 24:1), not to man. By relinquishing his control of the land and acknowledging its inner, holy core, man draws this holiness into all the other years, conferring life. Conversely, if he refrains from this acknowledgment, it brings death. Like the Midrash’s example of *maaser*, *shemittah* is a matter of life and death.

By refraining from working the land during the *shemittah* year, a Jew recognizes *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s ownership of the world, thereby imbuing it with life and drawing spiritual illumination from an extremely sublime level which is above time, into our temporal world.

However, if he fails to acknowledge this, he thickens the layer of physicality of the material world and draws it closer to spiritual death.

This explains the extreme severity the Torah attaches to disregarding this mitzvah, warning that doing so leads to exile from Eretz Yisrael. It is not a sin like other sins, for by neglecting this mitzvah man demonstrates his belief that the world and

everything it contains belongs to man. Heaven shows him his mistake by removing him from the land he thought he owns. Rashi comments on the *pasuk*, “You shall dwell upon the land securely” (*Vayikra* 25:18): “For the sin of [neglecting] *shemittah*, Yisrael are exiled as it says, ‘Then the land shall appease [the sin of its neglected] Shabbasos... and shall bring appeasement for its [neglected] Shabbasos’ (ibid. 26:34), and the seventy years of the Babylonian exile corresponded to the seventy *shemittah* years that they neglected.”

This is the meaning of the Torah’s command, “The land shall rest” (ibid. 25:2). The word *eretz* (land) denotes earthliness and physicality. It is this that man is commanded to set aside, striving to draw vitality through his attachment to the source of rest which is the sublime, spiritual world hidden within the earthliness of the physical world.

☞ *Shemittah*’s Inner Connection to Har Sinai

THE SEFAS EMES concludes his discussion by returning to his opening question and elucidating the deeper significance of *shemittah*’s association with Har Sinai. By mentioning that the mitzvah of *shemittah* was given at Har Sinai, the Torah is stressing that the essence of this mitzvah is to inculcate the awareness that the Torah that was given at Har Sinai is the basis of all physical existence.

Fulfilling the mitzvah of *shemittah* demonstrates that the Upper World’s influence upon the lower world comes about through observing the Torah that was given at Har Sinai. The mitzvah of *shemittah* demonstrates starkly that the world is sustained by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who brought it into being and Who supports it. *Shemittah* shows the entire world that “the land shall rest, a Shabbos for Hashem” — when the earthliness of the physical world recedes, the whisper of the hidden coal of Torah that is the basis of everything in existence and that gives it life can be discerned, and the coal then bursts into flame.

SUMMARY

The purpose of *shemittah* extends beyond the simple recognition that the land belongs to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and not to man.

The mitzvah's goal is for man to internalize that the Torah we were given at Har Sinai constitutes the life force implanted within existence and that Torah's fire must grow from being a hidden, flickering coal into a flame. Without Torah, there can be no life. This idea is the basis of the mitzvos that express and demonstrate that reality can be apprehended in different ways and that "life and death lie in the power of the tongue." In other words, man decides between the two, his actions and interpretation determining whether he tilts the world towards acknowledgment or denial of its spiritual core.

Bechukosai

Moving Beyond the Bounds of the Intellect's Grasp

☞ “If You Make Your Way in My Laws” — You Shall Toil in Torah

THE TORAH PROMISES great reward to those who follow its path: “If you walk with My laws, observe My commandments, and do them, I will bestow your rains in their season, the land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give its fruit” (*Vayikra* 26:3–4).

What does “walking with My laws” actually mean? The next words, “observ[ing] My commandments and do[ing] them,” refer to fulfilling the mitzvos. “Walking with My laws” must therefore denote some additional manner of adherence to the Torah.

In response to this difficulty, Chazal (in *Toras Kohanim*, *Bechukosai* 1) comment: “Walk with My laws’ — this means that you should toil in Torah study.” The relevance of the concept of “toiling in Torah” to the *pasuk*’s words requires further explanation.

Why is “toil” referred to as “walking?” Walking is a straightforward physical function that doesn’t require significant planning, while toiling in Torah denotes working intensely to fathom the depth and meaning of the Torah’s laws.

The Sefas Emes sharpens the question, pointing to the seeming contradiction between the idea of toiling in Torah, which presumes

the possibility of grasping the reasoning underlying the Torah's laws, and the word *bechukosai*, meaning "My laws" or "My statutes," which alludes to this toil. The term *chok* (in contrast to *mishpat*, meaning law or judgment) denotes a Torah injunction for which no reason is provided and whose reason in fact cannot be fathomed. The classic example of the term's use in this sense is in the *pasuk*, "*Zos chukas haTorah*, This is the statute of the Torah" (*Bamidbar* 19:2), which opens the section on the laws of the *parah adumah*. Chazal comment on these words (*Tanchuma*, *Chukas* 8), "To you (Moshe) I shall reveal the rationale [for the mitzvah] of *parah*, but to others, it shall remain a *chok*."

A *chok* thus denotes a law that we do not understand, whereas a scholar's toil in Torah focuses on understanding the Torah's laws and their underlying reasoning. How can following Hashem's "statutes," which cannot be understood, denote toiling to understand?

☛ Where Had David Hamelech Planned on Going?

COMMENTING ON THE *pasuk*, "If you walk with My laws," the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:1) identifies the act of walking as an integral component of a person's toil in Torah in that his feet carry him of their own accord to the *beis midrash*, demonstrating thereby that his innermost longing is to spend time there studying Torah. In this context, the Midrash cites the *pasuk*, "I calculated my ways, and I turned my feet towards Your testimonies" (*Tehillim* 119:59), commenting, "David [Hamelech] said, '*Ribbono Shel Olam*, each day I planned and said, "I will go to this place, to that dwelling, yet my feet carried me to *batei keneissiyos* and *batei midrashos*.'"'"

The Sefas Emes raises a question: according to the Midrash, David Hamelech hadn't originally planned on going to *batei keneissiyos* or *batei midrashos* but to some other place or house. "What," he asks, "were these 'places' or 'houses' that he originally wanted to go to?"

☞ Making One's Way from an Outward to an Inward Orientation

THE SEFAS EMES asserts that the Midrash doesn't mean to say that David Hamelech planned on reaching a certain physical destination and instead arrived at a different location. Rather, he explains, the Midrash is to be understood as follows:

A "dwelling" refers to the physical dwelling or sheath that houses a person's spiritual vitality; David Hamelech says that this plane of his existence was his intended destination.

In contrast to *malachim* that are referred to as *omdim*, standing or stationary (*Zechariah* 3:7), man is referred to as *mehalech*, a goer or mover, because his purpose in this world is to strive towards achieving the revelation that this world is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* dwelling place (see above, *parshiyos Shemini* and *Behar*).

The "place" and "dwelling" that David Hamelech wanted to reach refer to every individual source of spiritual vitality bestowed by Heaven. Where are these "places" to be found? Everywhere!*

Although this reality is cloaked by various external, physical layers, at its core, everything is essentially uniform and spiritual in nature. Man's role is to reveal this concealed reality of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sustaining all physical existence in the world on an ongoing basis, demonstrating that all we see around us is in fact merely a shell around a sublime, inner core.

"I calculated my ways" thus denotes the dependence of the revelation of this inner content upon man's thought and contemplation through which he identifies the spiritual kernel of truth within everything that he encounters.

A "way" denotes the path or distance between a destination and the search that precedes arriving there. Man inhabits

* It is related that as a child, the future Kotzker Rebbe was once asked where *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* can be found. He responded, "Wherever He is allowed in."

a physical world and resides within a body of flesh and blood; his eyes are not attuned to spirituality and Hashem's word that supports and sustains the world he sees around him. Man is far from his destination and must search for it. In practice, he doesn't maintain the awareness that "there is none besides Him; nothing else exists," that everything in existence represents a mere covering around the only reality — Hashem's will. Man is liable to perceive a false reality wherein that which he sees around him has independent existence. While engaged in his search for his destination, his spiritual situation therefore remains precarious, and his faith can waver.

Chazal indeed observe (*Yerushalmi, Berachos* 4:4) that "all ways (i.e., journeys) should be presumed dangerous." The stage of searching and wandering along the way is hazardous, because it can lead a person to err in matters of faith. Spiritual vitality is not evident; it is hidden and concealed, and man is liable to mistakenly assume that the physical entities he encounters have independent existence, divorced from any holy source.

"And I turned my feet towards Your testimonies (i.e., laws)" — a witness reveals to us a perception of reality that we lacked beforehand. Man's role in the world is to bear witness that everything was originally created and that it is constantly sustained solely through Hashem's will.

The *batei keneissiyos* to which the Midrash tells us that David Hamelech found his feet carrying him denote *kinus*, meaning ingathering and assembly. Man's task is to gather all the seemingly disparate units he sees around him within a single collective entity, to demonstrate that no reality whatsoever exists apart from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who sustains the entire universe.

☞ Two Levels in Serving Hashem

CONTINUING THIS LINE of thought, the Sefas Emes explains that there are two stages in a person's awareness that all he sees around

him represents an outer covering concealing the Divine vitality within it.

The first stage is that of intellectual awareness. This is important, but it isn't thoroughly assimilated into a person's being. It is comparable to a person knowing that a certain food is dangerous for him. His mind and better instincts usually suffice to keep him on the straight and narrow, but so long as the knowledge has not become part of him on the deepest level, he is not yet safe, and he is capable of deviating from the straight path.

The second stage takes place at the subconscious level, which exerts a stronger effect upon a person, determining his course even when his intellect is not at the fore. The promptings of the subconscious direct a person's course when his sight is obscured and his mind unclear. At this second stage, routine has become second nature, and the knowledge that was originally confined to a person's mind has become part of his essence.

The desired goal is for man to attain the second level of awareness.

What Hashem desires from man is his utter self-negation, along with all his desires, logic, and intellect, before Hashem's will. He wants man to set aside all his own desires and reasoning in favor of His will, such that his feet will carry him of their own accord to the *beis midrash*.

David Hamelech thus declares that he initially calculated his ways and followed the dictates of his intellect.

Subsequently, however, he attained a higher level at which his subconscious recognized the Creator's existence, and his feet carried him to the place where all of life's diverse details coalesce in accordance with the single intent that sustains them all — G-d's word.

How is a person to arrive at this second stage? By using his mind! He can use his mind to draw his knowledge and the pure faith that his intellect grasps deeper and deeper into his being until it penetrates his subconscious.

☞ Toiling in Torah Carries a Person beyond the Limits of His Understanding

THE SEFAS EMES now explains Chazal's interpretation of the words "if you walk with My laws" as "you should toil in Torah study."

On a more superficial level, man assumes that the highest attainment is that his mind grasps Hashem's word. However, upon reaching a deeper level, he concludes that the highest possible level is for him to negate his intellect before Hashem's word.

His toil thus extends beyond his intellectual grasp. Understanding is not the last word. A person needs to negate himself and continue exerting himself even beyond the limits of his understanding. The purpose of this toil is to sublimate the reaches of his subconscious and suffuse his entire being with his knowledge of G-d's existence.

The purpose and goal of a person's Torah study is to enable himself to negate himself to Hashem's will. This too is attained through intellectual exertion, although the culmination of this process is that his feet carry him of their own accord, for his entire being — his subconscious included — has become suffused with knowledge of G-d.

When a person pushes himself to the farthest reaches of his understanding, his goal is limited to the extent of his intellectual grasp. By contrast, when he serves Hashem even past the bounds of his understanding, his reach is unlimited.

The Sefas Emes asserts that by negating his intellect to that which lies beyond his intellectual grasp, a person can reach further and attain more.

Now we understand why the Torah conveys the obligation to toil in Torah with the words "if you walk in My laws." The goal of our toil must always be to raise ourselves to the level at which everything — even that which we imagine we understand — is a "statute" whose reasoning and rationale are ultimately concealed and unfathomable.

SUMMARY

The highest level of serving Hashem is when a person negates his intellect to Hashem's will, serving Him beyond the limits of the grasp of his understanding and suffusing his subconscious and his entire being with knowledge of Hashem. This is achieved by toiling to carry out Hashem's will that sustains everything in existence.

Indeed, "if you walk with My laws" conveys to us the demand "that you should toil in Torah study."

Bamidbar



There Is Nothing Besides the Creator, and There Is Nothing Besides the Torah

☞ The Relationship between a Thing's Content and the Place Where It Is Given

THE TORAH NOTES that when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* spoke to Moshe and instructed him to determine the number of Bnei Yisrael, this communication took place in the desert: “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai desert, in the Tent of Meeting” (*Bamidbar* 1:1). The difficulty is obvious: why make a point of mentioning the geographical location where this instruction was conveyed? Moreover, we already know this information, for it was only in the desert that Hashem spoke to Moshe from the *Ohel Mo'eid*, i.e., the *Mishkan*. There must therefore be some deeper connection between what was said and the place where it was said. We know that the Torah applies in all places and at all times, so what is significant about the fact that Hashem communicated with Moshe in the desert?

☞ Torah Is Given Only to the Person Who Feels That “There Is Nothing Else Besides It”

CHAZAL SUM UP this question in a few succinct words: “Why ‘in the Sinai desert’?” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 1:7).

Their answer is:

This is the source for the Sages' teaching that the Torah was given amid three phenomena:

1. Amid fire — as it says, “And the whole of Har Sinai was smoking” (*Shemos* 19:18);
2. Amid water — as it says [in reference to the Giving of the Torah], “Even the heavens dripped; even the clouds dripped water” (*Shofetim* 5:4);
3. Amid the desert — as it says, “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai desert.”

Why was it given amid these three phenomena? Just as these are freely available to all human beings, so are words of Torah freely available to all.

Chazal's point is that Torah is a vital resource that is available unconditionally to all who seek it. This explanation implies that in order for a person to absorb Torah, he must feel it to be as vital a necessity for him as water.

Torah is not for the individual who feels that life provides him with a menu full of choices from which he is free to choose either Torah or some alternative, equivalent pursuit. Torah is only given to the person who understands that all else is ultimately empty, like the desert; that all his other desires are insignificant, for life is impossible without Torah.

This is apparently the Maharal's intent when he writes in his *Discourse on the Torah* that, “This is why it is written, ‘They came to the Sinai desert,’ (*Shemos* 19:1), [where they would receive the Torah six days later], because man is lacking, being [made of] earth that is lacking, like a desert, and he therefore needs to be rendered complete.”

☛ In What Sense Is a Person

Expected to Become a Wilderness?

CHAZAL (*BAMIDBAR RABBAH* 1:7) cite a further explanation of why the Torah specifically notes that it was given in the desert: “An alternative

explanation: anyone who doesn't make himself ownerless, like a desert, is incapable of acquiring wisdom and Torah."

This answer clearly needs further elucidation. Chazal assert that the reason the Torah was given in the desert was that every recipient of Torah must render himself like the wilderness, desert-like, as a prerequisite to acquiring "wisdom and Torah."

What does this actually mean? Does learning Torah require that a person surrender all his self-esteem? Is he expected to negate his personality and individuality?

☛ Torah Is Given Only Where "There Is None besides Him"

TO ELUCIDATE ALL this, the Sefas Emes develops a very profound idea. The person who is afraid of the King and runs away from Him demonstrates his reluctance to encounter the King directly. He feels that he has an option of fleeing and escaping elsewhere where he need not confront the prospect of being in the King's presence. By contrast, the attitude of the desert shows readiness to acknowledge that "there is none besides Him" (*Devarim* 4:35).

The word *dabar*, which is related to *midbar*, refers to a leader or ruler, as in the *pasuk*, "*Yadbeir amim tachteinu*, He shall subjugate nations beneath us" (*Tehillim* 47:4). The Gemara has an expression, "*Dabar echad l'dor*, one leader for a generation" (*Sanhedrin* 7a).

The Torah is given to the person who negates himself and recognizes that he has no independent power to achieve beyond the vitality which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* instills in him. Associating this recognition with the idea of *hefker* — being ownerless and lacking any sense of self-importance — doesn't imply surrendering self-esteem or individuality. These qualities are necessary and are implanted in a person for a purpose; he needs to be fully in touch with them so that he can use them in the optimal manner. But he should not imagine that he is the source of his abilities and that he owes any success he enjoys to his own prowess. Whatever abilities a person

possesses are given to him on loan but actually belong to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Every person, with all his strengths and qualities, is wholly and constantly in the power of the Creator, “like clay in the hand of the potter,” and he should cultivate this awareness. This is the meaning of negating oneself like a desert. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* rests His *Shechinah* and gives His Torah wisdom only to the individual who recognizes man’s nothingness relative to the Creator’s greatness.

☞ Fearing Heaven Both in Private and in the Open

IN OUR PRELIMINARY morning prayers, we say, “A person should always fear Heaven in private and in the open.”

What does fearing Heaven “in the open” imply? After all, the person who doesn’t conduct himself in fear of Heaven when in private and does so only when in view of other people doesn’t fear Heaven even partially — he doesn’t fear Heaven at all. He is merely concerned about other people’s perception of him.

In line with the above approach, the Sefas Emes explains that “in private and in the open” refers to two aspects of the person himself.

Fearing Heaven in the open means being cognizant of the fact that the world operates with Divine supervision and that every act is performed in G-d’s presence. The knowledge that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* watches all the time and sees every deed prevents a person from sinning.

Fearing Heaven in private denotes an even deeper level of awareness that extends beyond intellectual awareness, instilling in a person the feeling that he is no more than “an axe in the hand of the hewer” and that not even his tiniest movement is independent of G-d’s input.

In the latter case, his fear of Heaven extends to every level of his being, suffusing even his subconscious and dictating every realm of his functioning such that his every limb attests that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sustains it and gives it vitality.

☞ Without Awareness That “There Is None besides Him,” Torah Study Isn’t Possible

A DIFFICULTY REMAINS: It is clear that unless a person feels that there is nothing of value besides Torah, he will not make sacrifices for it and will not succeed in grasping and understanding it. It is clear that the person who doesn’t acknowledge that “there is none besides Him” doesn’t fear Heaven and that his faith is incomplete. Why, though, should the person who doesn’t feel that “there is none besides Him” be incapable of acquiring wisdom and Torah?

To this, the Sefas Emes responds: “Because [only] to the degree that [amorphous] substance seeks completion does it merit receiving form. Thus, we find that at the moment of creation, there was initially nothingness, and only then, ‘There shall be light’ (*Bereishis* 1:3). This is why Torah was given in the desert, for a person must be aware that [without Torah], he is substance that lacks form.”

By way of elucidation, the Sefas Emes directs us to the Maharal’s comments, writing: “The Midrash states that the reason the Torah was given in the desert is because the person who doesn’t render himself like a desert won’t merit [learning] Torah. This can be understood according to the Maharal’s observations that everything possesses substance and form and that desert lacks any image. [Thus,] to the extent that a person is prepared to receive form, he will merit Torah, which is each thing’s inner vitality and its form.”

Let us explain these ideas.

☞ The Advantage Enjoyed by the Ground and by Human Beings over an Animal

THE MAHARAL’S COMMENTS in *Tiferes Yisrael* (Chap. 3) provide a key to understanding this topic. In explaining the *pasuk*, “Hashem... created man [out of] dust from the earth” (*Bereishis* 2:7), the Maharal wonders why this needs to be mentioned, for earth is the basis of every living thing. In this respect, man is no different than other animals.

The Maharal explains as follows:

Man is the only living creature possessing the potential to grow and develop beyond his present state. He has the capacity to actualize this potential by drawing upon his existing resources.

In the Maharal's words, "[The heavenly creatures of] the Upper Worlds exist in a fully developed state; they do not need to attain any further development." A *malach* neither grows nor develops; from the moment of its creation, it is endowed with its fullest spiritual form and properties.

The word for animal — *beheimah* — is comprised of the two words "*bah* (in it)" and "*mah* (what)." In other words, an animal's "what" — all of its instincts and abilities — is already "in it."

As the Maharal expresses it, "The fullness of anything that is created for His sake already exists within it."

Chazal (*Bava Kamma* 65b) rule: "A day-old ox is referred to as an ox; a day-old ram is referred to as a ram." Although a young animal indeed grows and matures physically, its essence undergoes no change. It has no untapped potential; it dies exactly the same animal it was born.

Therefore, says the Maharal, "With the exception of man, in the lower world as well there is no blossoming of potential, because no change takes place in the state in which a thing was created."

There is only one other creation that has the potential for yielding something new: the ground. With its capacity for growth and propagation, the ground produces a bountiful yield.

This is why the Torah states that man came from the ground, for both man and the ground are invested with the ability to promote growth, create, instill content, and fulfill potential.

"This," writes the Maharal, "typifies man, who is invested with potential which comes to fruition, and thus his name — *adam* — is appropriate, for it alludes to that feature which he shares with the *adamah* (the ground), which has the special property of cultivating the potential of the produce, plants, and everything else it yields. And such is man — his potential comes to fruition. His name is therefore fitting for him, and he suits his name."

In his discourses (*Discourse on the Torah*), the Maharal explains further that man's ability to actualize his potential and create is realized through Torah. A person who has no Torah knowledge is therefore akin to a desert, where there is no growth or vegetation.

This is why someone ignorant of Torah is referred to in Hebrew as a *bur*, which is also the term used for an empty, uncultivated piece of land where nothing grows.

An ignoramus is known as an *am ha'aretz*, because he remains like the *aretz*, like barren earth or ground.

The Maharal concludes: "And on account of man's deficiency in being like desert, he was given the Torah to render him complete, and then this earth yields its trees and vegetation."

In other words, man has been given Torah as the means of drawing out and developing his powers of creativity.

☞ The Prerequisite to Creativity Is a Sense of Being Deficient

IT SEEMS THAT the Sefas Emes's comments can now be understood.

Man has physical substance and a spiritual essence. To progress from being predominantly physical to his finished state, man must undergo a process of "self creation," developing and actualizing his latent potential.

In the words of the Sefas Emes, "To the extent that [physical] substance seeks completion, it will attain its spiritual] form."

The person who doesn't feel that his physical self is mere raw material and that his spiritual essence is still undeveloped doesn't engage in spiritual creativity. He will stay ignorant and cloddish, remaining a *bur* and an *am ha'aretz*. He lacks Torah and resembles a desert.

☞ Torah Provides Man's Greatest Expanse of Creativity

THE TORAH IS the means by which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world, and it is the medium through which He continues to operate

it. Torah thus holds the power of creativity. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* instills this power within man, provided man realizes that “There is none besides Him, and nothing exists apart from Him.”

In order to receive these Divine, creative powers, man must thoroughly absorb the knowledge that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* controls the world.

Torah is not given to man in order to empower him and give him intellectual advantage, says the Sefas Emes, but to the contrary, so that he will be able “to grasp Hashem’s will and comprehend the Torah.” Therefore, “The main thrust of toiling in Torah study should be to negate one’s own intellect and understanding [in order to absorb that of the Torah].”

The Sefas Emes explains that this is why “occupation with Torah study [must] be secondary to Torah’s leading role, [namely,] performing every deed solely in order to fulfill Hashem’s will and His desire, because ‘*Kudsha Brich Hu* created the world through the Torah’ (*Zohar, Hakdamah* 5a; see also *ibid.* Vol. II, 161a).”

It is now perfectly clear why, as the Sefas Emes writes, “To the extent that a person is ready to receive [spiritual] form, he will merit Torah, which is the inner vitality and the [spiritual] form of everything.”

The person who does not acknowledge that “there is none besides Him” remains without the ability to be spiritually creative, and “he cannot acquire wisdom or Torah.”

SUMMARY

The Torah was given in the desert to indicate that in order to acquire Torah, man must resemble a desert in two senses:

1. “There is nothing in existence besides Torah” — “for Torah [teachings] are our life” (second blessing of Maariv),

and anything else is wilderness. A person must feel that without Torah, he is parched, lacking any vital moisture.

2. “There is nothing else besides Him” — Torah holds the key to the Divine creativity, but these powers are only given to the person who absorbs into every fragment of his being — both his conscious mind and his hidden, subconscious mind — that vitality, comprehension, and ability are not man’s possession and are not under his control, but solely in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s control.

Unless a person recognizes this, he will remain incapable of innovation and creativity. Without acknowledging that “there is none besides Him,” he will be unable to develop his potential and will remain an ignoramus and an uncultivated wilderness.

Naso

The Wondrous Phenomenon of the *Nazir*

☞ What Is So Wondrous?

THE TORAH EMPOWERS a person to become a *nazir*, thereby rendering himself forbidden by Torah law to drink wine: “A man or woman who acts wondrously by making a separation vow to separate himself [from wine] for Hashem shall separate himself from new and old wine, must not drink new wine vinegar or old wine vinegar, and must not drink any grape beverage nor eat fresh or dried grapes” (*Bamidbar* 6:2–3).

Why does the Torah refer to this act as “setting oneself apart?”

The ability to create one’s own prohibitions through speech is not limited to undertaking *nezirus*. It is exercised when making any vow or oath, as the Torah writes, “A man who makes a vow to Hashem or who swears an oath to impose a restriction on himself shall not violate his word; he shall do according to whatever his mouth has uttered” (*ibid.* 30:3). In fact, the Rambam’s title for the section of his *Mishneh Torah* that deals with the laws of vows in general is *Sefer Hafla’ah*. Why is only a vow to become a *nazir* referred to as “setting oneself apart”?

In the Gemara (*Nazir* 29b), we find that although the Torah refers to an “*ish* (man) who makes a vow,” and the term *ish* usually excludes a minor under the age of bar or bas mitzvah, a minor within a year of attaining halachic maturity is actually also able to make a

vow. Chazal refer to such a minor as *mufla hasamuch l'ish*, “a wondrous individual close to maturity.” In other words, although he is close to becoming an *ish* but is not yet an *ish*, he is already able to take vows. The term *mufla* is thus applicable to anyone who is able make a vow. What is the wonder in making a vow?

Moreover, the Torah doesn't employ this term in relation to all vows. Only of the person making a vow of *nezirus* is it written, “A man... who acts wondrously, taking a vow...” How does a vow of *nezirus* differ from any other vow?

☛ A Wonder Denotes a Concealed, Inexplicable Phenomenon

THE VERB *PELE* is encountered elsewhere in the Torah, where it denotes the need to address a question of halachah to the *Sanhedrin*.

The Torah tells us, “When some matter of law is *yipalei mimcha*, beyond you, [whether it be distinguishing] between one [kind of] blood and another, between one [form of] judgment and another, or between one [kind of *tzaraas*] mark and another, becoming a matter of dispute [among the scholars] in your town...” (*Devarim* 17:8).

Rashi explains, “*Ki yipalei*, when it is beyond you’ — every expression of *hafla'ah* denotes separation and being apart, [i.e.] that this matter is separate and concealed from you.”

A *pele* thus denotes a phenomenon whose explanation is hidden, something inexplicable.

A miracle is therefore also referred to as a *pele* (*Shemos* 15:11) or *nifla'os* (*Tehillim* 78:11; 106:6, 22), because it has no apparent natural explanation.

☛ The Body-Soul Connection Is Another Wonder

IN THIS CONTEXT, the Sefas Emes cites the Rama's explanation (O.C. 6:1) as to why the *Asher Yatzar* blessing concludes with the words, “Healer of all flesh, Who acts wondrously.”

The Rama writes that this praise is on account of the way that “He keeps a person’s spirit inside him, binding a spiritual entity to a physical one, and [He does] all this through being the Healer of all flesh, for a person is then in perfect health, and his soul remains within him.”

The “wonder” referred to here is thus the bond between a person’s soul, which is wholly spiritual, and his body, which is material.

How does the soul keep the body alive? How is the soul assimilated into the body despite it and the body being two contradictory entities lacking anything in common? This is indeed a wondrous phenomenon!

☞ Body and Soul Are Not Mere Neighbors, but Become an Amalgam

THE SEFAS EMES explains moreover that the body and soul are not merely neighbors, coexisting side by side. They are in intimate contact, each of them blending into the other. Energy flows from the body to the soul and vice versa.

In his words, “Even within a person’s very soul there is some physical admixture.”

The body and the soul are engaged in a struggle. There are times when the body influences the soul and times when it is the other way around and the soul elevates the body. The body is created from earth, which is fundamentally inanimate, as alluded to in the Mishnah’s statement (*Avos* 1:17), “I found nothing more beneficial for the body than silence.”

Earth has mass, and unless it is moved, it will remain stationary. This conveys to man the message that he should maintain a certain laziness and reluctance to engage in physical pursuits.

The soul, by contrast, seeks to move; it needs space, renewal, and creativity.

Man's faculty of speech originates not with his body, but with his soul. It is thus written that upon the infusion of man's soul into his body, "Man became a living soul" (*Bereishis* 2:7), which *Onkelos* translates as "an articulate spirit."

☛ Speech Is a Physical Faculty That Affords the Soul Expression

IN HIS *NEFESH HACHAIM* (*Shaar* 3:5), R. Chaim of Volozhin explains that man has three components: thought, speech, and deed.

- thought is completely abstract, requiring no contribution on the body's part;
- deed is wholly physical;
- speech lies in between the two, resulting from the amalgam of body and soul.

On one hand, speech requires physical organs (the palate, throat, tongue, teeth, and lips).

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 65a) questions why a blasphemer receives lashes given the rule that lashes are only incurred for transgressing a negative precept that involves some physical act, which in this case is lacking, since all he did was speak. The Gemara responds, "Bending his lips [in order to form words] is [considered] an act." We find similarly in *Maseches Shabbos* (119b) that moving one's lips is considered an act.

On the other hand, speech expresses the speaker's thoughts. Speech that is uttered without prior reflection and lacks content is meaningless babble — it is not true speech. Speech reflects the landscape of the soul, giving form and expression to a person's thoughts and ideas.

Rabbeinu Bechayei (*Vayikra* 25:1) writes, "Human speech reveals hidden thoughts, as the *mussar* scholars have said: "The tongue is the quill of the heart."

The *Chovos Halevavos* (*Shaar Habechinah*, Chap. 5) likewise

wirtes, “The tongue is the quill of the heart, the soul’s mouthpiece, and the emissary of the subconscious.”

☞ The *Nazir* Creates a Wondrous Amalgam of Body and Soul

WHEREVER BODY AND soul are in contact, a fierce struggle between spirituality and physicality is underway.

Body and soul are polar opposites, each struggling on all fronts to gain the upper hand and determine whether the entire person will be wholly physically- or wholly spiritually-oriented. The fiercest battle, however, surrounds the mouth, which is where both body and soul operate in tandem.

The Sefas Emes explains, “If the soul’s foundations overpower the body, this is akin to the *nazir*, whose soul is dominant and who becomes holy.”

The *nazir*’s virtue lies in his ability to strike the correct balance between body and soul. He manages to take from this world all that he needs in order to survive and flourish while abstaining from wine, which provides physical enjoyment while beclouding the soul.

To be able to strike this perfect balance between body and soul is indeed something wondrous. Whereas every vow involves speech, the *nazir* finds the way to use his speech for balancing the influences of body and soul.

Without forgoing any of the drives that sustain life, he manages to reconcile them all and strike a wondrous balance whereby they all operate harmoniously.

As the Sefas Emes puts it, “This is the role of the *nazir* ‘who acts wondrously,’ whose soul gains dominance, which is a wondrous phenomenon, as they said, ‘Who acts wondrously,’ meaning that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* binds the soul to the body. And when the soul’s power is ascendant within him, he attains a powerful love of Heaven and forgets all worldly pleasures and therefore abstains from wine.”

SUMMARY

Man represents “a ladder whose feet stand on the ground yet whose head reaches the heavens” (*Bereishis* 28:12). Although he is physically rooted in the earth, his soul nevertheless aspires to the greatest heights.

Situated midway along this continuum is man’s faculty of speech, which on one hand involves physical movements but that affords expression to his thoughts and his intellect.

Speech can elevate a person to the upper heavens, as the *Chovos Halevavos* writes, “The tongue is the quill of the heart, the soul’s mouthpiece, and the emissary of the subconscious.”

At this point of contact between body and soul, the battle between spirituality and physicality — between the desire for pleasure on one hand and the search for what is ethical, just, and correct on the other — rages at its fiercest.

The individual who succeeds in finding the balance between these opposing urges, extracting that which is life-giving and rejecting that which obscures clarity, is the person “who acts wondrously.” This is the wondrous nature of the *nazir*, of “the man...who acts wondrously by making a separation vow for Hashem.”

Behaaloosecha

The Western Lamp and the Western Wall

☛ What Does a Person Elevate by Kindling a Flame in a Lamp?

AHARON WAS COMMANDED to enter the *Mishkan* daily and kindle seven lamps. Moshe was told, “Speak to Aharon and say to him, ‘When you light up the lights, [do so such that] the seven lights shine towards [the lamp of] the main shaft of the *Menorah*. Aharon did exactly so; he lit up the lamps towards [the lamp of the] main shaft of the *Menorah* just as Hashem had commanded Moshe” (*Bamidbar* 8:2–3).

The Torah refers to kindling the lamps as lighting them “up” or elevating them. Why should the simple act of lighting a flame and holding it next to a wick to set it alight refer to the flame’s upward direction when this isn’t determined by the person doing the lighting? Once he has lit the flame, it rises upward on its own.

Rashi’s response to this question is that the *kohen* lighting the *Menorah* had to hold the flame there long enough to ensure that the wick had caught fire properly to the point where the flame rose upward on its own.

In Rashi’s words: “*B’haaloosecha* (when you light up)’ — since a flame rises upward on its own, an expression of rising is used to refer to its kindling, for he needs to light it until the flame rises upward on its own.”

However, the word *b'haalosecha* means “when you cause it to go up,” and if this “going up” refers to the flame rising upward on its own, the *kohen* isn’t making anything rise. The question therefore remains: what exactly is the person kindling a flame in a lamp elevating or causing to rise?

☞ What Did Lighting the Menorah Achieve?

THE COMMANDMENT TO light the *Menorah* in the *Mishkan* and Beis Hamikdash raises a more serious question. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created light as well as the heavenly bodies whose light illuminates the world. Does the Source of all light require that a lamp be lit for Him? Granted, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* doesn’t have any need for our sacrifices either, but at least every sacrifice represents an act of service on the part of its owner whereby he obtains atonement and is restored to Heaven’s good graces.

Like the *Mizbei’ach*, the *Menorah* was one of the vessels used for the service in the Beis Hamikdash, but in what sense was lighting it an act of service?

Chazal respond to this question in the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 15):

This is the meaning of the *pasuk* “Hashem desires [to demonstrate to you and gain your attention] for the sake of His righteousness; He therefore increases Torah and strengthens it for you” (*Yeshayah* 42:21).” In other words. He instructs us to fulfill the mitzvos for our own benefit.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe, “I didn’t instruct you regarding the lamps because I need them, but for their (i.e., Bnei Yisrael’s) merit, as it says, ‘And light is to be found with Him’ (*Daniel* 2:22). (In other words, as the Source of light, He has no need for our light.) And it is written, “Darkness too doesn’t come from You, and [for You] night is as light as day” (*Tehillim* 139:12). This comes to teach you that He has no need for the lights of (i.e., lit by) flesh and blood.

Proof of this is that when a person builds a house, he makes the outer aperture of the window narrow and widens it towards the interior so that light will enter from outside and illuminate the interior. By contrast, when Shlomo built the Beis Hamikdash, he didn't do this, but made its windows narrow inside and widening towards the outside so that the light should radiate outwards from the Beis Hamikdash and illuminate the outside, as it says, "He made windows for the House that could be seen through yet were blocked" (*Melachim I* 6:4). This tells us that He is wholly light and that He has no need for their light.

And why, [therefore,] did He command you [to kindle the lamps of the *Menorah*]? In order to provide you with merit; therefore, it says, "when you light up the lamps" — meaning that this is a case of "Hashem desires [to instruct you]... for the sake of His righteousness."

This needs to be better understood, for it is untenable that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* should instruct us to perform any act that is wholly unnecessary and irrelevant simply in order to reward us for obeying Him. For example, it is hard to imagine there being a mitzvah to lift up a stone and then put it down simply in order to provide us with extra merit. What is the deeper significance of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* instruction to Aharon to daily light seven lamps in the *Mishkan*?

☞ Torah Represents Abstract Light, Whereas Mitzvos Represent Physical Light

IT IS WRITTEN, "For a mitzvah is a lamp, and Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23).

The Sefas Emes explains that the difference between these two types of light is qualitative rather than quantitative. Torah is likened to an independent source of illumination, whereas a mitzvah is likened to a lamp that must be lit by an outside fire. The lamp then becomes an extension of that external source.

Torah is wholly spiritual and abstract. By contrast, a mitzvah act is a physical deed carried out by the body and possibly involving other physical objects. Torah is a source of spiritual illumination. The burning fire of Torah finds expression in this physical world through performing mitzvah deeds. Torah's light and fire thereby spread to a person's physical dimensions.

In the Sefas Emes's words, "The mitzvos channel Torah's illumination into [physical] actions; they are referred to as 'lamps,' which serve as a substrate for light to exist [because physical light must have some physical source], because the mitzvos are from (i.e., are extensions of) the Torah."

☞ Lighting Up a Lamp, Thereby Transforming Earthenware into Light

THE WORD *NER* (lamp) is used by Chazal to refer to the vessel into which oil is poured and a wick is then placed and lit. This earthenware container is called the *ner* as though it itself is able to burn and provide light. Using an earthenware vessel in order to hold fire elevates the earthenware, rendering it a lamp, i.e., a light source. It is more than a mere piece of baked clay; it is a utensil that provides light.

The Sefas Emes explains that at its core, every creature contains Hashem's word that created it. This Divine word is a part of the holy Torah, for "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* looked into the Torah and created the world," as the *Zohar* writes (Vol. II, 141b). The words of the Torah serve as the basis for creation.

Ordinarily, this Torah lies deep within the physical sheath that encases it. However, whenever a person takes some physical object and uses it for fulfilling a mitzvah, which is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s command as it appears in the Torah, this arouses the inner holiness within the physical object and unites it with the holiness conferred on the object as a vessel for fulfilling one of Hashem's mitzvos.

The object's inner holiness thus finds external expression; its

spiritual light becomes apparent. This process represents the object's elevation and is paralleled by a piece of earthenware becoming a lamp that burns and illuminates. It is now clear why lighting a lamp is referred to as *ha'ala'ah*, elevating or lighting it up, for doing so raises it from being a simple potsherd to a source of illumination.

☞ Mitzvos as Vessels for Increasing Torah

THE SEFAS EMES uses this idea to explain the Mishnah in *Makkos* (3:16): "R. Chananyah ben Akashya says, '*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to provide Yisrael with merit; therefore, He increased Torah and mitzvos for them, as it says, "Hashem desires for the sake of His righteousness; He therefore increases Torah and strengthens it for you."'"

How do the mitzvos increase Torah and strengthen it? Surely, Torah is one thing and mitzvos are another; they are completely different, belonging to two distinct realms.

The answer is that through doing any mitzvah act, Torah's radiance extends into the physical realm. A mitzvah elevates a physical act to the heights of spirituality and holiness so that the Torah radiance that was concealed within it now bursts out, suffusing all realms of existence, including the physical, and defining their essence as vessels for fulfilling Hashem's will and as "objects of holiness." Earthenware becomes a lamp whose light shines brightly.

The Torah which was hidden within the physical object, bringing about its creation, has grown and intensified. This is the meaning of the *pasuk's* words, "He therefore increases Torah and strengthens it."

☞ Enlarging Torah through the Oral Torah

THE SEFAS EMES explains further: "This is the function of the Oral Torah, as it is within man's power, through the mitzvos, to draw Torah's illumination into all his deeds, as it says, 'For the matter is very close to you, to carry it out with your mouth and with your heart'" (*Devarim* 30:15).

Continuing the above line of thought, the meaning of this statement seems self-evident. The Rambam writes (in his Introduction to his fourteen-volume *Mishneh Torah*):

All the mitzvos that were given to Moshe at Sinai were given along with their full elucidation, as it says, “And I shall give you the stone tablets and the Torah and the mitzvah” (*Shemos* 24:12). “Torah” refers to the Written Torah; “and the mitzvah” refers to its elucidation. And He commanded us to fulfill the “Torah” according to “the mitzvah,” and this “mitzvah” is that which is called the Oral Torah.

The process of the Written Torah’s clarification through the Oral Torah parallels the process of Torah’s spread into the physical realm through the fulfillment of the mitzvos.

The mitzvos facilitate Torah’s growth and its extension beyond the abstract realm into the physical world, resulting in the outward spread of the spiritual spark contained within the mitzvah object.

The Oral Torah uses the written words to conquer new vistas. By using his physical organs of speech, man enables Torah to spread and extend into new realms. This is “increasing Torah” in the truest sense.

☞ The Lamps’ Eternal Relevance

SOME MITZVOS ARE one-time events. Some mitzvos are a function of the arrival of a certain time or circumstance. All of the above mitzvos confer special elevation, and a person fulfilling one of these mitzvos makes the special *Shehecheyanu* blessing.

Other mitzvos are part of daily routine, and their effect is steady and incremental, as described by the *pasuk*, “Stones are worn away by water” (*Iyov* 4:19).

The *Menorah*’s lamps were lit daily as part of the daily service, but they also had eternal consequences.

Rashi (*Bamidbar* 8:2) notes the juxtaposition of the section mentioning the mitzvah of kindling the lamps (at the beginning of *parshas B’haalosecha*) with that of the dedication sacrifices brought by the *nesiim* (directly preceding it at the conclusion of *parshas*

Naso). He comments that giving Aharon the privilege of lighting the Menorah was intended as compensation for Levi not bringing a dedication sacrifice along with all the other *nesiim*: “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him, ‘Yours is greater than theirs, for you kindle and prepare the lamps.’” The source of this explanation is a Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:6), where Chazal note that Aharon was dismayed that every *nasi* brought a sacrifice for the dedication of the *Mizbei’ach* expect for him. When Aharon expressed his concern that “perhaps the tribe of Levi is suffering on my account,” *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him, “Don’t worry, you are destined for something greater. The sacrifices are brought only so long as the Beis Hamikdash stands, whereas the lamps ‘shall shine towards the main shaft of the *Menorah*’ forever.”

This is astonishing, for the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash brought not only the sacrifices to an end, but lighting the *Menorah* as well. In what sense is kindling the *Menorah*’s lamps eternal?

☞ The Light of the Western Lamp Shines in Secret

TO ANSWER THIS question, the Sefas Emes cites the remarks of his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, who explains this in light of the Gemara (*Shabbos* 21b), which comments on the *pasuk*, “Outside the partition of testimony Aharon shall set up [the *Menorah*]” (*Vayikra* 24:3) that the *Menorah* provided testimony to the world’s inhabitants that *Shechinah* rests upon Yisrael.

“What was the testimony? Rav said, ‘[This refers to] the western lamp, into which he put the same quantity of oil as the other lamps yet [which continued burning miraculously such that] he lit [the other lamps the following evening] from it, and he finished [preparing the lamps] with it.’”

The *Chiddushei HaRim* asserts that in reality, the western lamp continues burning to this day.

With the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the *Menorah* was hidden, but its western lamp was never extinguished, and it continues

burning in hiding. This is the source of all spiritual illumination in the world. This is the meaning of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s assurance to Aharon that "Yours (i.e., your service of kindling the lamps) shall endure forever."

☞ The Western Lamp Infuses the Holy into the Mundane

THE SEFAS EMES weaves his explanation of the *Chiddushei HaRim*'s comments into the above ideas regarding the nature of the *Menorah*'s light.

The *ner maaravi* (western lamp) is etymologically related to *eruv*, meaning a mixture. *Maarav* (west) is the direction in which the sun sets, when fading daylight gradually "mixes" with darkness as day turns into night. The western lamp, says the Sefas Emes, thus represents "the mixing and the connection of every [physical] thing with the vitality of its inner [spiritual] light."

As with any other mitzvah object, this lamp symbolizes drawing forth the Torah's spiritual illumination — namely, G-d's word through which He created and sustains the world and which is at the core of every creature's physical existence — into the physical realm.

Although the physical *Menorah* of the Beis Hamikdash is no longer with us, we retain the bond between the spiritual and physical realms which it represented, as the Torah's "light of the seven days [of creation]," which is the source of all light, was drawn into a physical wick, thereby elevating it from a mundane object into a mitzvah object.

This light continues shining forever, because the Torah, which is the source of light, is eternal. Hashem's word endures forever. With the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the sacrificial service ceased, and the pathway it afforded to the attainment of closeness to Hashem was drastically diminished. However, the ability to draw out abstract, inner spiritual light so that it illuminates the physical realm, represented by lighting the *Menorah*, remains with us forever.

It is possible everywhere "to light up a constant light" (*Vayikra*

24:2). A lamp can be kindled even at a great distance from the source of light, thereby drawing out Torah's glowing light and banishing a great deal of darkness. Torah's holiness suffuses the physical realm of existence. As the Sefas Emes writes, this is therefore a mitzvah "that endures forever, for the main function of lighting the lamps was to draw out Torah's light into the very world of deeds and [spiritual] concealment."

☛ The Western Lamp and the Western Wall

THE ABOVE IDEAS beautifully elucidate the following comments of the *Shelah* (*parshas Tetzaveh*, *Torah Ohr* 3):

The testimony is provided by the western lamp, for it was decreed that the Western Wall should not be destroyed. Even after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, some impression of the *mikdash* remains in the form of the Western Wall. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* left this sign that the *Shechinah* will never depart from Yisrael, even during the exile when the *Menorah* is extinguished and "He has made me dwell in deep darkness" (*Eichah* 3:6). This shows that in fact light will result from the darkness, and in the future, we will have far more light than darkness.

The western lamp corresponds to the Western Wall that will never be destroyed, regarding which Chazal (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 9:4) observe: "The *Shechinah* has never budged from the Western Wall." This indicates that there is a part of the Beis Hamikdash that is eternal and unaffected by the *churban*. This eternal part corresponds to the light that constantly glowed in the western lamp of the *Menorah*.

This is the abstract idea of the inner spark of holiness that ignites a fire that spreads throughout every realm of existence. Within this inner furnace, a core of holiness burns forever and ever.

☛ "Man's Soul Is Hashem's Lamp"

WITHIN MAN'S HEART burns an inner core of holiness — his soul.

The word *nefesh* (soul) is composed of the initial letters of the

words *ner* (lamp), *pesilah* (wick), and *shemen* (oil). Every person houses an earthenware lamp. It contains a wick, which is the channel along which spirituality and holiness can be drawn into the physical realm, as well as oil, which serves as the source and the fuel of the fire that transforms a physical vessel into a source of abstract light.

By using this combination together to light the fire of holiness, the earthenware is elevated to become a lamp — from something physical to something spiritual — that radiates light to its surroundings. This elevates the physical plane to the spiritual plane.

Fire is the one commodity that owes its existence to the destruction of physical matter. Perhaps this is why when a person departs this world and his body decomposes whereas his soul endures, a lamp is lit to benefit his soul.

SUMMARY

The Torah speaks of elevating a lamp rather than simply lighting it because it symbolizes the elevation of a physical vessel and its transformation into a source of abstract, spiritual illumination.

The lamps of the *Menorah* in the Beis Hamikdash were lit constantly, every day, as if to draw out abstract, spiritual illumination — the light of the seven days of creation — and imbue holiness and spirituality into the dark, physical world. The western lamp merged the holy with the mundane, greatly elevating the latter.

The western lamp continues burning with an everlasting fire, like the Western Wall, from where the *Shechinah* has never departed. Our task is to draw this great light into every realm of our existence, thereby banishing the darkness.

Shelach

Mitzvah Emissaries Come to No Harm

☛ What Was the Spies' Sin, and What Led to Their Mission's Unfortunate Outcome?

THE DISPATCH OF spies to the land of Canaan ended up in major misfortune for Bnei Yisrael. At first glance, it is difficult to understand how such an outcome resulted when the spies were sent after Hashem commanded that the mission be undertaken. The Torah tells us, “Hashem spoke to Moshe to say, ‘Send for yourself men to spy out the land of Canaan that I am giving to Bnei Yisrael; one man for each tribe of their fathers shall you send, each of them leaders among them’” (*Bamidbar* 13:1).

How could a mission undertaken in response to Hashem’s command result in such misfortune?

Noting the *pasuk*’s precise wording — “*Shelach lecha*, Send **for yourself**” — Rashi explains that Hashem conveyed to Moshe to “send [spies] *at your own discretion*; I am not instructing you to do so. If you want to, send [them].”

The Ramban questions this explanation: “In that case, Moshe himself was guilty, as he said when addressing Bnei Yisrael, ‘And I viewed the matter [of sending the spies] positively’ (*Devarim* 1:23).”

Why were all of Bnei Yisrael penalized with wandering in the desert for forty years and all the men who had left Egypt prevented from reaching the promised land, instead dying in the desert and being buried amid its emptiness, with no tombstone or marker?

The Ramban asks further how the spies sinned altogether when

they apparently brought back an accurate report regarding the points Moshe told them to investigate.

“What did the spies do?” asks the Ramban. “They were supposed to respond to what he had instructed them. What crime or sin did they commit by telling him, ‘Yet the people are fierce, and the cities are large and fortified’ (ibid. *pasuk* 28) — did he send them in order to bring back false testimony?!”

☞ The Object of the Command to Send Spies

THE SEFAS EMES explains this entire episode in light of the comments of the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 16:1) concerning the special nature of a mitzvah errand.

It is generally forbidden to embark on a sea voyage within three days of Shabbos. The goal is to avoid being at sea over Shabbos and the possibility of needing to desecrate Shabbos to save a life, which is preventable by setting out earlier in the week. But it is permissible to set out on any day of the week if the trip is to accomplish a mitzvah. A mitzvah emissary’s goal sets aside the concern of potential *chillul Shabbos*. Mitzvah emissaries are similarly exempt from dwelling in a *sukkah* for, as the Midrash says, “No one is more precious to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* than an emissary dispatched to perform a mitzvah who wholly devotes himself to the success of his mission.”

As an example of mitzvah emissaries who dedicated themselves completely to the success of their mission, the Midrash cites the two spies who were sent by Yehoshua bin Nun, as it says, “Yehoshua bin Nun sent two men from Shittim as spies *cheresh* (in secret), telling them, ‘Go and see the land’” (*Yehoshua* 2:1). “Our teachers taught: these [two men] were Pinchas and Kaleiv, and they went wholly devoted and succeeded in their mission.”

The Midrash asks what the word *cheresh* means and says, “Don’t read it as *cheresh* (ending in *shin*, meaning secretly); read it *cheres* (ending in *sin*, meaning earthenware). This tells us that they posed as potters and would announce, ‘Here are pots! Whoever wants, come

and buy!’ Why did they go to such lengths? So that the populace shouldn’t be aware of them and shouldn’t say that they were spies... to teach you the extent of these two righteous men’s dedication to their mission, whereas the emissaries who Moshe sent were evildoers.”

These comments raise several difficulties:

1. The Midrash states, “No one is more precious to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* than an emissary dispatched to perform a mitzvah.” Does this imply that involvement in carrying out a mission is somehow of greater significance than actually achieving the mission’s goal?
2. The twelve spies who Moshe sent were also mitzvah emissaries. In what way did they differ from the two spies sent by Yehoshua that can account for the very different outcomes of these two missions?
3. Since the word *cheresh* can be understood simply as meaning “in secret” — which is perfectly apt when dispatching spies, which is usually done with the utmost secrecy — what prompts the Midrash to interpret the word as a reference to earthenware, indicating that the spies adopted the guise of sellers of earthenware pots? And what particular dedication did adopting this disguise involve?

☛ Had They Conducted Themselves as Mitzvah Emissaries They Would Have Had Heavenly Assistance

THE SEFAS EMES cites the comments of his grandfather the *Chid-dushei HaRim*, who offers the following elucidation:

Hashem was not happy about the people sending spies. He had already promised them that the land was good, and it was He Who had taken them out of Egypt and was about to bring them into Eretz Yisrael. How could they possibly feel the need to investigate whether the land was good? Such a request was clear evidence that they lacked faith in Him and were doubting His ways.

Sending spies on such a basis would be a virtual guarantee of the mission's failure and consequent misfortune and heartbreak.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu's command to send spies offered an opportunity to save the people from such an outcome. How so?

If a person undertakes an endeavor that accords with his own, private agenda and doesn't find favor in Heaven's eyes, his efforts cannot succeed. However, if he negates his own program and undertakes the venture solely because Hashem commands that it be done, it will merit heavenly assistance and will enjoy success.

The only way that the spies sent by Moshe could ensure the success of their mission was by negating their own wishes before those of Hashem in the manner of loyal emissaries carrying out their mission solely on behalf of their dispatcher, without any personal agenda.

Thus, although the plan to send spies indeed originated with Bnei Yisrael, once they had been commanded by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to do so, they ought to have surrendered their own wishes and dispatched the spies solely because of Hashem's command. If the enterprise would have been undertaken only in order to fulfill Hashem's wishes, it would have succeeded, and their lives would have been spared.

Hashem's command to Moshe to send spies is therefore prefaced with the words, "Hashem spoke to Moshe, to say." Where is there any message here for Moshe to convey to others? After all, he himself carried out Hashem's instructions to send the spies. The words "to say" must therefore mean that Moshe was charged not only with sending the spies, but also with telling them that they were serving as mitzvah emissaries and that they were expected to act accordingly, negating their own intentions to that of their Dispatcher and abandoning any agenda of their own. Had they done so, their mission would have been crowned with success.

☛ Only the Emissary Who Negates Himself Represents His Dispatcher

THE SEFAS EMES explains that fulfilling a mission as an emissary is wholly dependent upon the purity of the emissary's intentions. A

true emissary fulfills his dispatcher's wishes solely and exclusively. If he is also acting out of self interest and following his own agenda, he is representing himself **and is not an emissary at all**.

For example, when an emissary contracts a marriage bond with a woman on behalf of another man, even if he tells her, "Behold you are betrothed **to me**" but intends that she be married to the dispatcher, she is in fact married to the dispatcher. The emissary is thus completely negated to his dispatcher — he surrenders his own identity, adopting that of his dispatcher. Halachah therefore dictates that "a person's emissary is equal to him," regarding the emissary as an extension of and at one with the dispatcher. It is thus crucial to the mission that the emissary set aside any agenda of his own.

☛ Yehoshua's Spies Resembled Earthenware

YEHOShUA SENT PINCHAS and Kaleiv "as spies, in secret." It is apparently unnecessary to tell us that these spies were dispatched secretly, for every spy must go about his business surreptitiously in order to avoid detection. Chazal therefore conclude that some extra information is being conveyed regarding the character of their mission and that the word *cheresh* should instead be read *cheres*, denoting earthenware. What is conveyed by this reinterpretation?

A golden vessel, for example, enjoys special distinction. It is beautiful as well as valuable, its monetary value by far exceeding the worth of the use that is made of it.

By contrast, an earthenware vessel is coarse and plain, lacking any particular distinction. Its worth depends solely on the use it serves, as its substance is virtually worthless.

In this respect, the person who embarks on a mission must resemble earthenware, lacking any self-importance, negating himself entirely to the wishes of his dispatcher. He must see himself solely as a tool that is wielded by the hand of his dispatcher — this is the crux and essence of his mission.

Such was the mission of the spies sent by Yehoshua. Their

dedication lay in utterly negating any agenda of their own and rendering themselves like “earthenware vessels.”

☛ The Spies’ Sin

WE NOW APPRECIATE that the twelve spies whom Moshe sent sinned by holding on to their own agenda, and this is what led to their failure. As the Sefas Emes writes, their fault lay in their failure to realize “that their mission was not to carry out their own wishes and discern whether the land was good; rather, they should have negated their own wishes before those of Hashem, Who sent them.”

By contrast, the special quality of the spies whom Yehoshua sent lay in them rendering themselves like “earthenware,” emissaries who have no stake whatsoever of their own. This is why they succeeded.

☛ Filling the Role of a Mitzvah Emissary Is of Greater Significance Than Fulfilling the Mitzvah’s Purpose

THE SEFAS EMES adds that with every mitzvah that a person undertakes, he is acting as a “mitzvah emissary.” When fulfilling a mitzvah, he should negate his own wishes to those of his dispatcher. Doing so amounts to sacrificing or surrendering himself for his mission.

This type of dedication doesn’t involve endangering oneself or making any unusual effort. Rather, it is a function of the purity of his intentions. The extent to which one negates himself before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* confers on him the status of an emissary. This is why the Midrash praises these individuals for acting as mitzvah emissaries even more than for actually fulfilling the mitzvah. As the Sefas Emes explains, “The desire, readiness, and yearning to fulfill the mitzvah are the main thing. This is what will ensure the success of his mission — fully devoting himself to it.” The extent to which a person serves as an emissary is thus even more significant than the outcome, for it is the key to the ultimate success of his mission.

☛ Mitzvah Emissaries Come to No Harm

CHAZAL (*PESACHIM* 8A) lay down the principle that “mitzvah emissaries come to no harm.” In light of the above, this is readily understood, for they are acting as emissaries of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in fulfilling the mitzvah, and as we have seen, “A person’s emissary is **equal to him**.” An emissary of Hashem in fulfilling a mitzvah thus merits filling a tremendously powerful role. If only a person negates his own wishes, he attains a sublime spiritual level at which the misfortunes of this world have no power over him. It is thus the person who renders himself “earthenware,” by wholly negating himself, who merits the most sublime standing possible.

☛ The Episode of the Spies Yields a Lesson of Universal Relevance

THE SEFAS EMES explains: “This Midrash actually conveys a message about life in this world, in which man is dispatched, [the world] being a place of [spiritual] danger, where everything is vanity and heartbreak — the antidote to this being keeping mitzvos.”

It is possible to steer clear of the various hazards of this world by regarding oneself as a mitzvah emissary entrusted with fulfilling mitzvos and focusing solely on doing Hashem’s will, totally negating one’s own agenda.

☛ How Does One Negate Oneself?

THE TORAH’S ACCOUNT of the episode of the spies teaches us that man can only overcome the spiritual obstacles of this world by filling the role of a mitzvah emissary who sets aside his own desires in favor of those of his Dispatcher. If, though, he is full of self-importance in everything he does, he will find it hard to negate himself when he wants to fulfill a mitzvah. A person should therefore conduct himself in all realms of life with the same connection to and self-negation towards *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

This lesson was first conveyed through the episode of the spies, referred to in Hebrew as the *meraglim*. The word *meragel* is related to *hergel*, meaning a habit or routine. A person should therefore accustom himself, recommends the Sefas Emes, “to draw Torah’s illumination into his routine and [assimilate it into] his nature.”

“Torah teachings are relevant to all generations,” he adds, “because when a person dissociates himself from physicality and desires [in order] to discern Hashem’s glory within every thing, he will be able to search, seek, and find the illumination hidden within every place.”

The *Zohar* thus writes (Vol. III, 160a) that the *meraglim* visited the city of Chevron, for the learned Jew who occupies himself with studying the Oral Torah is known as a *chaver*. In other words, all his deeds follow the Torah, and he himself has a connection to the Torah. We therefore pray (in the early morning blessings), “*shetar-gileinu b’sorasecha*, that You should make us used to Your Torah,” meaning that we should draw Torah’s illumination into our routine and ordinary affairs through fulfilling mitzvot as mitzvah emissaries who have no personal agenda of their own.

SUMMARY

An emissary’s worth is measured by the purity of his intentions.

The spies’ sin lay in harboring personal interests while engaged in fulfilling their mission.

With every single mitzvah we fulfill, we are acting as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s emissaries. If we render ourselves like fragile earthenware that boasts no self-importance whatsoever and our sole aspiration is to fulfill our Creator’s will, we will attain the standing of mitzvah emissaries who are spared from all harm, and we will successfully avoid all the spiritual hazards of this world.

Korach

Discord Heralds the Abandonment of Mankind's Mission

☛ Dispute as a Sin between Man and Man

BNEI YISRAEL WERE living peacefully in the desert. The *Shechinah* rested upon the *Mishkan* that stood in the center of their encampment, Moshe taught them Torah, their sustenance descended from heaven daily in the form of *man*, and they enjoyed an abundant water supply from Miriam's Well. And then, their tranquil existence was shattered by the eruption of an internal dispute.

The Torah tells us:

Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took himself aside [together] with Dasan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and Ohn, the son of Peles, of the children of Reuven. They rose up before Moshe together with two hundred and fifty men of Bnei Yisrael, leaders of the community, delegates to meetings, men of renown. They congregated against Moshe and Aharon and said to them, "You have [arrogated] to yourselves too much [greatness], for the entire community, all of them, are holy, and Hashem is among them, so why do you elevate yourselves over Hashem's congregation?" (*Bamidbar* 16:1–3)

At first glance, the dispute sprung from longstanding jealousy, with each of the participants aspiring to serve as *kohen gadol*.

Rashi explains the words "Korach...took" as follows: "He took himself to one side to be divided from the community to protest

[the awarding of] the priesthood [to Aharon]. This is the meaning of Onkelos's translation [of the word *vayikach*, he took,] as, 'He broke away' — he became divided from the rest of the community to maintain [his] dispute. The verb has a similar meaning in the *pasuk*, '*Mah yikachacha libecha*, Why is your heart taking you?' (*Iyov* 15:12), meaning '[Over what] is your heart taking you [away and] dividing you from other people?'"

We usually consider stirring up a feud as an interpersonal failing, because dividing a community leads to quarrels and disputes among its members. From Chazal's comments, however, it is clear that the implications of this shortcoming are much more far-reaching.

☛ In What Sense Was Korach Taking Issue with the Torah?

IT IS CLEAR from the Midrash that Korach wasn't only challenging Moshe and Aharon, but the Torah itself.

This is the manner in which Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:14) interpret the *pasuk*, "A brother who rebelled *mikiryas oz* (against the stronghold), and his combatants are like the beam securing the palace' (*Mishlei* 18:19) — this refers to Korach who rebelled against the Torah, which is [called] *oz*, strength, as it says 'Hashem shall impart strength to His People; Hashem shall bless His People with peace' (*Tehillim* 29:11)." To what aspect of Korach's dispute are Chazal referring here? In what sense did he take issue with the Torah?

☛ How Was Korach Taking Issue with Shabbos?

IN THE *ZOHAR* (Vol. III, p. 176a), we find that the effects of Korach's deeds were even farther reaching, exerting an effect upon the world's ultimate rectification and bringing him into conflict with Shabbos:

Korach maintained a dispute in both the upper and lower worlds.
He who wishes to take issue with the world's rectification is lost

from all worlds. Dispute destabilizes peace, and he who takes issue with peace takes issue with the Holy Name, for the Holy Name is *Shalom* (Peace). Come and see, the world endures only through peace. When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world, the world was unable to endure permanently until He came and imposed peace upon it. And what was that [peace]? Shabbos, which makes peace between the upper and lower realms, and [only] then did the world gain permanence and endure. And whoever disputes it will be lost from the world.

In what sense is a person who engages in dispute taking issue with Shabbos, which is at the foundation of the world's creation?

☞ Why Is the Object of a Dispute Held Accountable?

A FURTHER DIFFICULTY in understanding this episode arises from the comments of the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 110a), where Chazal interpret the *pasuk*, “Moshe arose and went to Dasan and Aviram” (*Bamidbar* 16:25) as follows: “Reish Lakish said, ‘From here we see that a person should not perpetuate a quarrel... Whoever maintains a quarrel transgresses a negative precept, as it says, ‘So that he shall not be like Korach and his community’ (ibid. 17:5).”

From this Gemara, it is evident that had Moshe not gone to Dasan and Aviram in an attempt to reconcile with them, he would have transgressed the prohibition against behaving like Korach and perpetuating a dispute. This is astonishing, for it was not Moshe who initiated the quarrel! Was Moshe truly expected to appease these quarrelsome troublemakers in order to avoid being lumped together with them? How can he possibly be regarded as equal to Korach and his band solely for failing to attempt reconciliation with an envious rival? Is a person liable to transgress the prohibition of being like Korach even when he didn't initiate the dispute and is not quarreling with or complaining against anyone but is actually the victim of another person who is insanely jealous of him and has picked a quarrel? How are we to understand all this?

☞ How Can Unity Breed Disparity?

THE SEFAS EMES gets to the root of the matter, examining the essential nature of discord and conflict.

In *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* (Chap. 3), we encounter the idea that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who preceded creation, is the ultimate unity, as we affirm twice daily, “Hear Yisrael, Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One” (*Devarim* 6:5). His unity is His essence — “Hashem is One, and His Name is One” (*Zechariah* 14:9). This unity is singular and unique, as the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 1:7), “No other single entity in the world parallels His unity, neither something that comprises other individual units nor something that is a single unit [but] is divisible into parts and extremes — rather, [His is] unity [of a quality] altogether unparalleled in the world.” This unity arises from the fact that nothing else can possibly equal Him. In *Derech Hashem* (Part I, Chap. 1), the Ramchal writes similarly, “A person must be aware that Hashem’s existence is an elemental existence, devoid of any composite nature and multiplicity whatsoever.”

The question thus arises as to how disparate entities can arise from a Source that is synonymous with utter and complete unity.

In other words, since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is the ultimate in unity yet at the same time is also the origin of everything in existence, how is it possible that different, disparate, and even contradictory and antagonistic entities come from Him? An apple tree will not sprout an orange; how can opposites emerge from an Entity whose essence is unadulterated unity? How can unity contain contrasts?

☞ He Makes Peace in His Heights

THE SEFAS EMES’S answer to this conundrum is that it is based upon a faulty assumption.

The question assumes that the world is comprised of disparate elements that are hostile and mutually exclusive. The solution to the problem lies in appreciating that any disparity exists solely in the eye

of the beholder. At their root, all these different phenomena are one. There is no disparity, because at the root of everything in existence is its innermost spiritual core that sustains it — Hashem’s word!

When Hashem is referred to as “making peace in His high places” (*Iyov* 25:2), this means that at the most sublime and highest dimension of existence, peace and unity prevail.

Accordingly, we find Chazal (*Tanchuma, parshas Vayigash* 6) explaining the *pasuk*, “Dominion and fear are with Him; He makes peace in His high places” (ibid.) in the following manner:

“Dominion” — this refers to [the *malach* named] Michael;

“and fear” — this refers to [the *malach* named] Gavriel.

Michael is water and Gavriel is fire, [yet] they stand [together] before the *Shechinah* and do each other no harm. This is the meaning of the words, “He makes peace in His high places.”

In other words, Michael is the heavenly prince of the sea, representing Heaven’s kindness and mercy, which are likened to water that symbolizes abundance for all. Gavriel, by contrast, is the heavenly prince of fire, representing Heaven’s trait of judgment that is likened to fire, which burns and consumes. Although water and fire — judgment and mercy — are complete opposites, since Michael and Gavriel are *malachim* serving Hashem, there is no discord between them, and each of them fulfills Hashem’s will in his own way, for their Master is One. This is why the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael* refers to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* as both Hashem (His Name that represents His trait of mercy) and *Elokeinu* (His Name that represents His trait of judgment). No duality is implied, *chalilah*. These are merely different facets of a single Ruler.

☞ Torah as the Unifying Factor of Creation

EVERY CREATURE IN existence plays a unique role. In this respect, it resembles a *malach*. Yet every creature also shares a single, identical purpose: to fulfill Hashem’s will.

Moreover, everything is sustained at any given moment by Hashem's word that created it and that is constantly creating it anew. "Hashem's word" is another way of referring to the Torah, for the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 161b) states that "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* looked into the Torah and created the world." Torah is thus the factor unifying and sustaining all of creation.

When each creature sets aside its own agenda in favor of fulfilling Hashem's will and the Torah's laws, this inner, unifying factor is revealed.

☞ "Shabbat Shalom"

CREATION'S ULTIMATE UNITY finds expression each week on Shabbos. Throughout the six weekdays, each person is busy in his own sphere of activity, be it predominantly related to the material or to the spiritual realm, attempting to fulfill his own, unique mission in the world. With Shabbos's arrival, however, everyone ceases his work, and it becomes apparent that all share a common goal of fulfilling Hashem's will. Everyone travels a different path, but when the activities charting these paths are set aside, it becomes clear that all share the same Dispatcher and all are striving to fulfill His will. This unity is clear and straightforward. "In His high places" — the sublime, spiritual dimension which enters the world on Shabbos — peace prevails, not only among *malachim*, but also among all creatures in the world.

"He shall impose peace upon us" (as we say at the conclusions of *kaddish* and *Shemonah Esrei*) means that just as there is no conflict between Michael and Gavriel, who in essence are both servants of the same King, so too on Shabbos, it is apparent that there is no conflict among people, each of whom is created to carry out his own unique mission but is identical in having to fulfill the will of the One King and obey Him. Shabbos thus gives expression to Hashem's Name of unity (i.e., that unites judgment and mercy) and expresses peace. This is the meaning of our Shabbos greeting, "*Shabbat shalom*."

☞ Unity Is Undone by the Introduction of Personal Bias

A COMMON DESIRE to fulfill Hashem's will and the recognition that man has no other agenda whatsoever besides the need to fulfill this will fosters unity. This typifies a *malach*, who exists solely to serve Hashem. Michael, prince of water, and Gavriel, prince of fire, work together harmoniously, putting aside any "personal" agenda in order to do only that which Hashem commands them.

An orchestra comprises many different instruments, but when each one sounds its part of the same symphony, follows the lead of the same conductor, and plays only what must be heard for the sake of the melody's integrity, perfect harmony results.

What shatters unity is the selfish interest of the emissary. If, for personal reasons, any member of the orchestra attempts to make himself heard on his own and doesn't follow the music or the conductor's directions, this ruins not only the harmony, but the melody itself.

The wisest of men thus says, "Selfish desire seeks out solitude" (*Mishlei* 18:1). When a member of a group follows a personal agenda, this destroys the group's unity, for each individual has desires of his own which he must sublimate to the common goal in the interest of unity.

A true emissary has no personal agenda beyond fulfilling his dispatcher's wishes. If he also takes his own desires into account, he ceases to be an emissary; he is no longer acting solely on behalf of his dispatcher. An emissary's personal desire is by definition contrary to Torah, which represents creation's core of Divine unity, unifying all individuals whose sole desire is to fulfill Hashem's will alone. This is the reason why the Torah was given to Yisrael on Shabbos, the day when personal goals are set aside and people refrain from engaging in the pursuits that mark each of them as a unique individual.

The Mishnah (*Avos* 5:17) thus states, "Any dispute that is purely motivated (i.e., where both sides genuinely seek to enhance Heaven's

glory) will ultimately endure (i.e., both paths will flourish).” Torah indeed flourishes through the clash of differing approaches to understanding it, compelling each side to sharpen and clarify its own unique perspective. Every individual grasps things in his own way, and no two people are exactly alike. But only when each disputant is purely motivated is the outcome of such a dispute positive. The Mishnah provides us the classic example of such a dispute: Hillel and Shammai. Because each side sought Heaven’s honor, their dispute “ultimately endures” and maintains unity.

☛ Sinful Dispute: Its Root and Consequences

THE MISHNAH (IBID.) continues, “Which dispute was impurely motivated? This was the dispute [instigated] by Korach and his band.”

Korach indeed aspired to the office of *kohen gadol*, who serves Hashem on behalf of the entire nation. Although his aspirations were appropriate, personal bias crept into his considerations. Once an individual has his own personal agenda and is no longer fully and solely aligned with fulfilling Hashem’s will, unity cannot survive.

Peace always reigns between *malachim*, even when one of them wields water and the other fire, for Hashem “makes peace in His high places” — their proximity to Him banishes any personal considerations, and they are wholly devoted to doing His will. If a person doesn’t elevate and sublimate his wishes, however, allowing himself to be subject to degenerate desire, the principle, “Selfish desire seeks out solitude” operates. This typified the dispute of “Korach and his band.” Moshe therefore pointed out to them (as Rashi cites on *Bamidbar* 16:6), “In the nations’ manner of worship, there are many customs and many priests who do not all congregate in one building. We, by contrast, have a single G-d, a single *Aron*, a single Torah, a single *Mizbei’ach*, and a single *kohen gadol*, yet all two hundred and fifty of you aspire to be *kohen gadol*?”

Their shortcoming lay in the involvement of their personal bias, but that was just the starting point. Their dispute ultimately involved

heaven and led to discord that undermined basic faith in Hashem, Shabbos, and Torah, all of which manifest Divine unity.

☛ The Share of Responsibility Born by the Quarrel's Instigator and by the Other Side

THIS EXPLAINS CHAZAL'S observation that Moshe did not perpetuate the quarrel, but tried to reconcile with Dasan and Aviram.

It is quite true that Moshe had no stake in the quarrel and was entirely blameless. However, a dispute doesn't remain confined to the interpersonal arena; it leads to offense against Hashem and His Torah. The person to whom Hashem's desire is all that matters — who entertains no personal agenda whatsoever beyond fulfilling Hashem's wishes — cannot allow such a situation to fester. He feels obligated to try to settle the quarrel. Otherwise — if he reasons that since he himself is not to blame, he needn't trouble himself to resolve matters — he himself will be guilty of succumbing to the sin of pride and placing personal considerations above the exclusive goal of fulfilling Heaven's will. Understanding that the consequences of a sinful dispute affect Hashem and His Torah obligates not only the quarrel's instigator, but also its victim, to make every effort to douse the flames and restore unity.

SUMMARY

The Sefas Emes provides a novel perspective on the topic of dispute according to which it never stays confined to the interpersonal arena. It sheds light upon a person's obligation to lead his life as an individual, creating his own, unique melody, while at the same time adhering to the identical notes that are open before all the other members of the orchestra as well as

to the conductor's directions. By overindulging his personal ambitions, a musician ruins the orchestra's entire performance.

Dispute runs counter to the Divine mission entrusted to each component of creation and has disastrous consequences for the disputant's relationship with G-d, for every person is entrusted with a mission of his own and comes into the world in order to fulfill Heaven's will. Engaging in dispute is diametrically opposed to this ambition and aborts a person's mission. Therefore, at the conclusion and climax of every *Shemonah Esrei* and *kaddish*, we request that the "Maker of peace in His sublime places should impose peace upon us."

Chukas

Establishing Contact with Hashem's Word Within

☞ What Is the Significance of the *Parah* and the Water — And of Purity and Impurity?

THE CONCEPTS OF impurity and purity are difficult to grasp.

What exactly happens when a person has contact with a dead body? And how are we to understand the purifying effect of sprinkling a few drops of water that has been mixed with ash of a *parah adumah*?

The Torah indeed classifies this precept as *chukah* (statute), a law that is incumbent upon us to keep whether or not we understand its rationale. It is written, “This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem has commanded, saying, ‘Speak to Bnei Yisrael that they should take on your behalf a perfectly (i.e., wholly) red cow that has no blemish on it nor has ever had any burden on it’” (*Bamidbar* 19:2).

Explaining the relevance of the term “statute,” Rashi writes that it is employed here, “because Satan and the gentile nations malign Yisrael, saying, ‘What is this mitzvah, and what logic is there in it?’ He therefore termed it ‘a statute’ — ‘It is a decree of Mine, and you have no right to question it.’” This matter therefore certainly lies beyond our grasp.

It was even beyond the grasp of Shlomo Hamelech. This is how Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:3) understand the *pasuk*, “I intended

to acquire wisdom' (*Kobeles* 7:23) — Shlomo said, 'I investigated, inquired, and searched, [trying] to uncover the meaning of *parah adumah*, and yet,' the *pasuk* concludes, 'it remained distant from me.'"

We find similarly in the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* *ibid.* 8):

A certain idolater asked R. Yochanan ben Zakai, "These things that you do have the appearance of witchcraft. You bring a cow, burn it, crush it, take its ash, and sprinkle two or three drops of it upon any of you who has become impure through a dead body and tell him, 'You are now pure.'" R. Yochanan ben Zakai told him, "You act in the same way towards a person afflicted by a spirit of madness. You bring grasses and set light to them beneath him so that they produce smoke and splash water on the grasses, and the spirit of madness departs. That's what we are doing. Impurity is a bad spirit (i.e., a type of insanity), as it says, 'And the prophets, too, and the spirit of impurity I shall banish from the land' (*Zechariah* 13:2). We [too] sprinkle water, and the bad spirit departs."

After the gentile left, his disciples said to him, "Our teacher, you fobbed off the gentile, but what explanation will you give us?"

R. Yochanan ben Zakai told them, "I promise you, it isn't the dead body that imparts impurity nor the water that purifies. Rather, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has said, 'I have enacted a statute; I have decreed a decree; you may not transgress My decree,' as it says, 'This is the statute of the Torah.'"

But is it tenable that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* would tell us to carry out arbitrary actions that have no deeper significance beyond being commandments of His? There indeed seems to be some meaning, though we do not understand it. However, that just compounds the problem: why refer to a profound, abstruse subject as "the Torah's statute" when the Torah's hallmark is significance and depth of meaning?

☞ Heightening the Difficulty

THE SEFAS EMES cites another Midrash that makes this even more difficult to understand.

Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah* ibid. 1) cite several examples of the seeming paradox mentioned in the *pasuk*, “Who can bring forth purity from impurity, if not [the] One?” (*Iyov* 14:4):

Avraham was born to Terach; Chizkiyahu to Achaz; Yoshiyah to Amon; Mordechai was descended from Shimi [ben Geira]; Yisrael’s progenitors were idolaters; [a person’s level in] the World to Come is from (i.e., determined by his attainments in) this world. Who commanded this? Who decreed this? Was it any [other] besides the world’s One [Creator]?

Thus, we have learned: a *gris*-sized *baheres* (a type of leprous lesion) is impure, whereas if the *tzaraas* covers his entire body, he is pure. Who commanded this? Who decreed this? Was it any [other] besides the world’s One [Creator]?

Thus, we have learned: if a woman’s fetus dies inside her, and the midwife extends her hand and touches it, the midwife is impure for seven days [as a result of her contact with a dead body], while the woman remains pure until the fetus emerges. Who commanded this? Who decreed this? Was it any [other] besides the world’s One [Creator]?

Thus, we have learned: the garments worn by the *kohanim* who dealt with the *parah* [*adumah*] from beginning to end (as well as the *kohanim* themselves) became impure, whereas it itself renders garments pure, as well as the impure person upon whom they sprinkled.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, “I have enacted a statute; I have decreed a decree; you may not transgress My decree.”

Contemplating these Midrashim yields two areas of difficulty in understanding the mitzvah of *parah adumah*:

1. How does sprinkling water on a person render him pure?
2. There is an apparent contradiction between two laws: on one hand, the *kohen* dealing with the water is rendered impure, whereas the impure person upon whom the water is sprinkled is thereby rendered pure. What then is the status of the *parah adumah*? If it is an agent of purification, how does it impart impurity and vice versa?

It seems from the second Midrash cited above that the *parah* is actually impure, yet there exists a counterintuitive phenomenon whereby purity issues from impurity. This is exceedingly difficult to grasp, for the word *tohar* (purity) is apparently related to *tzohar*, denoting translucence and transparency that facilitate becoming close to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and perceiving the radiance of His holiness. *Tumah* (impurity), on the other hand, denotes filth that blocks and closes off a person's spiritual perception, preventing him from drawing close to Hashem and perceiving His light. How is it possible that of all things, it should be the ultimate in impurity and estrangement that leads to purity and closeness? How can impurity possibly give rise to purity?

☞ “Before Whom Are You Becoming Pure and Who Is Purifying You?”

ULTIMATELY, IT IS the very severity of this difficulty that actually sheds light on the topic and provides a key to understanding it. The Sefas Emes explains how the *parah adumah* purifies the person who has contracted the impurity of a dead body:

The world was created through Hashem's word, which sustains everything in existence at every moment. Hashem's word is holy and pure; the root from which man issues, then, is pure.

However, Hashem's word is buried within the physical world to which it imparts life. It is hidden and concealed within this external realm, which is distant from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Distance from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* constitutes impurity.

At the farthest possible distance from the Divine presence is a dead body, from which G-d's sustaining word has departed. The person who comes into contact with it is therefore distanced and rendered impure.

How can he draw close again and restore his purity?

This is achieved through establishing contact with the Source of purity, just as contact between *mayim chaim* (naturally flowing

water) and *mayim she'uvim* (drawn water) such that they form a single body purifies the latter.

Hashem's word that is within a person has a similar effect when it comes into contact with an external revelation of Hashem's word that instructs him how to act. In this way, Hashem's word that created him flows and is active within him, leading him to accept Hashem's word that commands him.

When Hashem instructs a person how to act and he does so in a manner that demonstrates his obedience — i.e., when intellectually, he doesn't understand — this shows that he is a creature that is subservient to Hashem's will. Hashem's word that is within him thereupon bursts forth and becomes apparent, establishing contact with his fulfillment of the external command and restoring him to purity.

In order to become pure, a person must therefore fulfill Hashem's word in a manner that bespeaks his obedience. This happens when he is commanded to do something that contains an element of the incomprehensible. We are therefore instructed to sprinkle the waters of the *parah adumah*, which render the people who prepare and administer them impure while at the same time purifying the person upon whom they are sprinkled. The absence of logic and impossibility of comprehension are crucial for creating this situation of utter obedience, which results in the revelation of man's closeness to Hashem's word that resonates within and sustains him.

It is thus the very “illogic” of *parah adumah* that renders a person pure.

☞ Two Penetrating Questions

THE SEFAS EMES then draws our attention to the two expressions that appear in the Midrash:

1. “Who did this?”
2. “Who commanded this? Who decreed this?”

In the context of the Midrash's discussion of how purity can

issue from impurity, the Sefas Emes understands these expressions as articulating the following two profound and fundamental questions:

1. “Who did this?” — how does the *sitra achara* (the “other side,” i.e., the Satan) have the power to oppose Hashem’s utterances by enticing people to disobey them?

There are forces in the world that apparently oppose *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*; these are known as the “other side.” But how is this possible given that “the entire world is filled with His glory”? How can any part of existence give the appearance of contradicting His will?

2. “Who commanded this? Who decreed this?” — since this benighted phenomenon was also created by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Himself, how can man hope to oppose it? In other words, although it is at first glance unclear how any darkened area can exist in a light-filled room that is suffused with Hashem’s radiance, since this is in fact the case, how can man hope to overcome the darkness and banish it?

☞ Darkness in Service of Light

THE SEFAS EMES explains that Chazal’s response to this question is that there is no such thing as darkness that opposes light. In fact, light is only recognizable as such when it radiates amid darkness. Darkness’s role is thus to act as a contrast to light, the background or substrate against which light can be discerned.

We thus find in the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 184a), “Light is only [recognizable as] such when it radiates from amid darkness. When this ‘side’ (the *sitra achara*) submits, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is elevated higher and glories in His honor. Serving *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is only from amid the darkness, and good only is revealed from amid evil. When a person follows a bad path and leaves it, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s honor is elevated, and this represents the wholeness of everything — good and bad together.”

We find similarly in the *Zohar* (Vol. III, 48a) that Chazal interpret

the *pasuk*, “The advantage of wisdom over foolishness is like the advantage of light over darkness” (*Koheles* 2:13) as meaning that “the benefit of light is only recognizable when it shines in the darkness, and [in addition,] that black rectifies white, for without black, white is not discernible, and it is due to black that white is elevated and becomes precious. A person doesn’t realize the virtue of a sweet taste until he tastes something bitter, [so] what renders it sweet? The [prior] bitterness.”

☞ The Purification Process Represents the Ultimate Extraction of Light from Darkness

FOLLOWING THIS LINE of thought, the Sefas Emes elucidates the Midrash’s comments regarding the laws of purity and impurity and how they address how Yisarel can overcome the darkness of the *sitra achara* that Hashem Himself decreed should exist.

The answer becomes evident upon contemplating how purity is able to issue from impurity.

We have seen that the answer to this question is that it is Hashem who commanded this. *Tzivui* (command) shares the same root as *tza-va* (connection). In other words, Hashem has given man the ability to establish contact and bond with His word that lies within him by acceding to the Divine command that tells him how to conduct himself. A person forms a connection with this inner source of life through obeying Hashem’s instructions as to how he should live.

As the Sefas Emes writes, “Through this contemplation, he brings everything back to its root, and purity results.” Man engages in physical actions whose logic eludes him and whose sole significance to him is that they are Hashem’s command. By fulfilling these commandments, he is submitting himself to Hashem’s word, thereby conveying that he is Hashem’s creation, formed through His word in order to carry out that word.

We now understand the dynamic whereby *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has invested man with the power to oppose the darkness He created and to bring forth purity from the depths of impurity. By doing so,

man submits to Hashem's word that is concealed within him, thereby causing it to become apparent and evident. As we have explained, this is the very purpose for which evil and darkness were created — so that G-d's word buried within them should be revealed, for nothing highlights existence as well as the emptiness that preceded it.

☛ The Concept of a Statute

WE ALSO NOW understand why this mitzvah in particular is called *chukah*, referring to a fixed, immutable law embedded in the Torah, the system of laws by which Hashem instructs us to live. *Chakikah* also denotes engraving, as in carving into stone or some other hard substrate. Engraving is only possible on a hard substance that offers resistance. Torah is also described as being “[letters of] black fire upon [a background of] white fire,” for it denotes light's resistance to darkness. By fulfilling the Torah's dictates, man gives outer expression to his obedience to Hashem's word that pulses within him, thereby drawing out this word, just as light radiates from darkness. His actions thus allow this light to illuminate all of creation.

Hashem's word is the source of vitality of the entire creation. This Divine core hidden within man sustains all the worlds, bringing life, abundance, and blessing to every creature. Indeed, the word *chok* also denotes sustenance, as in the *pasuk*, “Sustain me with my statutory ration” (*Mishlei* 30:8). Chazal say, “*Chok* is used to denote food, as it says, ‘They shall eat their *chok* (fixed ration) that Pharaoh grants them’ (*Bereishis* 47:22); and it also says, ‘Sustain me with my statutory ration’” (*Beitzah* 16a).

SUMMARY

The basis of purity is thus Hashem's word that lies within man and sustains him. The source of impurity is a dead body, from

which Hashem's life-giving word has departed. The person who obeys and fulfills Hashem's word when it apparently lacks meaning and defies human logic thereby demonstrates that Hashem's word is within him and that he was created to obey His word. This draws Hashem's word outward, creating unparalleled closeness between him and G-d, thus reinstating his purity. This drawing out into the open of what was concealed represents engraving clear, pristine light upon a dark board — this *chakikah* symbolizes the *chok*, the law of the Torah.

Balak

A Hall That Leads into a Corridor

☞ A Prophet for the Nations of the World

WHEN ASSAULTING YISRAEL, the nations of the world usually employ physical means. As we say in the Haggadah, “In every generation, they rise up against us to destroy us,” which is typically with violence. However, in this *parshah*, we read of an attempt to employ spiritual weaponry — the power of prophecy — in order to fight Yisrael.

The Torah tells us:

The Moavim said to the elders of Midian, “This congregation will now lick up our entire surroundings, just as the ox licks up the green of the field.” And Balak, son of Tzipor, was king over Moav at this time. He sent messengers to Bilam, son of Beor, to Pesor, which is on the River, in the country of his [native] people, to summon him, saying, “Look, a people has come out of Egypt. They have now blotted out those who kept an eye on the land and are living [right here, about] to destroy me.” (*Bamidbar* 22:4–6)

Bilam was not a military strategist, but a genuine prophet whose spiritual endowments accorded him great powers. Chazal (*Sifrei, V'zos Haberachah* 357) comment on the *pasuk*, “And there did not arise among Yisrael any other [prophet] on par with Moshe” (*Devarim* 34:10): “Among Yisrael there did not arise, but among the nations there did. Who was that? It was Bilam, son of Beor.”

Rashi (on *Bamidbar* 22:5) asks, “Why did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bring His *Shechinah* to rest upon a wicked gentile?” In other words,

what is the reason that Bilam merited a level of prophecy equivalent to that of Moshe Rabbeinu?

Rashi's response is that it wasn't due to any personal merit of Bilam, but to preempt the gentile nations:

So that the nations shouldn't have the opportunity to argue, "Had we possessed prophets, we would have returned to the [path of] good." He therefore raised up prophets for them, but [instead of repenting,] they breached the fence of universal morality, for at first, they were restrained in matters of immorality, and this one (i.e., Bilam) advised them to abandon themselves to promiscuity.

☞ Perception Is a Function Not of Merit, but of Clarity of the Medium

RASHI'S COMMENTS RAISE a major difficulty. In order to perceive anything, it is crucial to possess the means to do so. Physical sight is impossible without eyes; viewing a distant place or object is impossible without binoculars or field glasses; a telescope is crucial for viewing the heavenly bodies; and night vision is impossible without some source of illumination. No matter how great an individual's merit, unless he possesses the technical means necessary for seeing, he will be unable to see. The same principle applies to prophetic perception. A prophet needs to have attained a sublime spiritual level at which he is detached from physicality, enabling him to perceive Divine visions. It is impossible for the person who remains attached to physicality and sensuality to access abstract Divine sights. The prophet must utterly negate his physical and emotional existence and sublimate himself to the higher spheres. Only when he ceases to "exist" as an earthly being will he be able to perceive Divine communication.

While receiving prophetic visions, prophets indeed appeared to have lost their senses due to the negation of their regular, natural existence. The Radak (*Melachim II* 9:11) explains that the prophet is referred to by the speaker in the *pasuk* (ibid.) as "that madman" because "they experience the negation of their senses and emotional

faculties.” The Radak writes elsewhere (*Shmuel I* 19:24) that “when prophecy rests upon a person, his senses cease to function, and he collapses... due to the extent of the negation of his senses and his emotional function, and he remains with the power of his intellect alone.” Similarly, the *Sefer Chassidim* (773) explains, “When prophets’ souls are attached [to Heaven] in fierce love, their hearts are with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as though they are not part of this world.”

This level of spirituality can only be attained by the person whose character traits have undergone correction. The Gemara (*Nedarim* 38a) tells us, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* rests His *Shechinah* only on a person who is mighty, wealthy, wise, and humble.”

To the question of how strength and wealth are relevant to prophecy, the Rambam (*Shemonah Perakim*, Chap. 7) responds that “mighty” and “wealthy” are to be understood here as the Mishnah (*Avos* 4:1) explains them: “Who is mighty? He who subdues his inclination. Who is wealthy? He who is happy with his lot.” Thus, only the person who possesses these upstanding traits is a candidate for prophecy. These represent the “visual apparatus” for perceiving Divine sights. In the Rambam’s words (*ibid.*): “And know that no prophet can prophesy unless he first attains every intellectual virtue and a majority of the virtuous traits and the most significant ones among them.”

The question, therefore, is how Bilam attained prophecy without the requisite perfection of character. Even armed with the nations’ right to a prophet of their own, without the necessary qualifications for seeing, sight is impossible. With his uncouth approach and evil traits, deserving as the case may have been, he lacked the refinement and spiritual orientation required for apprehending wholly abstract, Divine visions.

☞ In What Sense Does Bilam Serve as a Mentor?

THE MISHNAH (*AVOS* 5:19) further compounds this difficulty:

Whoever possesses these three traits is one of the disciples of Avraham Avinu, while possessing three other traits marks him as a disciple

of Bilam, the evildoer: a benevolent eye, a humble spirit, and an undemanding soul make one a disciple of Avraham Avinu, while a malevolent eye, a proud spirit, and an expansive soul makes one a disciple of Bilam, the evildoer.

Being a disciple implies that a mentor is necessary for whatever is being learned and that this mentor has something to convey.

Worthy character traits must be learned, and the greater the stature of the teacher, the greater the extent to which his disciple will be able to refine his own inborn traits and adopt correct and proper manners. In the realm of character improvement, there is certainly much to learn and ample opportunity for being a student.

By contrast, negative character traits don't have to be learned, for they are usually inborn. It is written, "Man is born a wild mule" (*Iyov* 11:12). Why does the adoption of bad traits necessitate studying under Bilam?

As the Sefas Emes puts it, "What does the title 'disciples of Bilam' imply? What is there to learn from him? Any fool can pick up these negative traits of a malevolent eye, a proud spirit, etc. without studying them."

☞ Why Seek the Difference between Polar Opposites?

AFTER LISTING THE traits that typify the disciples of Avraham Avinu and of Bilam, the Mishnah continues:

What is the difference between the disciples of Avraham Avinu and of Bilam, the evildoer? The disciples of Avraham Avinu enjoy this world and inherit the World to Come, as it says, "There is [plenty of good] with Me to bestow upon those who love Me, and I shall fill their storehouses" (*Mishlei* 8:21), whereas the disciples of Bilam, the evildoer, inherit Gehinnom and descend to the pit of destruction.

What information does the question, "What is the difference between the disciples of Avraham Avinu and of Bilam, the evildoer?" seek to elicit?

Describing a difference is only necessary when comparing two similar items. In the case of polar opposites, which are utterly dissimilar to begin with, it shouldn't be necessary to seek a difference. Nobody asks what the difference is between light and darkness, sweet and sour, physical and spiritual, a *tzaddik* and a *rasha*, or medicine and poison, because the answer is self-evident.

What is the meaning of the Mishnah's question?

☞ Bilam Had Negative Traits, but He Held Them in Check

THE SEFAS EMES explains that Bilam was indeed a spiritually oriented individual who willingly sacrificed his physical desires in order to reach spiritual attainments — there was plenty to learn from him. There are also similarities between Bilam and Avraham Avinu, as evidenced by the sources from which Chazal derive Bilam's negative traits:

An Expansive Soul — it is written, "In response, Bilam told Balak's servants, 'Were Balak to give me enough silver and gold to fill his house, I cannot transgress the instructions of Hashem, my G-d, to do anything small or large'" (*Bamidbar* 22:18). Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:10) cite this speech as indicating that he was avaricious and craved wealth.

It should be noted, however, that despite coveting money and mentioning it longingly and greedily, in practice, he overcame his urge to profit and forwent the money so as not to act contrary to Hashem's wishes.

A Proud Spirit — it is written, "Hashem refuses to allow me to go with you" (ibid. 22:11), on which Rashi comments, "but only with princes superior in rank to you; we learn that his spirit was proud and that he didn't want to reveal that he was under Hashem's control."

Although Bilam was indeed proud and arrogant, even when greater and more distinguished nobles came to honor him, he still made

it clear to them that were *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to tell him, “No,” he would not go with them even at the cost of giving up all the honor they were promising him. Apparently, Bilam got the better of his lust for unbridled honor.

This answers our first question of how he could access prophecy without having rectified his unsavory character. Bilam did in fact gain control of his negative traits and was therefore a candidate for prophecy. He seems to have had great strength of character, overcoming some very negative tendencies indeed. He was a source of instruction to his disciples of how to get the better of negative traits, even some very bad ones. It is thus clear that the Mishnah refers to “the disciples of Bilam” because he indeed had what to teach, and it is also clear why the Mishnah seeks to understand the difference between Bilam and Avraham. In light of this insight, the difference between them becomes much less obvious, and we need to understand how they in fact differed.

☞ Fallen Down Yet Still Seeing

ON THIS POINT, the Sefas Emes notes the profound, all-important difference between Bilam and Avraham: rather than “How do you conduct yourself?” the question to consider is, “What is it that you are trying to achieve?”

Bilam acted humbly — in pursuit of honor.

Avraham acted humbly — in pursuit of humility.

Bilam indeed effaced himself, overcoming the craving for honor that swelled and surged within him, but only because he reasoned that by restraining himself now, he would later be accorded far greater honor.

His ultimate goal was thus honor, and even when conducting himself with humility, that is what he sought.

In the words of the Sefas Emes: “All his submission was only for the sake of attaining the level which he would later be able to pride himself in.”

Similarly, Bilam passed up the opportunity for monetary gain in the hope of eventually attaining far greater wealth at a later point.

His avarice hadn't abated at all — on the contrary, he anticipated even greater indulgence of his powerful cravings. He hadn't overcome his desires; he was restraining himself temporarily in order to fully satisfy his desires later on.

This is how the Sefas Emes explains Bilam's description of himself as "fallen down, yet still seeing" (ibid. 24:4). Bilam closed his eye in a show of restraint and humility, but he still opened it to peek out. His powerful desire was nonetheless evident even as he seemed to be acting with restraint and abstinence.

By contrast, the truly righteous are genuinely humble. Their self-effacement is no act. They suffice with the minimum because they aspire to nothing more than cleaving to "the Source of all life, knowing constantly that no creature has any vitality beyond G-d's power and that they are like the axe in the hand of the hewer," as the Sefas Emes writes. They are truly men of the spirit, people of truth.

Can there be any greater, more profound difference?

☞ Distinguishing between True and Fake

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the Mishnah's question as to the difference between the disciples of Avraham and those of Bilam is prompted by their outward similarity in regard to self-restraint and getting the better of worldly urges and drives.

The difference between the two schools lies in their differing motives, a seemingly minor factor given the external resemblance but that leads to widely divergent outcomes. This can be likened to a narrow platform separating two trains that are speeding in opposite directions.

This explanation is transmitted by the Sefas Emes in the name of the Baal Shem Tov; his profound and beautiful line of thought proceeds as follows:

The Mishnah says, "The disciples of Avraham Avinu enjoy this

world and are *nochalin olam haba*, they inherit the World to Come, as it says, *‘L’hanchil ohavay yeish*, there is [plenty of good] with Me to bestow upon [lit. to put into the possession of] those who love Me, and I shall fill their storehouses.”

The word *nachalah*, meaning a possession or an inheritance, is related to *nachal*, meaning a stream or river connecting two points along which some medium or item is conveyed from one place to another. Inheritance is thus referred to as *nachalah*, because it denotes a continuum of possession between generations.

How is *nachalah* applicable when speaking of the progression from this world to the next? In what sense is there a continuum between the two? The World to Come is wholly spiritual; it doesn’t represent the opposite bank of a river whose near bank is worldly and physical. Where is there some point of meeting between these two worlds? How can this world be portrayed as a passageway leading into a large hall when the passageway is physical and confined to this world while the hall is spiritual, existing only in the Upper Realms?

Moreover, how are we to understand that a physical act in this world can engender reward in the World to Come, which is altogether spiritual? How can a physical act be rewarded in spiritual currency? This is like trying to trade in sand for diamonds.

The Baal Shem Tov answers that the creation of this world was *ex nihilo*. However, physical void is actually spiritual existence. The physical void that preceded creation was in fact G-d’s spiritual existence.

At the core of physical existence is a physical void that has spiritual existence, around which and enveloping it is physical existence.

This spiritual core at the center of physical existence is the word of Hashem, Who created the world and sustains it constantly, moment by moment.

At the core of all that exists in the world is thus a physical void that is wholly spiritual, a concealed source of spiritual illumination. The person who locates this light has found the other riverbank, the

radiance that also exists in the World to Come, which is utterly devoid of physicality, consisting solely of spiritual radiance.

As the Sefas Emes writes, “These two worlds (i.e., this world and the next) are interconnected; in this world, holiness is invisible, hidden beneath a physical mantle of desires and husks (i.e., barriers), whereas the World to Come is hidden in that it is utterly abstract, and Divine wisdom is rooted in *ayin* (utter concealment) and is hidden from all.”

A point of contact between these two worlds thus clearly exists; by accessing the holiness that rests within the physicality of this world, a person can attain the World to Come.

As the Sefas Emes writes, “The person who finds the illumination hidden within the concealment of this world merits the revelation of that which is concealed in the World to Come as well.”

Avraham Avinu rendered this world subservient to the World to Come, which he considered the ultimate goal. He demonstrated the physical void of this world and its underlying spiritual substance, which is the word of Hashem, “besides Whom nothing else exists” (*Devarim* 4:35). This renders the world’s inner, essential core dominant over its physicality, which the former negates, rendering it like a peel that is removed and discarded. This inner, spiritual radiance is present both at the core of this world as well as in the next world. Having revealed its presence in this world, Avraham merited both worlds. He possessed spirituality both in this world and the next.

Bilam attained the spiritual acquisitions of the World to Come, which is facilitated by rectifying negative traits, solely as a means of advancing his ambitions in this world. This therefore precluded him from attaining the World to Come. Bilam didn’t regard his worldly urges as a physical husk surrounding a core of holiness, his purpose being to uncover the core and discard the husk. On the contrary, he assigned the main significance to the physical husk, and the inner core of spiritual illumination was merely a tool enabling him to further his worldly ambitions.

This is the difference between a truly spiritual individual and a person who draws upon occult forces; between the person who brings a lamp in order to dispel the darkness and introduce powerful illumination and the person who sees light as a tool for getting the most out of living in the darkness in which he remains shrouded.

The sublime levels of holiness, spirituality, and prophecy that Bilam attained were his ultimate undoing. He introduced evil into the realm of good, subjugating light to the outer husk, and therefore inherited Gehinnom. Avraham, on the other hand, subjugated the husk to the light, revealing the void of the physical world which was the origin of its substance and created a continuum between the inner spirituality of this world and the spirituality of the next, thereby inheriting both worlds.

SUMMARY

Like Moshe, Bilam attained sublime levels of pure spirituality, for he had the strength to withstand and overcome physical desires. He was indeed an elevated spiritual individual who thereby perceived Divine visions. He could have disciples, as there is what to learn from him, to the point that there are even grounds for asking what distinguishes him from Avraham. The answer to this question is that they differ in regard to their divergent orientations. Avraham regarded this world as a physical passageway leading to a spiritual hall. Avraham discovered the physical void that exists at the core of this world whose substance was created from nothing, correctly identifying it as a mere husk to be discarded. Avraham sought to strengthen and empower spirituality and holiness, and with this orientation, he and his disciples perceive the concealed illumination and attain the World to Come.

Bilam, on the other hand, regarded spiritual attainments

and man's ability to delay gratification merely as a means of intensifying his ultimate gratification. He failed to perceive the illumination concealed in this world and remained in utter darkness, for his orientation was the opposite of Avraham's. For Bilam, the spiritual hall led to the farthest end of the physical passageway.

Indeed, as the Mishnah (*Avos* 3:1) recommends, "Know where you come from and where you are headed."

Pinchas

He Deserves to Take His Reward

☛ The Priesthood by Rights

THE TORAH SELECTS *parshas Pinchas* for conveying to us fundamental lessons about the principle of reward and punishment.

Pinchas acted zealously and defended Heaven's honor when Zimri profaned it by sinning publicly. Pinchas killed Zimri and the Midianite woman, in reward for which he was elevated to the priesthood. The Torah tells us:

Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the *kohen* has revoked My anger from upon Bnei Yisrael by displaying zeal among them on My behalf, and I have not destroyed Bnei Yisrael in My zeal. Therefore, say to him, "I hereby extend to him My covenant of peace." And he and his offspring after him will have a covenant of everlasting priesthood, since he displayed zeal for His G-d and atoned for Bnei Yisrael. (*Bamidbar* 25:11–15)

It was not originally intended that Pinchas should be a *kohen*, as the Gemara (*Zevachim* 101b) tells us, "Pinchas did not become a *kohen* until he killed Zimri." Rashi (*Bamidbar* 25:13) explains: "Although priesthood had already been conferred on Aharon's descendants, it was given only to Aharon, his sons who were anointed with him, and the descendants they would have subsequently. Pinchas, however, who was already born but was not anointed, didn't attain priesthood until now."

Pinchas's act of zealotry thus won him priesthood as a reward.

As Chazal express it (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:1), “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, ‘It is only just that he should take his reward.’”

☛ Why Is an Act of Judgment

Rewarded with a Gesture of Kindness?

WHY IS THIS particular case chosen to demonstrate that reward is paid openly in this world? Moreover, the general principle is, “In the same measure that a person deals out to others, Heaven deals out to him” (*Sotah* 8b). What aspect of Pinchas’s deed rendered his reward appropriate? The salient attribute of a *kohen* is kindness, as the *Zohar* (Vol. III, 303a) states. The Mishnah in *Avos* (1:12), too, tells us that Aharon was “a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace; loving people and drawing them closer to Torah.” How are we to understand that Pinchas, who displayed extreme zeal and executed justice with his own hands, merited priesthood, which is typified by love and kindness, as his reward? Where is the “measure for measure” here?

☛ Priesthood Represents a Level of

Loving of Hashem That Is Bestowed as a Gift

THE SEFAS EMES cites the comment of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi (*Tanya, Igeres Hakodesh*, Chap. 18) that priesthood is a spiritual level that is bestowed upon a person as a gift from Heaven. This means that a person is able to work on himself and attain fear of Heaven (i.e., fear of Heaven’s retribution or even the more elevated fear of Heaven’s exaltedness). It is appropriate and natural that a person should fear that which is more sublime than himself simply on account of it being greater than he — in fact, the greater its sublimity, the more in awe of it he is.

However, it is harder for a person to feel love towards Heaven. How can he love that which he is incapable of grasping? Man occupies a physical body and perceives that which is outside of him through his physical senses. How can he attain a state of loving

Heaven, of closeness and enjoyable attachment, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is his diametric opposite, being wholly abstract and spiritual and impossible to apprehend not only with human senses, but even through human intellect?

We must conclude that the *kohen* merits his love of Heaven as a gift and kindness.

This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, “And you shall serve; I shall convey your priesthood as **service that is a gift**” (*Bamidbar* 18:7).

☛ Pinchas Was the Only *Kohen* Who Merited Attaining Love of Heaven Deservedly

AHARON MERITED PRIESTHOOD for himself and all his future descendants that brought him to a level of loving Heaven which was bestowed on him as a gift.

There was one *kohen*, however, who attained this level of loving Heaven not as a gift, but in his own merit. Pinchas merited priesthood for himself and for all his future descendants, representing a level of loving Heaven that became his deservedly.

A thorough explanation of these ideas is in order.

☛ Pinchas's Actions Revealed the People's Desire

THE SEFAS EMES explains that when one member of a group sins publicly in view of his colleagues and they remain silent, expressing no protest, this indicates that the sinner's spiritual malaise has already infected all of them, and he has merely done in practice that which they all secretly desire to do. That is the only way he dares sin in front of them all, and that is why nobody protests his actions.

Therefore, when Zimri took the Midianite woman in view of his tribesmen and nobody raised any objection, a plague broke out among the entire community. They were all tainted by association, and Heaven's wrath flared against the entire community, which had seen what he did and remained silent.

By rising up and killing Zimri in view of everyone, Pinchas broke

the inertia and showed that the moral failing had been one man's, and his alone. The community was not implicated after all, for there had indeed been a protest. Zimri's deed had not gone without censure.

In fact, Pinchas's act reversed the apparent, prior array of forces. The fact that Pinchas mustered the courage to put a tribe's prince to death in public view demonstrated that Zimri's crime greatly disturbed them all and that they had wanted to protest, but only Pinchas had come forward and done that which they had all wanted to happen but had not dared do. Only because they all shared the desire to protest had Pinchas found the courage to kill a person — and not just any person, but the prince of a tribe — in public view.

Only because this desire was common to all of them was no voice heard protesting Pinchas's zealous action. Pinchas's act therefore removed the universal taint from the silent onlookers, revealing purity in its place. The Torah therefore makes a point of writing, "By displaying zeal **among them** on My behalf." This wasn't the angry act of a maverick individual acting as a lone wolf.

Rather, as the Sefas Emes writes, "He brought his deed into [the communal context of] Klal Yisrael, acting as he did solely to show that even though a Jew had sinned, there was still among Yisrael someone who would wreak vengeance, thereby assuaging the King's fury."

☛ A Member of the Group Who Strikes Out on His Own Reveals Something about the Entire Group

BY REVEALING WHAT the Jewish people's inner desire was, Pinchas's act rescued them from the plague.

For the zealous deed of one individual to serve as an example of the general feeling, that individual must be an ordinary person — one of the people and thus representative of them all.

Had Moshe been the one to do what Pinchas did, it would not necessarily have indicated that deep down, the common man wanted this to happen. The case could have been made that Moshe was the only person who reacted in this way because due to his great holiness,

he detested Zimri's sin, whereas the rest of the nation didn't join him because deep down, they identified with Zimri. For such a deed to be truly representative of the mood among the nation as a whole, it had to be carried out by someone like Pinchas, one of the rank and file.

This is why Pinchas was not anointed as a priest originally, along with the other *kohanim*. The intention was that his zealous act should be carried out by an ordinary Jew who was not a *kohen*, but a member of the general population, so that it would be representative of the nation as a whole.

It is now clear why Pinchas wasn't elevated to the priesthood as a gift earlier, prior to this incident.

☞ All Reward Is Really Undeserved

ACCORDING TO THE dictates of justice, nobody deserves to be rewarded for his good deeds.

A person always first benefits from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* bounty and only then uses what he received for doing mitzvot. It can thus be said that he actually receives his "reward" before doing any worthy deeds and doesn't deserve anything further. The person who fulfills the mitzvah of circumcising his son first received the gift of a child. The landowner leaving a corner of his field unharvested for the poor first received possession of his field, which yielded a harvest. For what is he seeking further reward?

In this vein, it is written, "Who preceded Me, and I shall pay?" (*Iyov* 41:3). Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* 27:2) explain that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* makes this statement in wonderment at the person who seeks reward. Expanding on this idea, the Midrash says:

"Who praised me before I gave him a soul? Who circumcised for My sake before I gave him a son? Who erected a railing before I gave him a roof? Who made Me a *mezuzah* before I gave him a house? Who made Me a *sukkah* before I gave him the space? Who obtained a *lulav* for Me before I gave him money? Who made *tzitzis* for Me before I gave him a *tallis*? Who separated *pei'ah* before Me before I

gave him a field? Who separated *terumah* for Me before I filled his granary? Who separated *challah* before Me before I gave him a dough? Who separated an offering before Me before I gave him an animal?”

The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (62:13), “Kindness is Yours, Hashem, for You pay a man according to his deeds” can be understood in this light. If a person indeed deserves payment according to his deeds, why should this be reckoned as a special “kindness” on Hashem’s part?

The answer is that whatever a person’s deeds are, they are only done after ample reward has been bestowed upon him in advance. Thus, when Hashem further rewards a person for his deeds, He is going beyond the requirements of justice.

☛ Pinchas Alone Took Action Prior to Receiving any Reward

IN THIS RESPECT, Pinchas’s deed was extraordinary, for he had received nothing beforehand.

The priesthood that had been bestowed on his grandfather, father, and uncles as a gift had been denied him. He was an ordinary individual. Pinchas was the only person who took action before receiving anything in advance. His reward therefore didn’t go beyond the dictates of justice and was fully deserved.

His was a special case, of which Hashem said, “It is only just that he should take his reward.”

☛ What Pinchas Gave Up

PINCHAS MADE TWO huge sacrifices:

1. He was prepared to sacrifice his life; Zimri could have killed him. Upon his own initiative, Pinchas came forward and took another man’s life in public. He had no guarantee how the people as a whole and the tribe of Shimon in particular would regard what he had done.

He was an individual acting on his own, alone in his

zealotry, risking his life without having been instructed to do so. Although *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had admittedly bestowed life on him, which can possibly be construed as reward in advance, it had not been given to him on the understanding that he was expected to endanger it to prevent Zimri's sin. The halachah that states, "Anyone who has relations with a non-Jewess, zealots assail him" belongs in the category of rulings that are "halachah but not publicized." When Pinchas risked his life without any halachic requirement to do so, he was making a sacrifice for which he fully deserved a reward.

2. Moreover, Pinchas was apparently giving up any prospect of ever being appointed a *kohen* in the future, for the Gemara (*Berachos* 32b) states, "Any *kohen* who has taken another person's life should not raise his hands in the priestly blessing." The *Zohar* on this *parshah* (114a) adds that anyone who has killed is disqualified from serving as a *kohen* altogether. Pinchas was therefore apparently destroying his own chances of ever receiving priesthood as a gift — by engaging in an act that was fundamentally a matter of strict justice, he would no longer have been entitled to the status of a *kohen*, who is the quintessential figure of kindness.

☛ What Pinchas Received

PINCHAS RECEIVED — measure for measure — reward that corresponded to both of these areas:

1. For sacrificing his life, he was rewarded with everlasting life, for as Chazal tell us, "Pinchas is Eliyahu" (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 29; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *parshas Pinchas*, mentioned by Rashi, *Bava Metzia* 114b).
2. For giving up any prospect of becoming a *kohen* and having love of Heaven bestowed on him as a gift, Pinchas attained this very level deservedly, in his own merit. Whereas the initial bestowal of priesthood, which came as a gift, is denied

to a *kohen* who has shed blood, the person who deserves the priesthood through his own merits cannot be deprived of this status for any reason whatsoever.

It is possible to attain a level of love of Heaven through a gift from Above. However, such love cannot exist in the person who espouses strict justice and takes another's life.

Alternatively, it is possible to attain a sublime level of love of Heaven through self-sacrifice, when a person's heart goes out to Hashem and he is ready to give up his physical and even his spiritual existence for the sake of becoming close to Hashem. Such a person fully deserves the love of Heaven that he attains. He cannot be detached from this level on account of carrying out the dictates of strict justice. On the contrary, he attained his love of Heaven in accordance with those selfsame dictates.

SUMMARY

We have learned:

- By rights, nobody deserves any reward for his worthy deeds. Anything that may be due to him is covered by the bounty that was bestowed on him in advance that enabled him to fulfill the mitzvah in the first place.
- A person usually cannot earn a sublime level of loving Heaven by rights. The priesthood, whose members are characterized by their love of Hashem and His nation, is a gift to them.

However, a person can merit both reward and priesthood entirely deservedly through self-sacrifice.

This is what we learn from Pinchas, of whom *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, "It is only just that he should take his reward."

Matos

Practice Is the Root of Understanding, Not Vice Versa

☛ The Connection between the Laws of *Tefillin* and the Jewish Nation's Holiness

THIS *PARSHAH* MENTIONS how Bnei Yisrael set out to fight the Midianites, headed this time by Pinchas rather than by Moshe. The Torah tells us, “Moshe then spoke to the people, saying, ‘Equip men from among you for the army, and they shall wage war against Midian to carry out Hashem’s revenge against Midian’” (*Bamidbar* 31:3). Several *pesukim* later, it is written, “Moshe then sent them to the army, a thousand men from each tribe, them, together with Pinchas, the son of Elazar the *kohen*, to the army, and the holy vessels and the wailing trumpets with him” (*pasuk* 6).

This campaign against Midian represented a war of holiness against impurity, which is why Pinchas — who had reined Yisrael in from sinning with the Midianites by killing Zimri, who had relations with a Midianite princess — was chosen to lead it.

The Midrash makes it clear that the men chosen to accompany Pinchas to battle had also attained a special level of holiness.

Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, *ibid.* 6) apply the following *pesukim* in *Shir Hashirim* to the twelve thousand men who took part in the battle against Midian: “You are indeed beautiful, My dear one, you are indeed beautiful; your image is like a dove. Under your snood,

your hair is like that of the goat flock that descends from Mount Gilad, leaving it exposed. Your teeth are fine and white like the flock of selected ewes that came up from the bathing pool, all of whom are perfect with no defect among them” (4:1–2).

The necessity of having righteous fighters to wage war against the impurity of Midian seems self-evident. However, Chazal interpret the above *pesukim* as alluding to a further qualification that was required for participation in this campaign — meticulous care in fulfilling the mitzvah of *tefillin*:

“‘That came up from the bathing pool’ — [meaning] that none of them donned their *tefillin shel rosh* before their *tefillin shel yad*, for had any one of them donned his *tefillin shel rosh* before his *tefillin shel yad*, Moshe would not have praised them, and they would not have returned safely. This implies that they were superlatively righteous.”

How are we to understand the need to make sure that they didn’t don *tefillin shel rosh* before *tefillin shel yad* in the context of their suitability for going into battle against Midian?

☞ The Connection between a Campaign Waged by Yisrael and Donning *Tefillin Shel Rosh* before *Tefillin Shel Yad*

REVERSING THE ORDER in which the *tefillin* are donned is actually a disqualification for joining any battle fought by Yisrael against another nation, not just in the case of the war against Midian.

The Torah tells us that prior to every war, it was announced, “Which man is afraid or faint-hearted? He should leave and return to his home so that he doesn’t demoralize his brethren like himself” (*Devarim* 20:8). Since it is normal for anyone to feel some apprehension prior to a conflict, Chazal (*Sotah* 8:5) explain that this declaration addresses the person who is afraid on account of sins he has committed. However, it would be wrong to assume that this refers to an entrenched sinner whose sins exceed his merits.

The Gemara (*Sotah* 44b) states clearly that “a person who conversed in between one *tefillah* and the other has committed a sin that requires him to return from the battle lines.” Rashi explains that conversing “between one *tefillah* and the other” means “between donning his *tefillin shel yad* and *tefillin shel rosh*.” Why is this particular sin cited as disqualifying a person from going out to battle? What is especially severe about it? Moreover, a person who converses between donning his *tefillin shel yad* and *tefillin shel rosh* hasn’t actually committed any sin — he just needs to make an additional *berachah* on the *tefillin shel rosh*, donning which is no longer covered by the blessing he made when putting on the *tefillin shel yad*. Rashi explains that when the Gemara says that he has “committed a sin,” this is only “if he fails to make an additional blessing, for thus it says (*Menachos* 36a), ‘If he conversed, he makes two *berachos*; if he didn’t converse, he makes [just] one.’” Thus, if he made the second *berachah*, he hasn’t sinned at all. How can this be referred to as a sin on whose account he has to return from the battle lines?

☞ “They Sever the Arm together with the Head”

AMONG THE BLESSINGS that Moshe bestowed on the tribes that are recorded in *parshas V’zos Haberachah*, the might of the members of the tribe of Gad in battle receives special mention. It is written, “And about Gad he said, ‘The Source of blessing enlarges Gad’s territory; Gad dwells like a lioness and severs the arm along with the crown of the head’” (*Devarim* 33:20). Rashi explains, “‘Dwells like a lioness’ — since Gad’s territory was adjacent to the border, he is likened to a lioness, for all who dwell near the border must be strong warriors. ‘And severs the arm with the crown of the head’ — Their victims were apparent; they cut off the heads and the arm with a single stroke.”

In his exposition of the halachos of *tefillin* (*Menachos, siman* 15), the Rosh attributes Gad’s prowess in severing the heads and arms of their enemies in a single sword stroke to the aforementioned

halachah that anyone going out to battle must be meticulous about not letting his mind wander elsewhere between donning his *tefillin shel yad* and *tefillin shel rosh*. He notes that the tribe of Gad took particular care in this respect, not interrupting between donning *tefillin shel yad* and *tefillin shel rosh*, not even to respond *yehei shmei rabbah*, *kedushah*, or *amein*.

In Rabbeinu Bechyei's commentary on the Torah (*Bamidbar* 32:32), we find similarly that the tribe of Gad "were secure in their might and power in the merit of the mitzvah they fulfilled, according to Chazal's interpretation [of the words]: "they sever the arm" — in the merit of the *tefillin* on the arm; "along with the head" — in the merit of the *tefillin* on the head."

What is the deeper connection between prowess in battle and fulfilling the mitzvah of *tefillin*?

☞ Giving the Heart Precedence over the Mind

THIS CAN APPARENTLY be understood by fully grasping the difference between the *tefillin shel yad* and *tefillin shel rosh*.

The prayer we say prior to donning *tefillin* includes the words, "And He has commanded us to place them upon the arm in commemoration of His outstretched arm and that [the *tefillin*] should [also] be [positioned] parallel to the heart to thereby subjugate the desires and thoughts of our heart to His service, may His Name be blessed. And [He has commanded us to place them] upon the head, over the brain, so that the soul [that resides] in the brain, together with rest of my senses and faculties, should all be subjugated to His service, may His Name be blessed."

The *tefillin shel yad* is positioned on the arm, across from the heart, whereas the *tefillin shel rosh* is positioned over the brain.

A person's heart, which beats uninterruptedly, is the center of all his physical activity. His brain, where all his mental activity takes place, is the center of his thought and meditation.

Giving the *tefillin shel yad* precedence over the *tefillin shel rosh*

thus denotes the precedence of the heart over the brain, or in other words, of physical activity over mental cognition.

In short, this corresponds to Bnei Yisrael's declaration at Har Sinai granting "*Naaseh* (We will do)" precedence over "*Nishma* (We will listen)." Maintaining this priority is the key both to the individual's prowess and to Yisrael's ability to overcome the nations of the world.

The obligation to accord donning the *tefillin shel yad* priority over donning the *tefillin shel rosh* symbolizes the idea that Yisrael's superiority is contingent upon their spirituality rendering all their physical activities holy, this finding expression in both their hearts and their actions. The individual who elevates his mental faculties alone while neglecting to purify his mundane, physical actions and leaves them prey to his baser urges will fall when he faces practical challenges. Such a person "should leave and return home" and refrain from going out to the battlefield.

☛ The Upper Hand in Battle Is Gained by the Side Whose Minds and Deeds Are in Sync

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the *tefillin shel yad* represents a person's own efforts to subjugate his physical actions and faculties to Hashem's service — in other words, work that depends on human effort — which is why they are placed across from the heart, the seat of physical activity. By contrast, the *tefillin shel rosh* represents the bestowal of Heavenly inspiration upon the mind. Chazal (*Berachos* 6a) understand the *pasuk*, "And all the nations of the land will see that Hashem's Name is associated with you, and they will fear you" (*Devarim* 28:10) as referring to the *Shechinah*'s presence that is engendered by wearing *tefillin shel rosh*. However, man must rectify his deeds before attending to the holiness that suffuses his mind. As the Mishnah (*Avos* 3:9) says, "Whoever's deeds are in excess of his wisdom, his wisdom shall endure. And whoever's wisdom is in excess of his deeds, his wisdom shall not endure."

The Sefas Emes explains the following *pasuk*, recording the

declaration of the army commanders to Moshe after their successful campaign against Midian, in line with this idea: “They said to Moshe, ‘Your servants have calculated the total number of troops who are with us, and not one man of ours is missing’” (*Bamidbar* *ibid.* *pasuk* 49). In the Sefas Emes’s words, “This means that nobody’s mental faculties had progressed beyond the rectification of his deeds in practice.” If a person’s intellectual attainments are out of sync with the state of his practical observance, his wisdom will not endure. He will certainly be unable to overcome an opponent in battle — even when he represents truth and his opponent represents evil — if his opponent’s mind and deeds *are* acting harmoniously.

This point can be elucidated by the Chafetz Chaim’s remark that a certain faction espousing an ideology at variance with the Torah leaders was achieving success because its members thoroughly believed in the false values in which they placed their faith and that therefore “they are fighting for falsehood but are doing so genuinely.”

In the same way, it can be said that although among the nations of the world filth and impurity are paramount, their actions are nonetheless in sync with their minds, and their deeds are faithful to their ideals. This gives them power. In order to overcome this power, it is crucial that a righteous opponent be able to fell their arm and head in a single stroke by virtue of the harmony existing within himself between his mind and his actions. This perfection can only be achieved by preferring the rectification of practice over that of the mind. It is therefore vital that every person who goes out to battle is utterly meticulous about donning *tefillin shel yad* before *tefillin shel rosh*.

☞ Practice Is the Root of Understanding

THERE IS ANOTHER Mishnah (*Avos* 3:17) whose lesson we must incorporate into the above discussion. The Mishnah states, “Whoever’s wisdom is in excess of his deeds, what does he resemble? A tree whose branches are many but whose roots are few, and the wind comes and uproots and overturns it. However, the person whose

deeds are in excess of his wisdom, what does he resemble? A tree whose branches are few and whose roots are many, such that even if all the winds in the world come and buffet it, they will not move it from its place, as it says, ‘He shall be like a tree planted near water that spreads its roots to streams, never notices when heat comes, whose leaves are always lush, in a year of drought is not afraid, and who never ceases to produce fruit’ (*Yirmeyahu* 17:8).”

This Mishnah compares a person’s deeds with the tree’s roots and his wisdom to its branches.

This seems counterintuitive; we would have expected the comparison to be the other way around, because a person’s deeds are an outgrowth of his wisdom, so wisdom should be compared to the roots, and deeds to the branches that grow from the roots.

Chazal are alerting us to a very serious phenomenon to which we must be attentive. Although everyone knows that his deeds must be consistent with his ideals, this is frequently not what happens in practice. Instead of bringing his actions into line with his wisdom, a person will often adjust his ideology and wisdom to bring them in line with his deeds.

This means that his wisdom will actually be the product of his deeds, which are thus the root that determines the final outcome. This is conveyed by the Gemara’s statement (*Sanhedrin* 63b), “Yisrael knew that idolatry is worthless, and they only engaged in it as a means of permitting themselves immorality.”

SUMMARY

Indeed, in the Sefas Emes’s words, “A person’s deeds should emulate his understanding, and he should not act too clever.”

The person who wants his personal holiness to bring him triumph in battle over an opponent who truly and sincerely

believes in his lustful path must purify his own heart in all sincerity. This purification can't start from the branches, but must start from the root, which is firmly planted in the soil of reality, in the physical world. He must therefore be meticulous in giving priority to the *tefillin shel yad* over the *tefillin shel rosh*, rectifying his heart before his mind and his deeds before his intellect.

Masei



What Doesn't Destroy You Makes You Stronger

👁️ Journeying for the Sake of Encamping?

THE TORAH INTRODUCES Moshe's précis of Bnei Yisrael's desert sojourns as follows: "These are the stopping places of Bnei Yisrael **who left Egypt** according to their groups, led by Moshe and Aharon. Moshe wrote down **how they proceeded** (lit., their departures) **according to their stopping places** under Hashem's instructions, and these were their **stopping places according to how they proceeded** (lit., departed)" (*Bamidbar* 33:1–2).

The Torah first refers to "**how they proceeded, according to their stopping places**" (i.e., their departures from their various encampments), which is as we would expect, for every stop is the point of departure for the next journey.

However, the Torah then immediately reverses these terms, referring to "**their stopping places according to how they proceeded**" (i.e., the encampments to which each journey brought them), which implies that the purpose of each departure was the encampment to which it brought them.

Which was the main purpose — the journey or the encampment?

The term "stopping places according to how they proceeded" itself is puzzling. How is it possible to suggest that the goal of each journey was to arrive at the next stopping place, when each encampment was

merely a temporary pause on the way to Eretz Yisrael? What purpose did each stop have beyond allowing people to rest and gather their strength for a further leg of their journey, bringing them ever closer to Eretz Yisrael? The Torah begins this account by telling us that Bnei Yisrael's departure from Egypt was the starting point of all their travels, implying that this was all really one long journey with several rest stops along the way, not a series of separate journeys whose every encampment had significance of its own.

☛ What Is the Significance of the Middle Book of the Torah, Which Speaks about the Journeys?

THERE ARE TWO *pesukim* in the book of *Bamidbar* that are “bracketed” within two reversed *nunin*:

It was whenever the ark traveled that Moshe would say, “Arise, Hashem, may Your enemies be scattered, and may those who hate You flee from before You.” And when it came to rest, he would say, “Rest, Hashem, among the tens of thousands and the thousands of Yisrael.” (Ibid. 10:35–6)

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 116a) states, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* made these section markers before and after it because it is considered a book in its own right.”

In other words, the Torah actually consists of seven books: 1. *Bereishis*, 2. *Shemos*, 3. *Vayikra*, 4. *Bamidbar* until “It was whenever the ark traveled,” 5. *Bamidbar* from “It was whenever the ark traveled,” until “the thousands of Yisrael,” 6. *Bamidbar* from there until the end, and 7. *Devarim*.

These two *pesukim* are thus considered a book of their own. What fundamental teaching do they convey that is such a major Torah principle?

We also need to understand why at the beginning of every journey Moshe said, “May Your enemies be scattered, and may those who hate You flee from before You.” Bnei Yisrael were traveling through the desert — desolate territory without a living soul. The

only advantage of such a place is that there are no enemies. To whom do the words “May Your enemies be scattered” refer?

☛ The Purpose of Each Desert Encampment

THE SEFAS EMES explains that at each spot where Bnei Yisrael encamped, they achieved the rectification of that place, transforming it from a site of physical and spiritual abandonment into somewhere civilized and a place of study and reflection.

In the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 237a), we find that “the desert was readied for impure spirit, so that the latter should have some place to be dominant.” Desert terrain is devoid of human population and influence. The Torah refers to the desert as containing “snakes, serpents, and scorpions” (*Devarim* 8:15); it is the realm of the agents of harm and damage.

Whereas holiness is a source of life, in the desert, desolation and death, emptiness and abandon hold sway — it is the antithesis of sanctity and the *Shechinah*’s presence.

Making their way through the desert with the *Shechinah* in their midst, Bnei Yisrael transformed this spiritual desolation.

We thus find in the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, *parshas Masei* 23:4) that the reason Scripture specifies each of the desert encampments is because in the future, the desert will be inhabited, as it is written, “I shall make the desert into a water-filled lake” (*Yeshayah* 41:18). At present, there are no trees in the desert, but there will be in the future, as it says, “In the desert, I shall put cedar, acacia, myrtle, and oil trees” (ibid. *pasuk* 19). At present, there is no path through the desert, which is all sand, but in the future, there will be paths there, as it says, “I shall even place a path in the desert and in the wilderness, rivers” (ibid. 43:19); and it says, “There shall be there a path and a way; it shall be called ‘the holy way;’ no impure nation shall pass upon it [though] it be theirs;’ for the traveler to go on and [even] fools shall not blunder” (ibid. 35:8).

The desert encampments were thus a means of taking over and

readying the desolate terrain so that in the future, when impurity gives way to holiness, it can become inhabited.

☛ “Their Stopping Places according to How They Proceeded”

THE TORAH’S FORMULATION is now readily understood. Since all of Bnei Yisrael’s travels in the desert were merely stages on a single journey to arrive in Eretz Yisrael, we found difficulty with its implication that each part of that journey was undertaken for the purpose of arriving at the next stop. Now, we appreciate that their arrival at the stopping place to which each leg of the journey brought them indeed had a purpose beyond simply resting. Certainly, Bnei Yisrael were engaged in one long journey whose purpose was to convey them from the impurity of Egypt to the holiness of Eretz Yisrael, but beyond affording them respite from the long journey, each of their encampments was the setting for a spiritual conflict that took place there. Each and every encampment served a specific purpose, requiring a specific rectification that was achieved after a struggle with the local forces opposing holiness that resisted the attainment of the place’s particular spiritual mission.

According to this, however, the corresponding term — “how they proceeded (i.e., departed) according to their stopping places” — becomes harder to understand. If each encampment and its spiritual rectification was the goal, in what sense was their stopping merely for the purpose of traveling on?

☛ The Encampments Convey the Lesson That Spiritual Setbacks Also Have a Purpose

THE SEFAS EMES explains:

All the encampments were recorded in order to let G-d’s people know that a servant of Hashem should not become discouraged by all the setbacks he experiences, for such is life — there are ups and

downs. Following every respite that they attained after a [spiritual] battle, a further battle ensued. So it is always; “They journeyed... and they encamped... they journeyed... and they encamped,” as it says in *Tehillim* (84:8), “They go from strength to strength,” for Hashem’s servants have no rest, for this is the purpose for which they were created — to fight battles on Hashem’s behalf. Certainly, the [spiritual] battles that Klal Yisrael fought concerned matters that involved all of creation.

In other words, on the heels of every respite — representing some achievement — comes a new journey, a new setback, and a new challenge, necessitating a new struggle to overcome it.

The Torah thus chronicles one challenge after another and one setback after another, conveying to us that there are no achievements without setbacks.

The individual who is engaged in a spiritual struggle for Heaven’s sake should therefore never lose heart on account of experiencing a defeat, for every setback paves the way for a new ascent. The momentary setback actually steels and galvanizes his soul, strengthening and steadying his progress and ensuring its subsequent stability and permanence.

☛ Yosef Intended to Elevate Himself but Was Instead Faced with an Extreme Challenge

AT THIS JUNCTURE, it is fitting to cite the comments of the *Zohar* (Vol. I, 190b), in regard to Yosef, of whom it is written, “It happened **on a certain day** that he came to the house to do his work, and none of the members of the household were there in the house. She grabbed him by his garment, as if to say, ‘Lie with me,’ but he left his garment in her hand and fled and went outside” (*Bereishis* 39:11–12).

What do the words “on a certain day” signify? What was special about that day, and what work did Yosef have to do in the house on that day?

The *Zohar*’s answer to these questions is quite startling.

“It happened on a certain day” — this is “the day on which the *yetzer hara* has dominion in the world and descends to obstruct people.

“When is this day? It is the day when a person comes to repent his sins or intensifies his efforts to study Torah and fulfill mitzvos, which represent a person’s ‘work’ in this world. Since a person’s work in this world is to serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, he needs to be as fierce as a lion in every way so that the ‘other side’ shouldn’t dominate him or entice him.”

In other words, with every prospect of spiritual elevation, spiritual struggle intensifies. Yosef aspired to reach higher when he was suddenly confronted with the terrible trial of Potiphar’s wife, which threatened to make him stumble and bring him down. At the very moment of spiritual ascent, a person is vulnerable to his baser instincts and must fight like a lion to resist.

☞ Assistance Is Extended to the *Tzaddik* in the Form of Challenges That Strengthen Him

THESE COMMENTS OF the *Zohar* are surprising, for it is unclear why Yosef should have been exposed to spiritually life-threatening danger at the very moment that he strived for elevation.

We would expect just the opposite, for the rule is, “Along the path that a person desires to take he is led” (*Makkos* 10b), meaning that the individual who is drawn after his desires will stumble, whereas the person who seeks spiritual elevation is afforded the opportunity to attain his goal.

Similarly, in connection with the *pasuk*, “If a person is drawn to mockers, he will become a mocker, whereas he who is drawn towards the humble shall find favor” (*Mishlei* 3:34), Chazal (*Shabbos* 104a) expound, “He who seeks to become impure is given opportunity to do so, whereas he who seeks to become pure is assisted.”

How can the Heavenly assistance promised to “he who seeks to become pure” be reconciled with the enticements of Potiphar’s wife?

Rather than facing a terrible challenge, we would expect Yosef to have attained sublime holiness, in keeping with the Gemara's (*Yoma* 39a) interpretation of the words, "You shall render yourselves holy, and you will [thereby] become holy" (*Vayikra* 11:44): "A person who sanctifies himself a little is sanctified [by Heaven] a lot; the person who sanctifies himself down below is sanctified up above; the person who sanctifies himself in this world is sanctified in the World to Come."

Bnei Yisrael in the desert were apparently also troubled by these questions, as after every stop — during which they had successfully fought on Heaven's behalf to vanquish the spirit of impurity and abandon prevailing in the desert — came another setback, and they set out on yet another journey.

According to the Sefas Emes's explanation, though, the pattern is clear, for every setback is the foundation of further ascent, and a person can only attain perfection after facing challenges. The heavenly assistance extended to the person who "seeks to become pure" includes the challenge that comes on the heels of an achievement. As the Sefas Emes (in *parshas Vayishlach*) explains the *pasuk*, "Yaakov arrived *shaleim*, intact or perfect" (*Bereishis* 33:18), "After having experienced all the forgoing suffering, he is referred to as *shaleim*, as it says, 'A *tzaddik* falls seven times yet he rises' (*Mishlei* 24:16) — [in other words, he ascends] precisely because he has fallen."

Indeed, "he who seeks to become pure is assisted," but this assistance doesn't set him in stone — it leads him to become even stronger with the next challenge he faces.

SUMMARY

Bnei Yisrael's desert encampments were not just opportunities to rest, but represented spiritual battlegrounds. These encampments transformed spiritually hostile and impure sites into

places where holiness could thrive and that would eventually become inhabited. This is the meaning of the phrase “their stopping places according to how they proceeded.”

However, the Torah also refers to “how they proceeded according to their stopping places,” for their departures from the places where they had triumphed spiritually also had a purpose — to teach them how to fall and then get back up. As the Sefas Emes writes (in *parshas Bo*):

When a person is aware of this, it becomes easier for his *yetzer hara* to gather strength to oppose him. Even though those who are occupied with serving Heaven experience various types of setbacks, as it says, “A *tzaddik* falls seven times yet rises,” they should be aware that everything is for the good. And similarly, all of the setbacks that a person experiences are required so that he can grow, so that he should afterwards be greater.

Indeed, whatever doesn’t destroy you galvanizes you.

Devarim



Who Has Exalted Us above Other Languages

☞ “Not a Man of Words,” Yet
“These Are the Matters of Which He Spoke”

AS FORTY YEARS of traveling through the desert were drawing to a close, Moshe stood before Bnei Yisrael and spoke, addressing the entire Book of *Devarim* to them.

The Torah tells us, “These are the matters of which Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael on the other side of the Jordan, in the desert, on the plain, opposite Suf, between Paran and Tofel, Lavan, Chatzeiros, and Di Zahav” (*Devarim* 1:1).

Moshe, however, was no “man of words” (*Shemos* 4:10). When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to dispatch him as His emissary to speak to Pharaoh, Moshe told Him, “Please, Hashem, I am not a man of words; not yesterday, not the day before, not even from when You began speaking to Your servant, for I stammer and have difficulty speaking” (*ibid.*).

How and when did Moshe become a polished speaker?

☞ The Tree of Life Heals Speech

THIS QUESTION IS addressed in the Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah* 1:1), where Chazal respond that Moshe Rabbeinu’s speech impediment

was cured when the Torah was given, for upon that occasion, any and every member of the nation who was suffering from any physical blemish was healed. In this context, the Midrash presents the following discussion of Torah's healing power upon language in several contexts:

What is the halachah regarding a Jew writing a *sefer Torah* in another language? Thus taught the Sages: there is no difference between *sifrei Torah* on one hand and *tefillin* and *mezuzos* on the other hand, other than that *sifrei Torah* can be written in any language. Rabban Gamliel says, "Even *sifrei Torah* they only permitted to be written in Greek." What is Rabban Gamliel's reason for saying it is permitted to write *sifrei Torah* in Greek? Thus taught our teachers: Bar Kapara said, "For it says, 'G-d shall expand Yefes, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem' (*Bereishis* 9:27), meaning that Shem's teachings shall be repeated in Yefes's languages." They therefore allowed writing in Greek. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, "See how precious Torah's language is — it cures language." From where is this learned? As it is written, "The tree of life heals speech" (*Mishlei* 15:4), and the "tree of life" refers to Torah, as it says, "It is a tree of life for those who grasp it" (*ibid.* 3:18). Torah's language unties the tongue. The proof is that in the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is going to bring up fine trees of Torah from Gan Eden. And wherein lies their excellence? In their ability to heal language. For before Moshe merited [receiving the] Torah, it is written about Him, "I am not a man of words," but once he merited Torah, his speech was cured, and he started to speak about things. Where do we see this? From that which we read regarding, "These are the matters of which Moshe spoke."

☛ What Connection Is There between Physical Healing and Using a Foreign Language?

THESE COMMENTS ARE very perplexing, for the Midrash apparently places "defective" speech in the sense of a foreign language that is devoid of holiness on the same footing as defective speech due to some physical impediment, whereas their respective remedies are utterly dissimilar. To explain:

The distinction between *lashon hakodesh* (i.e., Hebrew) and all other languages lies in the fact that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world through the Ten Utterances recorded in the Torah's account of the Six days of Creation, which were spoken in *lashon hakodesh*.

This is thus not a language that resulted from any human consensus; as the language employed by the Creator, it is intrinsically holy. These two classes of language differ profoundly. Hashem's speech is not merely a means of communication; it brought the entire creation into being and sustains it on an ongoing basis. Each word spoken by the Creator provided the impetus for that thing to come into being. When a human employs *lashon hakodesh*, he is thus using the same "building blocks" through which the world was created and through which it continues to exist. Each word of *lashon hakodesh* thus expresses the essence of whatever it denotes — it is that word that actually brings the thing it denotes into existence and sustains it. Altering a word thus alters the essence of the thing it describes. For example, moving the letter *ayin* from after the letters *nun* and *gimel* (*nega*, plague or affliction) to before them (*oneg*, pleasure) changes the word's essence from one extreme to the other.

The words of other languages, by contrast, are invested with no holiness. They bear no intrinsic connection to the essence of the objects or the phenomena they denote. Their sole significance lies in a society's consensus that this particular sign or series of signs and this phonetic sound or series of sounds should represent the same specific thing to all who speak, hear, read, and write the language. All other languages are thus symbol-based, with each society arbitrarily determining its own symbols.

Understanding language on this basis leads us to conclude that writing a *sefer Torah* in a foreign language should neither remedy the language's mundane nature in any degree nor alter its character as the product of a consensus. All it achieves is using a symbol-based language to convey holy content. The foreign language itself doesn't change or assume a holy character.

By contrast, when the Torah was given, Bnei Yisrael were cured of any physical handicaps — this was genuine healing.

Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* 18:4) tell us, “When Yisrael stood at Har Sinai and declared, ‘Everything that Hashem has said we shall do and shall listen to’ (*Shemos* 24:7), there were no lame, blind, mute, deaf, or intellectually disabled individuals among them. Of that moment, it is said, ‘You are wholly beautiful, My beloved one, and there is no blemish in you’ (*Shir Hashirim* 4:7).”

Accordingly, Moshe’s physical speech defect was cured when the Torah was given.

The comparison drawn by the Midrash between the allowance to use a foreign language for writing a *sefer Torah* and the fact that receiving the Torah brought about the cure of all physical ailments is thus very difficult to understand — the two are utterly dissimilar.

✎ Although Using a Foreign Language for Torah Study Doesn’t Alter the Language, the Student Absorbs Holiness

THE SEFAS EMES resolves this difficulty by explaining that studying Torah in a foreign language does in fact “heal” the language, thus rendering this similar to the cure of physical ailments that took place prior to the giving of the Torah.

His explanation of what this means, which follows, is both profound and wonderful:

“*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* looked into the Torah and created the world” (*Zohar*, Vol. II, 161b). Hashem’s word through which the world was created is thus the Torah, which, in the Sefas Emes’s words, “imparts and bestows life upon every creature in the world — the source of the vitality of everything is thus the Torah.”

The world that surrounds us thus represents a physical husk or shell surrounding inner content of holiness and spirituality. That which is drawn inwards, away from the periphery and towards its inner, Torah essence becomes imbued with spirituality and is thereby

sanctified. That which maintains its distance from Torah remains coarse and far removed from holiness.

The language a person speaks gives expression to his inner content. His language is the instrument that conveys the cadences of his essence. A coarse, materialistic individual speaks in a coarse manner, whereas a holy, spiritual individual employs refined language.

The person who studies Torah fills himself with holiness and connects to his spiritual core, which is the word of Hashem sustaining him. If a person learns Torah, the language he speaks is thereby sanctified, for it expresses his inner world, which has become holy.

Therefore, even if a Torah scholar speaks a foreign language that lacks the special character of *lashon hakodesh*, his speech assumes holiness, because his inner essence has become holy.

In other words, although the language retains its arbitrary character and lacks any intrinsic holiness, since speech expresses the speaker's essence, and the latter has become sanctified through learning Torah, his speech will reflect the holiness situated at his core.

The Torah which rectifies a person thus also remedies the language that he speaks.

Chazal therefore tell us that Moshe explained the Torah to Yisrael in seventy languages. These languages were merely the outer cloak, the means of conveying the holy inner essence of the scholar of Torah.

☞ Language as a Mirror of the Soul

IN LIGHT OF the above, we understand that when Chazal permit writing a *sefer Torah* in a foreign language, this indeed rectifies the language. It becomes the instrument for conveying a holy melody; its syllables express the inner yearning for connection to spirituality and holiness which form the core of physical existence.

The Gemara (*Bechoros* 30b) relates, "A certain woman was married to a Torah scholar, and she would wind his *tefillin* around his arm. She was subsequently married to an ignoramus and would affix

tax receipts to his arm.” Language works in a similar way. It can express heresy and denial or sublime, holy ideas. No matter what language a person speaks, if his essence is rooted in holiness, this will be conveyed in his speech.

Speech is like a mirror; no matter what language is being spoken, it will reflect the speaker’s essence.

☛ Yefes’s Beauty within the Tents of Shem

THE MISHNAH (*AVOS* 4:20) warns that a container’s external appearance isn’t always indicative of its contents: “Do not look at the pitcher but at its contents; there can be a new pitcher filled with [fine] old [wine], and there can be [an] old [pitcher] that doesn’t even contain new [inferior wine].”

Now, Chazal interpret Noach’s blessing to his two elder sons — “G-d shall expand Yefes, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem” — to mean that “Yefes’s beauty shall dwell in the tents of Shem.”

The Tent of Shem refers to the holy, inner content of the Torah teachings that are studied in *batei midrash* by the descendents of Shem; this represents the pitcher’s contents.

The Beauty of Yefes represents the pitcher’s external beauty, which was the specialty of Yefes, ancestor of the Greeks.

In light of the Mishnah’s message, what is the significance of Noach’s blessing to Yefes? Can a thing’s external appearance seep into its inner sanctuary that holds its content and essence? In what sense are the aesthetics of Yefes present among the teachings of Shem?

The Sefas Emes maintains that *chalilah* we suggest that externalities have any bearing upon inner essence — the *beis midrash* is not the setting for external glitter or the vanity of beauty. They are irrelevant to its role and mission.

Rather, the effect is in the opposite direction; content influences externals. When Torah thrives within the tents of study, even the medium of its outer expression reflects this and becomes sanctified.

In this case, the external beauty of the Torah's outer casing is attributable to its role as the vessel serving its holy content.

This is what happens when the Greek language is used for writing a *sefer Torah*. As a rule, this language is used to express foreign, alien content; it expresses "the other side," the polar opposite of holiness. However, if it is used as the medium for communicating Torah teachings, its regular content is overtaken and sublimated by holiness, and the Greek language itself expresses holy content. This is how Yefes's beauty can play a role in that which transpires within the tents of Shem.

As the Sefas Emes writes, "The languages of the nations of the world can also serve as 'clothing' for the Torah, and through [serving] Torah's inner content, which is the core of holiness, the other excluded languages that are [usually] attached to 'the other side' also draw close to holiness."

☛ Moshe's Speech Impediment — Solely in Regard to the Mundane Realm

WITH THIS IDEA, the Sefas Emes elucidates the first part of the Midrash, explaining how by being used to transmit Torah, a foreign language can become sanctified, for the speaker's essence becomes holy, resulting in his language expressing inner content that has been overtaken by holiness.

He then uses the very same approach to explain the second part of the Midrash regarding the healing of Moshe's speech.

The Midrash isn't referring to the physical cure of a speech impairment. It refers to a person's ability to channel his own inner holiness and have this penetrate the heart of another person who is distant from that realm and mired in coarseness and impurity such that the latter's inner world changes. Moshe was sent to address Pharaoh, who ruled over a mighty dominion of impurity. The goal of speaking to him was to influence Pharaoh's inner world such that he would obey Hashem's word, whose binding nature he had hitherto denied.

When Moshe told Hashem, “I am not a man of words,” he meant that his speech expressed his own vast inner content, which scaled spiritual heights, enabling him to speak to Hashem. His speech conveyed the holy essence of a human who transcended the physical realm. Moshe therefore believed he was unable to use his holy speech such that it would descend from the heights and be apprehended by an individual mired in the depths of impurity. He therefore asked Hashem not to send him to use his gifts of sublime, holy speech to imbue holiness into Pharaoh’s degenerate world. He felt unable to use his speech in this way. In this respect, his speech suffered from an impediment.

Moshe’s speech was sublime and spiritual — it belonged to the heavenly realm. He found the prospect of descending with it to the depths of degeneracy extremely difficult.

☞ Torah as a Means of Transforming Inner Essence

THE SEFAS EMES explains that Torah is the medium through which the person articulating it can change his essence — no matter what language he speaks in — for as Hashem’s word, Torah sustains everything on an ongoing basis and therefore conveys each thing’s inner content. By speaking words of Torah, a person can alter his essence, for he is thereby connecting to and drawing upon his core of inner holiness that is concealed within himself for which his soul yearns.

Prior to the giving of the Torah, however, this innermost chamber of the soul was inaccessible, because the core of inner holiness within a person cannot be tapped into without Torah. Until the giving of the Torah, therefore, Moshe’s speech was impaired. Without the Torah, he was unable to “neutralize” the foulness within another person’s essence and render it completely holy. Moshe’s own sublime level of holiness precluded him from finding a common tongue with any person whose inner essence was dominated by coarseness and impurity. Once the Torah had been given, however, Moshe no longer said, “I am not a man of words” — he sought to achieve the

extension of Torah's holiness to every nation and language, and he now possessed the means of doing so. To this end, he began elucidating the Torah in seventy languages, introducing its light into the language of every nation on earth.

☞ The Mutual Influence of Vessel and Content — Of Speech and Inner Essence

AT THIS POINT, the Sefas Emes introduces yet a further level of depth into these ideas.

While a person's speech expresses his inner essence, the flow is not just one way, from inside outward; speech is a two-way street. A person's speech and his inner world exert an effect on one another:

- On one hand, speech expresses that which transpires within a person's soul; his inner world shapes his speech. An inner world where holiness prevails yields pure, refined speech.
- On the other hand, speech also changes the soul, influencing a person's inner landscape. Torah's holy and spiritual nature renders its containment within a physical vessel difficult. When the vessel has undergone adjustment for its contents, however, and has become sanctified and imbued with spirituality, a person is able to serve as a receptacle for Torah even in its most abstract, sublime spiritual form. Studying Torah channels its holiness into a person's inner world; the deeper the level at which he absorbs the Torah he studies into his soul and his inner world, the more spiritual he becomes and the greater his success in penetrating its depths.

☞ The Goal of the Book of *Devarim*

IN LIGHT OF the above ideas, the Sefas Emes explains the significance of *Sefer Devarim*.

Torah's expanse is infinite, and Moshe attained levels of understanding that Bnei Yisrael did not. Because Moshe's holiness was

superior to Bnei Yisrael's, there was a gulf between his understanding and the extent to which Bnei Yisrael understood. Moshe sought to bridge this gap before he died. When a disciple's level falls short of that of his teacher, the only way forward is to heighten his disciple's holiness. Moshe thus tried to instill the Torah's teachings deep within Yisrael's inner world so that they would be able to attain profound understanding and plumb its infinite depths.

In *Sefer Devarim*, which is also referred to by Chazal as *Mishneh Torah*, Moshe reviewed the entire Torah, teaching it to Bnei Yisrael again. The purpose of this review was not to introduce anything new, but to sharpen and deepen their knowledge. Through his speech, Moshe brought Torah's illumination right into Bnei Yisrael's innermost being, rendering them capable of containing Torah's light.

SUMMARY

Moshe taught Bnei Yisrael that a person's speech can affect his inner world, illuminating and rendering it capable of receiving spirituality and holiness. Such speech — no matter in which language it is delivered — can sanctify a person. It can render a person spiritual and broaden the scope of his understanding and the extent of his awareness even without introducing any new knowledge simply by sharpening his existing knowledge and transforming him into an entity of Torah. Indeed, this is part of the mitzvah, "You shall drill them into your students and speak about them" (*Devarim* 6:7).

Ua'eschanan

“Hashem, Open My Lips” — The Privilege of Standing before Hashem in Prayer

☞ What Do the Ten Terms of Prayer Signify?

MOSHE ATTEMPTED TO have the decree against him entering Eretz Yisrael rescinded. He prayed in the form of *chinun* or *techinah* (entreaty), denoting a request for an undeserved favor.

Moshe told Bnei Yisrael, “I entreated Hashem at that time, saying, ‘Hashem, G-d, You have started showing Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty power — for what power exists in heaven or on earth that can equal Your deeds and Your mighty doings?’” (*Devarim* 3:23–24).

Moshe introduced this particular form of prayer. We do not encounter the expression *techinah* used for prayer prior to this.

Chazal point this out in the Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah* 2:1):

Tefillah (prayer) is referred to by ten different expressions. These are:

shevaah (pleading),

tze'akah (calling out),

ne'akah (crying out),

rinah (song of prayer),

pegiah (entreaty) [as in “*Vayifga bamakom*, he prayed in that place”

(*Bereishis* 28:11)],

bitzur (prayer amid trouble) [as in “*Batzar li ekra Hashem*, when in a strait, I call Hashem” (*Shmuel* II, 22:7)],

keriah (calling),

nipul (prostration) [as in, “*Va’etsnapal lifnei Hashem*, I prostrated myself before Hashem” (*Devarim* 9:18)],

pilul (reasoned prayer) [as in “*Va’yaamod Pinchas vayfalel*, Pinchas stood and prayed” (*Tehillim* 106:30)],

tachanunim (entreaties).

Of them all, the only type of prayer that Moshe offered was *tachanunim*, as it says, “I entreated Hashem.”

A thing’s name denotes its essence, and when something is referred to by several names, each name highlights a different aspect of its nature. What do these various expressions of prayer signify, and what is the nature of the prayer referred to as *techinah*, which Moshe chose for offering his prayer concerning a matter so fateful to his future?

☞ Two Stages of Prayer — To Merit Standing before Hashem and the Actual Plea

THE SEFAS EMES presents a breathtaking approach to the topic of prayer. We usually understand prayer as the straightforward act of standing before Hashem and praying. The Sefas Emes maintains, however, that there are actually two distinct stages:

The first stage is entering the situation of standing before Hashem.

The second stage is tendering our request itself.

The first stage, says the Sefas Emes, is more difficult to achieve than the second. The difficulty is in opening up the doorway ushering us into Hashem’s presence and in seeking the privilege of standing before Him.

We are all aware that whereas one can be fully attentive to a conversation one is having with a friend, when it comes to praying, we find ourselves frequently distracted. During prayer of all times, even when tendering some critical request, a person can find himself

uninspired, unable to find the right words, unable to focus his thoughts or to engage his heart in truly requesting that which his lips are murmuring, so that he tenders his plea appropriately. This phenomenon is what results when the gateway to prayer remains closed; he has not succeeded in arriving in the situation where he stands before Hashem.

This explains the need for prior preparation before praying — laying the groundwork and requesting that the door should swing open, allowing us access to Hashem and according us the privilege of standing before Him.

Once this has been granted and we find ourselves “inside” — in Hashem’s presence — deliberation over the actual request takes into account how deserving the suppliant is, and his pleas are answered or not accordingly. Therefore, in regard to certain things that a person deserves to receive, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* assists him in formulating his request and “puts the words into his mouth. The reason a person may find that his focus is enhanced is because the door is already wide open.

☞ The Quality of Our Focus Is a Gauge of Our Prayer’s Acceptance

THE MISHNAH (*BERACHOS* 5:5) tells us, “They said about R. Chanina ben Dosa that when he prayed on behalf of the sick he would say, ‘This one will live; that one will die.’ ‘How do you know?’ they asked him. He told them, ‘If my prayer is fluent on my lips, I know that it is accepted, and if not, I know it is rejected.’”

R. Elimelech of Lizhensk (quoted by R. Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin, *Pri Tzaddik, parshas Vayeishev* 3), explains that the word *shegurah* in R. Chanina ben Dosa’s response — “*Im shegurah tefillasi b’fi*, If my prayer is fluent on my lips” — is related to *shigur*, meaning sending or dispatching, in the sense of an emissary who is dispatched on a mission which he carries out on behalf of the dispatcher as opposed to acting on his own behalf. Similarly, the word *shigrah*

(routine) denotes an act that a person carries out on a regular basis virtually automatically, involving no novel input whatsoever on his part. When describing his prayers as being *shegurah b'fi*, R. Chanina implied that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had dispatched the prayer to him, placing the appropriate words upon his lips and the correct thoughts in his mind.

In other words, in the second stage of prayer, a person is in the situation of clay in the hand of the potter; the quality of his prayer is a function of how deserving he is. If the moment is auspicious, he prays properly, because Heaven is placing the words on his lips.

Thus, if he finds that he has managed to properly focus his thoughts, this indicates that the door was open to him and that his heavenly Listener was prepared to hear his prayer. He therefore afforded him entry to His presence in order to articulate his request.

Our prayers on the Yamim Nora'im include the following request:

Please accompany the mouths of the emissaries of Your nation, the House of Yisrael, who are standing before You today seeking mercy and entreating on behalf of Your People, Yisrael. Guide them as to what they should say; bestow on them understanding as to how they should speak; make known to them what they should ask for... and may they not stumble in their speech or be embarrassed by their response, nor may they say before You anything that is contrary to Your wishes.

Once Heaven's door is open and the moment is auspicious, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is merciful and generous in regard to a person's actual request, assisting him in directing his thoughts appropriately and in saying the right things in order that he should receive the good that he deserves.

It is written in *Mishlei* (16:1), "The mouth's speech is from Hashem," meaning that Hashem places a person's request in regard to something that he needs upon his lips in order that his salvation should come about through his prayer.

Thus, at the beginning of every *amidah* prayer, we say the *pasuk*, "Hashem, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise"

(*Tehillim* 51:17), because it is Hashem who sends our prayer to us, putting its words into our mouths.

The challenge thus lies in the first stage — in getting Heaven's door to open and attaining the privilege of entering Hashem's presence to pray. This is why a person must engage in preparation before attempting to pray, readying his heart and asking that Heaven “open for us a gate [even] at the time when the gates are closing.”

☛ Focus in Prayer as a Heavenly Gift

THE SEFAS EMES cites the Midrash's comment (*Devarim Rabbah* 2:1), “The following is an indication as to [the efficacy of] a prayer: if a person focused his thoughts on his prayer, he can be assured that his prayer has been heeded, as it says, ‘Prepare their hearts [so that] Your ears may hear’ (*Tehillim* 10:17).”

“This presents a difficulty,” notes the Sefas Emes, “for the heart's thoughts constitute the backbone of the prayer, and in their absence (i.e., if the words alone are mouthed without concentrating on their meaning), it is not considered a prayer at all. What is the meaning of the Midrash's comment that the heart's thoughts are merely an *indication* in regard to his prayer?”

The Sefas Emes gives a startling answer:

The explanation of the matter is that the real preparation for standing in prayer is something that isn't dependent upon a person at all, but is bestowed upon him as a gift from Hashem *yisbarach*. It is therefore written, “Prepare their hearts,” meaning that it is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* who readies a person's heart for prayer. This is an indication through which a person can discern whether he has merited the object of his prayer — if he feels that he has succeeded and has merited to fully focus his heart, the prayer pouring from his heart in front of Hashem, this is a sign to him that he has truly merited the main goal of prayer.

This is readily understood in light of the above.

The word *kavanah*, meaning intention, which in the present

context refers to focusing one's thoughts on the words of one's prayer and on the One to whom it is being addressed, is derived from the word *kan*, meaning a base or support. As we have seen, in order to pray, a person must position himself in Hashem's presence, and Hashem's willingness to allow him to approach and stand before Him is itself a gift bestowed by Heaven. Any person who is not in an appropriate spiritual state will not merit this gift. The ten expressions of prayer enumerated by the Midrash thus represent not ten different types of prayer, but ten pathways for bringing oneself to the state in which he will be allowed to approach Hashem in prayer. Then, when an auspicious moment arrives, and the foundation has been properly laid, a focused heart and the appropriate words will be effective.

☞ Ten Pathways for the Preparatory Stage

THE SEFAS EMES explains that these ten expressions of prayer do not denote differences between one type of prayer and another; there is only one type of prayer.

Once a person is already standing in Hashem's presence, his prayer should be fluent for, in the *pasuk's* words, "The mouth's speech is from Hashem." However, at the first, preliminary stage, he must clear his heart and ready himself emotionally prior to praying so that Hashem will allow him into His presence in order to tender his request. The ten expressions of prayer represent ten moods or emotional states that a person can cultivate before he actually prays, necessary emotional preparation so that Heaven's door will be opened for him, allowing him to enter Hashem's presence.

In the words of the Sefas Emes, "The preparations with which a person readies himself for prayer are the ten expressions mentioned in the Midrash, because to the extent that a person readies himself in order to merit attaining this state of prayer — either through crying out or through the bitterness and distress of his trouble — he is aroused to pray."

A person's preparation for prayer thus takes the form of his attainment of a state of mind in which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* affords him entry into His presence to pray. If his heart is broken and seething in angst, Hashem affords him access into His presence to pray, in fulfillment of the *pasuk*, "Hashem will not scorn a broken and downtrodden heart" (*Tehillim* 51:19).

☛ Grant My Request Because I am Undeserving?

TECHINAH (BESEECHING) IS one of the ways in which a person can open the gate that will allow him to stand before Hashem in prayer.

However, the individual who beseeches is actually saying, "Please grant my request even though I am undeserving."

The word *techinah* is derived from *chen* (favor) and is related to *chinam* (free), something that is not owed but is awarded purely as a mark of favor.

This is how Rashi explains the word *va'eschanan*: "The expression *chinun* always denotes a free gift. Even though *tzaddikim* are able to substantiate their requests with the merit of their good deeds, all they seek from G-d is a free gift. Because He told him (Moshe), 'I shall favor whomever I shall favor' (*Shemos* 33:19), he approached Him using the expression *va'eschanan* (I sought favor)."

How are we to understand this idea of asking for a gift bestowed freely? What is the meaning of our prayer, "*Avinu malkeinu*, our Father, our King, **favor us** and answer us, **for we have no deeds?**" We can understand asking for something *despite* being undeserving, but how can we offer our being undeserving as a reason for granting it, asking for it *because* we are undeserving?

☛ What Is the Significance of Prayer Altogether?

THE SEFAS EMES poses a further, trenchant difficulty regarding the entire institution of prayer. Since a person has to ask for whatever it is he needs, it is evident that according to strict judgment, he is

undeserving. Knowing that this is the case, how can he pray to receive that which he does not in fact deserve?

☞ “I Beseeched” — For the Right to Stand before Hashem

THE SEFAS EMES responds to these questions by again citing the aforementioned distinction between a person’s actual request and the privilege of standing before Hashem.

It is straightforward that for a plea to Heaven to meet with a positive response, the supplicant must deserve it being granted. In regard to whether or not to accede to the actual request, a person’s deeds are examined in light of the principles of reward and punishment and judgment and mercy — sublime Heavenly reckonings of the world’s King and Judge Who is at the same time a merciful and benevolent Father who seeks people’s good.

Regarding a person’s focus while praying, though, the path is clear. Once Heaven’s doors have opened, his prayers have unhindered passage to enter through the main entrance. Once a person has acknowledged his own powerlessness and the need to seek Heaven’s assistance and Hashem has opened the doors of prayer to him, it is Hashem who guides him, opening his lips and putting the appropriate words into his mouth and the right thoughts into his mind. The role of a person’s *techinah* — his plea to merit heavenly bounty despite being undeserving — is to achieve this first stage of opening Heaven’s gate.

Thus, the term *va’eschanan* doesn’t relate to the merits of his actual request, but to being granted the privilege of standing before Hashem in prayer. The Sefas Emes points out that the word isn’t written *va’eichanein*, which means that the speaker engages in active beseeching. Rather, the word *va’eschanan* is reflexive, meaning that he was rendered a beseecher. Moshe sought a passive role whereby Heaven would place the words of prayer into his mouth — he asked to be granted the opportunity to enter Hashem’s presence in order to pray.

It was this opportunity that he requested as an undeserved gift. Such a request doesn't violate any principles of reward and punishment, for only in regard to the supplicant's actual plea do these become operational, whereas the privilege of entering Hashem's presence can be granted even undeservedly.

Moshe's request thus amounted to him saying, "Even if my actual request will not be granted, at least grant me a hearing; I request this privilege as a free gift. Even if I don't merit my plea being accepted, and Your decree that I should not enter Eretz Yisrael is final, that concerns the question of whether or not to accede to my request, but it shouldn't prevent me from being heard." Moshe's goal was to open Heaven's gate and be granted the privilege of praying in Hashem's presence. It was for this that he beseeched Heaven.

SUMMARY

The main obstacle to overcome is meriting the initial access, opening the gate, and receiving the privilege of standing before Hashem. Whether or not person ultimately deserves that his request be granted, he needs to prepare himself and enter the appropriate frame of mind before praying in order to be granted the privilege of standing before Hashem. This required preparation is crucial in order to be able to pray. While prayer itself is uniform, there are ten pathways of preparation for prayer through which a person readies his heart, their role being to open up the gates of Heaven.

Moshe — dwelled in Hashem's presence at all times, entered the Tent of Meeting, heard Hashem's word, and was the greatest prophet in the history of the Jewish nation — teaches us that when he wanted to stand before Hashem in order to make his appeal, even he had to beseech to be granted this privilege for free.

Eikev

The Person Who Comes to Listen Is Thereafter Drawn to Hear More

☞ “If” Is Conditional; “Because” Is Certain

MOSHE TELLS BNEI Yisrael that if they listen to Hashem, He will uphold the covenant He made with their ancestors, and they will benefit from extraordinary reward.

It is written:

And it will be *eikev tishm’un*, **because** you heed these laws and observe and fulfill them, Hashem, your G-d, will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that he promised to your forefathers. He will love you, bless you, and make you numerous, and He will bless your progeny, the fruits of your land — your grain, your wine, and your oil — the offspring of your cattle, and the robust ones of your flock on the land that He swore to your forefathers to give to you.
(*Devarim* 7:12–13)

Now, when referring to a condition whose future fulfillment is uncertain, the Torah usually employs the word *im* (if), as in the *pasuk*, “*im shamó’a tishm’u*, if you fully heed My commandments that I am commanding you today” (*ibid.* 11:13).

By contrast, the term *eikev* denotes a condition whose fulfillment is a foregone conclusion due to something that has already happened, as in the *pasuk*, “*Eikev*, **because** Avraham heeded My voice and observed My charge, My commandments, and My laws” (*Bereishis* 26:5).

In our *parshah*, however, the word *eikev* refers to a condition whose fulfillment is at this point uncertain, as it is subject to human

free will. Why does the Torah use the term *eikev*, implying that its fulfillment is a foregone conclusion?

☛ Are the Two Meanings of “*Eikev*” Identical?

RASHI EXPLAINS THAT the words, “And it will be *eikev tishm’un*, if you heed” mean, “If you heed the simple mitzvot that a person tramples with his heel,” understanding the word *eikev* to mean “heel.” According to this explanation, the conditional “if” is implied but not stated explicitly.

The source for Rashi’s explanation is the Midrash Tanchuma (*Eikev* 1), where we find:

“And it will be, *eikev...*” this refers to the *pasuk*, “Why should I be afraid during days of evil, *avon akeivai*, the sins of my heels shall surround me?” (*Tehillim* 49:6). David was afraid of the Day of Judgment and said, “*Ribbono Shel Olam*, I am not afraid of [having transgressed] the severe mitzvot in the Torah, which are severe; what do I fear? The simple mitzvot, in case I have transgressed one of them, for I may or may not have fulfilled it because it was straightforward, and You have said ‘Be as careful with a simple mitzvah as with a severe one.’”

In other words, a person is particularly liable to stumble regarding straightforward mitzvot because he takes them less seriously.

According to this interpretation, *eikev* isn’t qualifying the reward for keeping the mitzvot — “if” or “because” you heed them — but the actual mitzvot referred to, specifying them as the type of mitzvah that isn’t at the forefront of a person’s mind and which he fulfills without paying it particular attention.

Rashi’s explanation is not entirely clear, though, for the following reasons:

1. According to Rashi too, the fulfillment of these mitzvot is uncertain, and even David HaMelech, who was meticulous in his observance, felt that he may not have observed them properly. This just renders the choice of word more problematic — surely, the word *im* should have been used.

2. Explaining that *eikev* refers to a person's heel is very strange, for this apparently departs from the *pasuk*'s plain meaning, where *eikev* means "because" rather than the heel of the foot.
3. It is problematic syntactically as well, for we ordinarily understand the word *eikev* as referring to the continuation of the *pasuk*, which speaks of the consequences of Yisrael's deeds, i.e., "if" or "because" you do such-and-such, then Hashem will reward you, etc. rather than to the actual deeds themselves.

☞ The Existence of a Causal Progression in a Person's Relationship with G-d

THE SEFAS EMES explains that *eikev tishm'un* refers to the heightened sensitivity that a person merits due to his fulfillment of the mitzvos. He only needs to start the process whose second stage unfolds as a result of the first, with one following automatically from the other. We are thus not dealing with some uncertain factor that necessitates using the word *im*, but with something certain, justifying the use of *eikev*.

This idea appears later on in the *parshah*, where it is written, "And it will be *im shamó'a tishm'u*, if you constantly heed My commandments that I am commanding you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with your whole heart and your entire being..." (*Devarim* 11:13). Rashi explains the double expression *im shamó'a tishm'u* as meaning, "If you listen to the old, you will listen to the new; and similarly, [where the Torah writes *im shachó'ach tishkach* (ibid. 8:19), it means] if you have started forgetting, you will ultimately forget everything, for it is written [in the Midrash], 'If you abandon me for one day, I will abandon you for two days.'"

In other words, the person who listens and studies Torah is led to further study and to further listening, for drawing oneself closer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is akin to getting onto a train that travels on to its second stop due to having left the first, without any further effort on the passengers' part.

How are we to understand this idea? Doesn't a person have to

make new choices every moment whether to slacken or cease in his efforts — or even regress, *chalilah* — or to continue pushing forward? How are we to understand this “chain of consequences,” whose certainty justifies the use of the word *eikev*?

☞ The Soul Yearns for Hashem’s Voice

CERTAINLY, EVERY PERSON has free will, affirms the Sefas Emes, but the soul naturally yearns to hear the voice that reaches it and to which it is drawn. Hashem’s voice was heard by every member of Klal Yisrael at Har Sinai, and it continues to reverberate on an ongoing basis.

It is thus written, “These matters Hashem spoke to your entire gathering on the mountain from amid the fire, the cloud, and the darkness in a powerful voice *v’lo yasaf* (that did not cease), and He wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me” (ibid. 5:19).

Onkelos translates the words “*v’lo yasaf*” as meaning that Hashem’s voice didn’t cease. Rashi adds further that this is “because His voice is powerful and endures forever.” Hashem’s speech at Har Sinai can thus be heard to this day.

His voice continues reverberating; all a person needs to do in order to hear it is incline his ear in the right direction and listen. The closer he gets, the more powerfully he hears the voice. The more refined his hearing grows, the more pleasant and engaging he finds its cadences. The Gemara (*Eruvin* 54b) comments on the *pasuk*, “He who guards the fig tree will eat its fruit” (*Mishlei* 27:18): “Why are Torah teachings likened to fig trees? In the same way that for however long a person rummages in a fig tree, he will keep coming across more fruits, with Torah teachings also, for however long a person ponders and dwells on them, he finds meaning in them.” The Gemara continues: “It is also written, ‘Your nipples will constantly satisfy you’ (ibid. 5:19). Why are Torah teachings likened to a nipple? In the same way that for however long a baby roots at the nipple, he will find milk there, so it is with Torah teachings, for

however long a person ponders and dwells on them, he finds meaning in them.”

The more a person broadens the scope of his Torah study and the deeper the comprehension he develops, the wider his access to the flow of content and the more meaning he discovers in it. This process has a momentum of its own, because a person becomes “addicted” to the experience, deriving more and more pleasure the more he learns and absorbs. All he needs to do in order to start the ball rolling is incline his ear and listen. From that point onward, the process unfolds virtually on its own, because he is satisfying the craving of his soul.

☞ As Person’s Sense of Hearing Becomes More Exquisite, the More Refined He Becomes through Fulfilling Mitzvos

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the more refined a person becomes, the more exquisite a sense of hearing he develops. This comes about through both Torah study and fulfilling mitzvos. The intensity with which he hears Hashem’s voice speaking to him constantly will grow ever greater not only the more Torah he studies, but also the more mitzvos he fulfills, for these also bring him closer to his Creator and render him more spiritual.

Prior to the revelation at Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael declared, “*Naaseh v’nishma*, We will listen and we will fulfill” (*Shemos* 24:7), for the ability to hear Hashem’s voice depends on fulfilling mitzvos, which refine a person and heighten his spirituality. We therefore say (in Shacharis, in the blessing following *kerias shema*), “Happy is the man who listens to Your mitzvos” — in other words, fulfilling “Your mitzvos” fosters within him the to ability “listen.”

☞ “Know Him in All Your Endeavors”

DEVELOPING THIS IDEA further, the Sefas Emes asserts that not only Torah study and fulfilling mitzvos have this effect. Everything

a person does heightens the extent to which he is able to pick up Hashem's voice speaking to him.

How so? Nothing happens randomly; everything emanates from Hashem's word and ultimately fulfills it. In the Sefas Emes's words, "In fact, the entire world is filled with mitzvos, as we find in the Mishnah (*Avos* 6:12), 'Whatever *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created in His world, He created solely for His glory, as it says, "All who are called by My name and whom I created in My honor, I formed them and made them" (*Yeshayah* 43:7).'"

Thus, even ordinary, mundane, and physical deeds can become mitzvos if only a person carries them out with the correct intentions. He can sanctify the material realm, fulfilling a mitzvah with his every deed, as it says, "Know Him in all your endeavors" (*Mishlei* 3:6). If done with the goal of fulfilling his Creator's wishes, every act a person does is a mitzvah, and he will thereby devote his life to furthering Heaven's glory.

Hashem's Torah Is at the Core of Every Achievement

REVEALING FURTHER DEPTH in this idea, the Sefas Emes explains that Hashem's Torah is at the core of every accomplishment. By having worthy intentions while engaged in it, a person will draw closer to Hashem and will be able to tune into the sound of the Torah. The *naaseh v'nishma* process whereby engaging in deeds heightens a person's ability to listen is thus replicated through his every deed, even the most mundane and physical.

This is because Hashem's voice that reverberates through the world ever since the giving of the Torah is expressing His word through which everything was created. The utterances with which Hashem created the world constitute His Torah, for "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* looked into the Torah and created the world" (*Zohar*, Vol. II, 161b). The Torah is referred to as *reishis*, the beginning (see Rashi on *Bereishis* 1:1, quoting *Mishlei* 8:22), and it served as the

blueprint for the world's creation. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1) thus tells us that in the same way that a craftsman follows a plan, the plan that Hashem followed in creating the world was the Torah. It is thus evident that everything a person does brings him closer to hearing Hashem's word, because this word reverberates in everything, sustaining it.

☞ “Because You Heeded” —

Heightened Listening, from Head to Heel

IN LIGHT OF the above, the opening words of the *parshah*, “It will be *eikev*, because you heeded” take on added significance. We are now able to merge the two meanings of the word. *Eikev* means not only “because,” but also denotes the heel, the lowest rung of human accomplishment — mundane, physical attainment that happens almost by itself, that he treads unthinkingly beneath his heel — for such deeds also heighten a person's ability to hear Hashem's word.

A person boards a speeding train; his first act of drawing close to G-d leads to the next and to all his subsequent progress, for the closer his soul comes to Hashem, the greater the intensity of His voice to which he “tunes in.” This process takes place through Torah study and fulfilling mitzvos, but Hashem's voice can be discerned even through minor, trivial acts.

“*V'hayah eikev tishm'un*, It will be because you heeded” — heeding Hashem's voice comes about through every single deed of yours that you undertake with the goal of furthering Heaven's glory.

SUMMARY

Hashem's voice reverberates constantly throughout the world. If a person starts to listen carefully, he will embark on a process that gathers its own momentum, intensifying and engulfing

him entirely from head to heel — from his head, where his mind and his soul's illumination reside, all the way down to his heel, his most mundane and physical level, referring to the deeds he carries out without needing to think.

Taking the first step suffices. The next one will follow upon its heel, because his soul yearns to hear Hashem's voice and will be drawn ever closer to it. This first step can be taken by learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvos, whereby he strains to hear Hashem's word but can discern it even when engaged in ordinary, physical acts if he only makes a point of carrying them out with appropriate intention, living his life in order to further Heaven's glory.

Re'eih

“Who Imparts Understanding to the Rooster”

👁️ “Look” — What Are We Supposed to Notice?

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU gives man the ability to choose between good and evil. Both paths are open to him, and he must decide which one to follow. The Torah tells us:

Look, I am putting before you today blessings and curses. The blessings will come so that you should heed the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, that I am commanding you today. And the curses will come if you do not heed the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, and you stray from the path that I am commanding you today by following the gods of others that you did not know.
(*Devarim* 11:26–28)

This choice is prefaced by the word “look,” with which the Torah draws our attention to something that apparently calls for our reflection so that we don’t miss it. That we possess free will is seemingly apparent and conspicuous — no great discernment is necessary in order to arrive at the straightforward conclusion that man chooses the path he wishes to take in life. To what is the Torah drawing our attention with the word “look”?

👁️ “Look” — Everyone Can See

THE SEFAS EMES cites a surprising explanation from his grandfather, the *Chiddushei HaRim*.

The word “*re'eh* (look),” isn’t drawing attention to the existence of the phenomenon of free will. Free will is indeed straightforward, requiring no great discernment to affirm its existence. Rather, “*re'eh*” is telling us that every person possesses the ability to discern which of the paths that lie before him is good and which is evil, even when this may not be apparent at first glance. The word “*re'eh*” conveys to us that not only Torah leaders and other righteous individuals are aware which is the correct path — every ordinary Jew can discern this path and correctly navigate his progress along life’s highways and byways.

☞ *Re'eh* — Every Person Can See

AS THE SEFAS Emes expresses it, “Hashem has implanted in every Jewish person the ability to discern and to choose only the [path of] ‘blessing.’ In other words, ‘*re'eh*’ denotes that ingrained in every Jew is the ability to see and distinguish between good and evil and to realize where the source of ‘the blessing’ lies and where the source of ‘the curse’ lies.”

☞ *Re'eh* — The Heart’s Awareness

THE SEFAS EMES’S understanding is based upon the distinction between a declarative statement, i.e., one that describes an existing situation, and a formative statement that creates a new situation. Hashem’s word, for example, creates reality, as the Torah tells us happened at the world’s creation, when Hashem’s utterances called the world into being.

Thus, by telling us “*re'eh*,” *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* implants within us the ability to see. This utterance itself instills in man the faculty of discernment, enabling him to understand what is good, correct, ethical, and just (and vice versa). This knowledge is intuitive. A person’s heart senses what is right and what is wrong. Every person, including those not endowed with clarity of thought or particular analytical

skills, is nonetheless able to distinguish between that which is good and ethical and that which is evil and inappropriate, for his heart prompts him as to the correct way to behave.

☛ Our Choices Are Made in Broad Daylight

THE SEFAS EMES explains the first of the morning blessings in light of this approach.

This blessing is, “Blessed are You... who gives the *sechvi* understanding to discern between day and night.” The straightforward way of understanding this blessing is that we are acknowledging the rooster’s ability to discern the break of dawn. It is a virtue to be able to discern the very beginning of the day while everything is still shrouded in darkness. The first glimmer of hope is not when the sun’s rays make their appearance, but long before. These blessings of praise, however, are offered by a person upon being granted a new day of life. Why did Chazal institute that the first praise should be offered for the rooster’s ability to discern the very first indication of daybreak?

The *Chiddushei HaRim*’s above idea serves as the basis for a further insight of the Sefas Emes.

The word *sechvi* also denotes a person’s inner capacity for reflection; the *sechvi* represents the heart, which is able to discern between moral light and darkness, between good and evil.

This idea actually appears in Rashi, who explains the *pasuk*, “Who gave the *sechvi* understanding?” (*Iyov* 38:36) as follows: “*Sechvi* denotes a rooster in the Sages’ nomenclature; others say it refers to the heart, which foresees, anticipates, and reckons future events.”

According to Rashi’s second explanation, *sechvi* is related to the Aramaic word *istachi*, which means seeing or gazing. This corresponds to Rashi’s explanation of the name Yiscah (*Bereishis* 11:29) as denoting gazing: “This [name] refers to Sarah, who was *sochah* (gazed, i.e., foresaw) with Divine inspiration, and *hakol sochin b’yofyah*, whose beauty was gazed upon by all.”

When a person rises in the morning and makes this blessing, he

is thus praising *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for instilling in him the ability to discern moral light from darkness and good from evil.

The new day that has dawned presents a person with new opportunities. Once again, he must carefully chart his course and decide how he will use his day. Upon the threshold of this new opportunity to choose, he thanks *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for enabling him to see the road ahead and get his bearings. Hand in hand with free will, the ability to discern between good and evil is also implanted in a person. Deep down, he knows which path leads to good and which to evil. Not only has he been granted the ability to choose, he can also grasp the nature of that which lies before him, and he spurns darkness and chooses light, identifying his choice clearly.

☛ The Answers Are Provided

THE SEFAS EMES takes this idea yet deeper, pointing out that not only does man make his choice in broad daylight and with the ability to foresee its results, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* even steers his heart towards good. This can be likened to a multiple-choice test, where the teacher has indicated the correct responses in advance.

While there is indeed free will, not only is it evident from the outset which choice is correct and which is incorrect, but the person choosing is guided to make the right choice. The “teacher” setting the test reveals the answers in advance, for as the “student’s” Father, He wants to give him every advantage and enable him to excel and achieve.

This is how Chazal interpret the command, “You shall choose life” (*Devarim* 30:19) — Hashem not only shows Yisrael the source of life and blessing, but He even leads them to make the right choice. In the words of the Midrash (*Sifrei* 53) on this *pasuk*:

R. Yehoshua ben Korchah says, “This is comparable to a king who hosts a banquet and invites guests, among whom sits his particular friend. The king indicates to his friend that he should help himself to a fine serving, but the latter doesn’t grasp the king’s intention. It is thus written, ‘I will instruct you and enlighten you as to the path

you should take; I will indicate it to you with [a wink of] my eye' (*Tehillim* 32:8). [However,] upon seeing that he [still] didn't understand, the king took hold of his friend's hand and placed it upon the fine portion. It is thus written, 'Hashem is my portion and my cup; You support my lot' (*ibid.* 16:5)."

☛ Curses That Bring Blessing

CONTINUING THIS LINE of thought, the Sefas Emes explains Chazal's teaching (*Devarim Rabbah* 4:1) that no interruption should be made in the Torah reading of the lengthy section of curses in *parshas Ki Savo*.

The Midrash concludes, "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, 'I have not given them blessings and curses for their detriment, but to let them know which is the good way for them to choose so that they should get reward.'"

In other words, the curses are not punitive; they are not conveyed in a vengeful spirit. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has no desire whatsoever that these curses should befall the Jewish people. Their purpose is to serve as a warning, like a sign on the wall that is meant to be read and implemented — they are intended as a deterrent. This is why they are to be read as a single unit, as befits a dire epistle whose purpose is to threaten and deter. Moreover, the curses are adjacent to the blessings, and no interruption should be made between them either. The idea is that a person should be deterred by the curses and return to the path of good so that it is the blessings that come to pass. The effect of the curses is thus actually to bring about blessing.

☛ Swaying the Person Who Did Not Understand the Hint

ACCORDING TO THE Sefas Emes, the Torah's curses are actually blessings, since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has given man free will and also influences him to make the right choice. To explain:

The *Chiddushei HaRim* explains that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has given man freedom of choice, providing him as well with the ability to discern which path is correct and good.

To this, the Sefas Emes adds that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* even leads man to the side of good, citing Chazal's teaching that He places a person's hand upon the fine portion.

The Sefas Emes further adds that a person who still doesn't get the hint and insists on putting his hand upon a poisoned serving is given a slight "electric shock" to encourage him to move away from there. The idea is not to endanger his life, but to provide a more substantial wake-up call to the person who has not picked up any of the gentler hints.

Man thus retains his freedom of choice. However, since upon one side of the scales rests deadly poison, and the person choosing is Hashem's beloved child, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* moves him towards the side of good in any way necessary — either with blessings or even with threatening curses, so long as he chooses the path of good.

☛ The Torah Promises That We Will All Ultimately Choose Good

THE GEMARA (*SANHEDRIN* 97B) discusses our future redemption, citing a difference of opinion among the *Tanna'im* over whether or not its arrival is contingent upon our repentance: "R. Eliezer says, 'If Yisrael repent, they will be redeemed, and if not, they will not be redeemed.' R. Yehoshua said to him, 'If they do not repent, they will not be redeemed? [In that eventuality,] *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will bring them under control of a king whose decrees are as harsh as those of Haman, and Yisrael will repent, and He will return them to the path of good.'"

The Rambam writes accordingly (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:5), "Every single one of the prophets exhorted [Yisrael] about repentance, and Yisrael will only be redeemed through repentance. **The Torah has promised that Yisrael will ultimately repent at the end of their**

exile, and they will then be redeemed immediately, as it says, ‘It shall be when all these things come upon you... you will return to Hashem, your G-d, and Hashem, your G-d, will then come back with the captives [of your exile]’ (*Devarim* 30:1, 3).

In other words, man is capable of choosing evil, but *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will influence his heart to return to the path of good. All paths are open to him, both good and bad — both blessing and curse that leads to blessing. Man can err and, if he wants to, he can overcome his inherent tendency to do good. He can choose to ignore the hints that Heaven sends his way and indulge his contrarian predilections. But long term, his Father in heaven will not allow His son to stray too far and choose to imbibe spiritual poison.

SUMMARY

Man is exhorted to open his eyes and follow his heart’s ethical prompting. The word “*re’eih*” teaches us that the heart sees; Heaven has implanted instinctive understanding in the *sechvi*, enabling it to distinguish between day and night. Man is given the freedom to choose, but he does so in broad daylight — every person knows what is good and correct.

The Father who allows us to choose for ourselves is merciful — He has implanted within all of us the inclination to choose good. Before every choice and at the dawn of every new day, we should open our hearts and listen to the counsel that He has placed there. We must avoid overriding our natural tendency to choose what is good and correct.

Shoftim

Two Keys to the Gates of Understanding

☛ Carrying Out Judgment in the Singular

MOSHE COMMANDS BNEI Yisrael to base their society upon a judicial system that includes both judicial and executive branches — *batei din* that render judgments and officials who enforce them — and to appoint worthy judges who sit at the city gates and judge the people.

The Torah writes, “You shall appoint for yourself judges and policemen according to your tribes in all your towns which Hashem, your G-d, is giving you, and they shall judge the people with just judgment” (*Devarim* 16:18).

Surprisingly, though, this command is expressed in the singular, whereas we would expect a directive to the entire nation to engage in a communal endeavor — such as the establishment of a nationwide system of law enforcement — to be addressed to the nation as a whole and expressed in the plural. Why does the Torah write, “You shall appoint **for yourself** judges and policemen,” in the singular? Are judges and policemen appointed by an individual? Can a lone individual render judgment?

☛ Judging Oneself When the Gates of Understanding Open

THE SEFAS EMES cites an explanation conveyed by his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, that the use of the singular indicates that this *pasuk* carries an additional meaning and is also to be understood as

a command to each individual to conduct just judgment within his heart when his own personal gates of understanding open up.

Accordingly, the various terms employed in the *pasuk* are to be understood as follows:

“Your gates” denotes the gateway to attaining knowledge of G-d. These gates open up to each individual based on his capacity for understanding, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* reveals Himself to each person accordingly.

“That Hashem, your G-d, is giving you” — A human being lacks the ability to grasp the nature of the Creator, who is so sublimely greater than he. Any conception a person has in this realm is due to Hashem’s kindness in revealing Himself to whatever degree is suited to his intellectual and emotional capacity. While there is indeed correspondence between the extent of a person’s grasp of G-d and the extent of his understanding, the former is not a result of the latter. His ability to comprehend G-d is not yielded by his intellectual effort — it is rather a gift bestowed upon him by Hashem commensurate with his capacity for containing it.

“Judges” refers to the judgment a person exercises within his heart regarding the extent to which he will utilize his intellectual gifts for assimilating the knowledge of Hashem that has been granted him as a loving gift by Hashem to enable him to attach himself to his Creator’s ways.

“Policemen” refers to the self-discipline practiced by the individual within whose heart knowledge of Hashem plays an active role.

☛ Upgrading One’s Tools and Intensifying the Illumination

THE BASIS FOR this interpretation can be found in the *Zohar* (Vol. I, 103b), where the *pasuk* “*Noda ba’she’arim baalah*, Her husband is known at the gates” (*Mishlei* 31:23) is interpreted in the following way:

“Her husband” refers to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*;

“is known” refers to attachment, as in the *pasuk*, “And Adam ‘knew’ Chavah his wife” (*Bereishis* 4:1);

“at the gates” — *ba’she’arim* is related to the word *hasharah*, an estimate.

In other words, precise, empirical knowledge of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is impossible to attain; *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* can only be known through imprecise estimation. Despite his impressive capabilities in the various realms of worldly wisdom, when it comes to knowledge of Hashem, man can grasp nothing concrete or definite. Relatively speaking, the person who has any rough idea at all is praiseworthy, because such an estimation can only be made once he has completely assimilated the knowledge he has attained, to the point where, based upon that knowledge, his faculties are able to apprehend some kind of perception of reality.

According to the *Zohar*’s interpretation, the *pasuk* means that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is known to the person who cleaves to Him — in the Sefas Emes’s words, “to the extent that each one’s heart estimates, according to the degree of attachment to the spirit of [Divine] wisdom that he manages to attain.”

In other words, this is an ongoing process whereby *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as a favor, implants some perception of the Divine within a person, in keeping with his capacity for grasping it. The recipient then assimilates these insights, thereby “upgrading” his capacity for comprehending yet more. As a result, Hashem reveals Himself to him again, giving him new insight and understanding. By fully absorbing these further abilities, he deepens his comprehension and feeling. And then once again, with the growth of his capacity for receiving this wisdom, he is exposed to stronger illumination. This process repeats itself *ad infinitum*.

☞ Man Always Remains Standing at the Gate

R. ELIMELECH OF Lizhensk adds a new level of insight into this infinite process of knowledge, internalization, creating further capacity for comprehension, and receiving yet more insight. In his *Noam Elimelech* (*Likutei Shoshanah*), R. Elimelech explains that man is

constantly “standing at the gate,” poised on the verge of understanding. However, he is granted understanding only when he arrives at the realization that he will never be able to attain his ultimate goal. He can intensify the process, hastening his progression forward, but his knowledge will always remain at the threshold of understanding, at the gateway to the next, far deeper level that still lies out of reach.

In the *Noam Elimelech*’s words:

“Open for me the gates of righteousness; [I shall enter them, I shall thank G-d]” (*Tehillim* 118:19) — such is the basic attribute of the righteous (i.e., always remaining “at the gate” no matter how great his progress). The greater the extent to which he serves his Creator, the more he understands that he cannot attain the fullest extent of serving Him, for there is no upper limit. This is the fundamental mindset of the *tzaddik*, who understands that he will never be able to attain the final goal. This is the meaning of the words, “Open for me,” i.e., the *tzaddik* asks that the gates of serving Hashem be opened for him, to “enter them” and serve the Creator, for he believes that he has as yet done nothing and achieved nothing with his service hitherto. The response to this *tzaddik* is [the following *pasuk*], “This is the gate to Hashem,” meaning that the main element in serving Hashem is to know that one cannot achieve the ultimate in serving Him, for this is a pursuit that has no end or limit.

☛ Unlocking the Gates of Understanding through Humility and Contrition

A PERSON SOMETIMES knocks at the gate only to find it locked.

He seeks the opening of the gates of understanding so that he can comprehend G-d’s ways and attain sublime insights into His Torah but, in the Sefas Emes’s words, “There are many times when one doesn’t merit proper peace of mind.” What can we do to open the gates at times like these?

This is addressed by the *pasuk*, “You shall appoint for yourself judges and policemen at all your gates.”

“**Judges**” refers to subordinating the pull of physicality to the dictates of the intellect.

“**Policemen**” refers to methods of coercion. In the same way that an official will force a litigant who insists that truth is on his side to set aside his opinion and follow the judge’s verdict, a person must also be able to force himself and nullify his own opinion.

There is one way to do this: humility.

A person must be able to set aside his own opinion and acknowledge, “The truth is greater than me.”

The never-ending process of acquiring knowledge of G-d can only unfold when a person conducts himself in a measured and level-headed manner and is keen and eager to learn. This spiritual thirst is aroused and maintained by his recognition that whatever he has grasped until now in comprehending G-d still leaves him at the starting point, and the long road ahead should appear to him as it does to a beginner just setting out.

In keeping with this approach, the Sefas Emes explains that each person must act as his own “judge” and “policeman,” “keeping watch over every feeling that is triggered by the first stirring of desire and by the longing aroused in his heart” and bearing in mind that he deserves no credit for this, for until now, he has only succeeded in understanding the tiniest fraction. Moreover, knowledge is granted to a person when he absorbs the lesson that whatever insights he attained hitherto were gifts, contingent upon Heaven’s kindness. This free gift is given only to the person who knocks upon the gates of understanding in humility and with a contrite spirit. These feelings only arise in the person who realizes that he has yet to attain proper understanding.

This is how the *Chiddushei HaRim* explained the *pesukim* quoted above and the subsequent *pasuk*: “Open for me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter them, I shall thank G-d. This is the gate to Hashem, the righteous shall enter it. I shall acknowledge You, Hashem, for You have answered me, and You have been my salvation” — “Through a person’s knocking at the gates of understanding and seeing that he cannot enter them, he repents, and the gates thereupon open up for him.”

☞ The Gates of Understanding Also Open Up by Saying *Pesukei D'zimrah*

ANOTHER ROUTE TO opening up the gates of understanding is alluded to in the opening words of the song for the Friday night meal composed by the Arizal, “*Azameir bishvachin* (I will sing praises) *l'mei'el go pischin* (to enter inside the gates).”

While we readily understand how tears can open up gates, it is harder to understand how song is able to achieve the same result. The explanation is that when a person acknowledges his Creator and praises Him, the fog of Divine concealment fades and melts away. Divine concealment is, after all, a consequence of the world's physicality creating an external reality within which G-d's word is not readily apparent. Man can pierce this barrier by acknowledging Hashem and His kindness and praising Him. Doing so reveals Hashem's presence and His role in the world, thereby dissolving and dissipating the outer covering and exposing the truth. This is why Chazal instituted the recitation of the various chapters from *Tehillim* and elsewhere, referred to collectively as *Pesukei D'zimrah*, every morning at Shacharis. In these *pesukim*, we praise our Creator and acknowledge that the entire physical world surrounding us is merely an outer casing within which everything is Divinely orchestrated. The Divine master plan unfolding is the world's inner, genuine reality. Reinforcing these concepts about knowledge of G-d leads to being granted a further free gift — the gates to our understanding open up ever wider.

SUMMARY

Man holds two keys that he can use to open the gates of understanding and comprehending G-d. The first of these is humility and negating his own prominence, realizing that he still only stands upon the gate's threshold and that whatever

he may have attained hitherto remains nothing more than a preface and the merest beginning of attaining further stages of profundity that he hasn't yet begun to grasp. The second key is praising *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and recognizing that the reality we perceive around us is nothing more than an outer covering for the orchestration of events by Hashem, besides Whom there is nothing.

Ki Seitzei



Binding and Release — From the Shackles of the *Yetzer Hara*

☞ This Law Is Only Necessary Because of the *Yetzer Hara*

FIGHTERS ON THE battlefield combat not only the other side's forces, but also their own drives and urges. They are usually trained for engagement with the enemy, but how are they to handle this latter challenge?

The Torah offers a seemingly astonishing solution, permitting a soldier to have relations with a beautiful woman whom he encounters during battle. The Torah writes:

When you go out to war against your enemies and Hashem, your G-d, gives them over into your hand, and you capture captives from them, and you see among the captives a beautiful-looking woman, and you desire her and take her as a wife. You shall then bring her into your house, and she shall shave her head and let her nails grow. She shall remove the clothing of her captivity and sit in your house and weep for her father and mother for a full month, and after that you may marry her and be intimate with her, and she shall be your wife. (*Devarim* 21:10–13)

How are we to understand the Torah permitting marriage to this gentile woman?

Rashi explains:

Here, the Torah is addressing the *yetzer hara*, for if *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* doesn't permit her, he will marry her anyway. However, if he

marries her, he will ultimately come to hate her, as it says [in the following section], “When a man has two wives, one of whom is loved and the other hated, and they bear him sons, the loved one and the hated one, and it was that the firstborn son was [the child] of the hated [wife]” (ibid. *pasuk* 15). And eventually, he will sire a wayward and rebellious son from her. This is why these sections follow one another.

In other words, the Torah permits the beautiful-looking woman solely because the soldier’s passions are inflamed.

☛ What Is the Appropriate Solution When the Deck Is Stacked?

RASHI’S EXPLANATION RAISES a very difficult problem: does the solution to inflamed passions aroused by a gentile woman lie in permitting relations with her? Isn’t this sanctioning surrender to the demands of the *yetzer hara*? If every time a person feels pressured by his *yetzer hara* we waive the “problematic” prohibition, the Torah will lose all its authority. On the contrary, the Torah addresses the problem of the *yetzer hara* by teaching people to delay gratification and overcome their urges. Chazal sum this up when they say, “I created the *yetzer hara*, and I created the Torah as its antidote” (*Kiddushin* 30b). How are we to understand the statement that the Torah only makes this allowance because of the *yetzer hara*?

We might argue that there is no alternative to permitting the woman, because the inflamed passions of a person engaged in battle are too difficult to overcome. He can’t refrain from going into battle, and once he is there, he certainly cannot run away, and the Torah doesn’t confront a person with a prohibition that it isn’t possible for him to withstand.

To this, the Sefas Emes retorts sharply: why would *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* instill in man a *yetzer* that is stronger than he is, only to permit that which is forbidden? The challenge is admittedly unavoidable, for a person can’t escape the *yetzer hara*; he is compelled to go out to battle, and he can’t back away from the confrontation.

However, under in the circumstances, we would expect the *yetzer hara*'s power to be curbed rather than permitting a prohibition. The *yetzer hara* is not an independent force; it too is controlled and guided by Divine providence. Therefore, in a situation where the *yetzer hara*'s strength surges, and the game is weighted in its favor, surely it is appropriate that it should be prevented from inciting a person. As the Sefas Emes puts it, "Wouldn't it be preferable to deprive the *yetzer hara* of the power to entice him to do this?"

☞ The Deeper Meaning of *Assur* and *Muttar*

THE SEFAS EMES bases his elucidation of this topic upon a fascinating comment of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi (*Tanya* 1:7). The reason why the term *assur*, which means tied or bound, is used to denote a forbidden, sinful act is because the *yetzer hara* ties and binds the sinner to the influence of the *sitra achra* that lies within the forbidden act.

In other words, a sin is referred to as *assur* because that is its outcome — it leads to the sinner's being bound by the *yetzer hara*'s shackles. Submitting to one's urges binds a person and brings him under their control, depriving him of his freedom and autonomy.

The Gemara (*Sotah* 3b) indeed tells us:

"Whoever performs a mitzvah in this world, it goes before him in the World to Come, as it says, 'Your righteousness shall go before you' (*Yeshayah* 58:8), and whoever transgresses a single *aveirah* in this world, it wraps around him and goes before him on the Day of Judgment, as it says, 'Their [evil] ways will hold onto them; they will rise in desolation and be lost' (*Iyov* 6:18).

"R. Eliezer says, 'It is tied to him like a dog, as it says, "And he didn't listen to her, to lie next to her, to be with her" (*Bereishis* 39:10) — "to lie next to her" in this world; "to be with her" in the World to Come."

Referring to a sin as being "tied to him" denotes the sinner's enslavement to his *yetzer hara*. As a result of sinning, he loses part of his freedom and becomes chained with the shackles of his desires.

By contrast, the words *better* (a permit) and *muttar* (permitted), says the *Tanya*, denote that a person “is not bound or tied by external forces that prevent him from returning and ascending.” In other words, the person who gets the better of his urges has broken free from the *yetzer hara*’s shackles and preserved his personal freedom. He did not do what the *yetzer hara* bade him do, but was able to postpone gratification and choose what he truly wanted.

☛ “It Is as Though It Becomes Permitted to Him” — Whereas In Fact, He Is Shackled

THIS IDEA SHEDS new light on R. Huna’s statement (*Yoma* 86b) that if a person “transgresses an *aveirah* and repeats it, it becomes tantamount to permitted in his eyes.” In other words, when sinning becomes part of a person’s life — not an occasional stumbling, but a matter of routine — he imagines that he is now free to do as he pleases, whereas the exact opposite is true. He is in fact bound tightly in the shackles of the *yetzer hara*. He has actually surrendered his freedom. In his eyes, his misdeeds are “as good as permitted,” but in fact, he is handcuffed!

The greatest damage wrought by sin is that the sinner’s soul is bound with the sin and enslaved to his *yetzer hara*. The tragedy is all the greater when the person himself is unaware of what has happened.

☛ The Yetzer’s Goal in Getting Man to Sin Is to Bind His Soul

WE ALSO GAIN new insight into the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 75a) that relates:

“It happened that a certain man took a fancy to a certain woman to the point where he became heartsick over not having her. They came and consulted the doctors, who said that the only hope of saving

him lay in his having relations with her. The Sages, however, said, 'He should die rather than have relations with her.'

"Let her instead talk to him from behind the fence."

"He should die rather than talk to her from behind the fence."

The Gemara then points out that if this woman was single, why was there a problem? Let him simply marry her!

The Gemara responds that doing so would not put him at ease, because that would remove all his enjoyment from marrying her. His sole desire was to indulge his forbidden fancy, as it says, "Stolen waters are sweet, and [stolen] bread eaten in hiding is pleasant" (*Mishlei* 9:17).

The *yetzer hara's* goal isn't in the actual deed itself so much as in rendering the sinner a slave of his passions. If the deed is permitted, the knot is untied, the shackle is opened, and the person doesn't become enslaved to his urges — with what delight will the *yetzer* portray such a deed?

☞ The Yetzer Hara Only Wants to Chain a Person

THIS IS SO fundamental an insight that we find in the Gemara (*Nedarim* 91b) that the Sages suggest that whether a suspected adulteress should be permitted to her husband depends on it. The Gemara records that a strange man was in the house together with a married woman when the woman's husband arrived home unexpectedly. The suspected adulterer hurriedly hid behind a door. The husband was hungry and was about to eat from a fruit that a snake had earlier bitten into, releasing venom into it. Upon seeing this, the other man called to the husband and warned him not to taste the fruit because it had been bitten by a snake. Obviously, he could no longer hide, but the woman claimed that she was not forbidden to her husband because although they had been about to sin, her husband had arrived before they had actually done so. Rava permitted the woman to her husband, reasoning that had the adulterer been guilty, he wouldn't have called out to warn the husband — he would have preferred that the husband die so that the woman would be available to him at all times.

The Gemara questions whether this is obvious and claims that we would actually have thought otherwise. We would have thought the adulterer had sinned with the woman but had called to warn the husband because he preferred that the husband live so that he could continue enjoying a forbidden indulgence, with the woman remaining “stolen waters [that] are sweet and [stolen] bread eaten in hiding [that] is pleasant.”

Tosafos (ad loc.) explain that even Rava who permitted the woman concurs with the rationale that a sinner is interested in a woman remaining married so that he can continue enjoying forbidden pleasures. However, Rava permitted the woman to her husband because a sinner is usually unaware of the bitter truth that the moment after he indulges his desire and wrests the forbidden pleasure to himself, it loses almost all its allure. Were a sinner aware of this as he is about to indulge, the deed would lose all its appeal, and he wouldn’t sin. He sins only because he deludes himself into believing that trampling on the prohibition represents a worthwhile achievement. Rava thus concluded that had the man sinned, he would mistakenly believe that his best interests would be served by having the husband out of the way, not realizing that the deed would then lose its appeal and that saving the husband’s life was actually the very way to perpetuate the sin’s attraction.

From here, we see that all the pleasure a sinner experiences in transgressing something forbidden hinges upon the *yetzer*’s ability to enslave him, destroying his autonomy and freedom to choose how to act. If this ruinous bond with which the *yetzer* keeps a person bound to it is broken, the *yetzer* loses its power, and a person no longer finds any incentive to sin. Why would the *yetzer* entice a person to sin when it will no longer hold him in its thrall and he will remain free and unshackled?

☞ Permitting Something Removes Its Entire Appeal

THE SEFAS EMES explains what a soldier going into battle experiences in line with this approach.

The *yetzer hara* confronts him threateningly. It is stronger than he is, and he has no avenue of escape. What is he to do?

The solution lies in weakening the *yetzer*, which the Torah achieves by telling the soldier that his desire is permitted. The moment the deed is permitted, the shackles are broken, and the *yetzer* can no longer achieve its goal of enslaving him to urges that get the better of him. Once the deed is permitted, the bond binding a person to the *yetzer hara* is rent asunder, and the *yetzer* has no interest in the deed itself, for the sin has now lost all its purpose. Permitting the deed weakens the *yetzer hara* and even banishes it altogether. The entire *raison d'être* for the enticement is gone. If the deed is not forbidden, the *yetzer hara* and temptation are much attenuated, and if there is no significant *yetzer hara*, then why even contemplate marrying the beautiful-looking woman?

☛ When Free Choice Remains, Matters Run Their Natural Course

FROM RASHI, TOO, it is evident that permitting the gentile woman breaks the spell that binds a person to his urges, for Rashi explains the Torah's juxtaposition of the laws of the captive woman and of the firstborn son of the hated wife as indicating that the person who marries this woman will eventually hate her and will divorce her. Were such a union to retain its allure as though it were forbidden, he would not necessarily hate or despise her. However, since it is not forbidden, and he remains free to choose his path, his rational mind is not bribed into acquiescence. When deprived of its allure, he is able to take a sober look at the situation and a natural repugnance to the idea of marriage to a gentile woman sets in. Since he cannot establish a traditional Jewish home with her, what interest does he have in such a marriage?

When a person retains his freedom of choice, his mind remains clear and he thinks straight, leading him to the correct conclusions.

☞ That Which Is Permitted Can Be Rendered Holy

THE SEFAS EMES asked why *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* doesn't weaken the *yetzer hara* of a person who goes into battle and is powerless to avoid its temptations, and his answer is that this is precisely what permitting the captive woman achieves. Detaching the person from the *yetzer hara* removes the latter's prey from between its teeth, for there is no longer any purpose in getting him to go ahead, since he will not be under the *yetzer's* control thereby. However, the implications of this idea extend much further.

The difference between performing a permitted act and one that is forbidden is that in the first case, a person can attach himself to the inner vitality of the holiness that lies within the act, not only to its external, physical aspect. In *Tanya* (*Igeres Hakodesh* 26:8), we find the following distinction drawn between a forbidden act and a permitted one: "*Issur* (that which is prohibited, e.g., a forbidden food) is something upon which the husk (i.e., external, impure spiritual forces) rests and which cannot ascend upward as can *heter* (something permitted), which is not tied and bound to the husk and which can ascend through the person who eats it with the appropriate intention."

Rendering something permitted thus enables a person to sanctify it and raise it to a higher spiritual sphere.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 21b) indeed draws a parallel between the Torah's allowance to marry the beautiful captive woman and its prohibition of various foods, observing that as to the former, "The Torah is addressing (i.e., only needs to permit this because of) the *yetzer hara* — better that Yisrael should consume the flesh of moribund animals that have been slaughtered (and thereby rendered halachically permitted despite the general unwholesomeness of such fare) than that they should consume the flesh of moribund animals that have died (whose consumption is forbidden as *neveilah*)."

The animal that was slaughtered can be sanctified, even though

eating the meat of a sick animal is unwholesome, whereas the carcass of an animal that has died is forbidden. Similarly, the allowance of the captive woman makes it possible to sanctify the union with her, for a person can imbue a permitted act with holiness provided he has the intention of serving his Creator thereby.

☞ Imbuing Even “Regular” Permitted Acts with Holiness

IN THIS CONTEXT, the Sefas Emes cites the Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah* 6:3), commenting on the *pasuk*, “For they are an appendage of charm for your head” (*Mishlei* 1:9):

To what do the words “For they are an appendage of charm” refer? R. Pinchas bar Chama said, “Wherever you go, the mitzvos will accompany you; ‘When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof’ (*Devarim* 22:8);

“If you made yourself a door, the mitzvos accompany you, as it says, ‘You shall inscribe them [and affix them] upon the doorposts of your house’ (ibid. 6:9);

“If you wear new clothes, the mitzvos accompany you, as it says, ‘You shall not wear *shaatnez*’ (ibid. 22:11);

“If you go to shave, the mitzvos accompany you, as it says, ‘You shall not encircle the corners of your heads’ (*Vayikra* 19:27);

“And if you have a field, and you go to plow it, the mitzvos accompany you, as it says, ‘You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together’ (ibid. *pasuk* 10);

“And if you sow it, the mitzvos accompany you, as it says, ‘You shall not sow your vineyard with *kilayim*’ (ibid. *pasuk* 9);

“And if you reap it, the mitzvos accompany you, as it says, ‘When you reap your reaping in your field and you forget a sheaf in the field’ (*Devarim* 24:19);

“*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, **‘Even if nothing [else] is occupying you and you are walking outside, the mitzvos accompany you,** as it says, “When a bird’s nest chances before you [along the way]” (ibid. 22:6).”

The Sefas Emes concludes from this that not only Torah and mitzvos attach a person to Hashem, but even an “ordinary,” permitted deed that is neither a mitzvah nor an *aveirah*, when done with the intention of serving Heaven, becomes a mitzvah act.

Since marriage with the beautiful captive woman is permitted, it too can be undertaken with pure motives and can be sanctified.

SUMMARY

The Torah teaches us that the entire purpose of the *yetzer hara* in creating a bond that binds the sinner is to deprive him of his freedom and autonomy. *Hetter* denotes the breaking of this bond and the unshackling of his freedom, enabling him to overcome his urges. Any deed that is permitted is of no interest to the *yetzer hara*, for its focus isn’t on the actual act so much as on the consequence. A person can actually carry out a permitted deed for Heaven’s sake, thereby imbuing both it and himself with holiness.

Ki Savo



What Constitutes True Renewal?

☛ To What Do the Words “This Day” Refer?

THE JEWISH NATION is commanded to bring the first fruits of their annual grain and fruit crops to the Beis Hamikdash. The Torah writes:

And it shall be when you come to the land that Hashem, your G-d, is giving you as an inheritance and you take possession of it and settle in it; you shall take from the first of all the fruits of the ground, which you gather in from the land that Hashem, your G-d, is giving you, and you shall place it in a basket. You shall then go to the place where Hashem, your G-d, shall choose to establish His Divine presence there. (*Devarim* 26:1–2)

After describing bringing the *bikkurim* and declaring our gratitude to Hashem for the fruits He has given us, the Torah concludes the topic by saying, “**This day**, Hashem, your G-d, commands you to fulfill these laws and judgments, and you shall guard and practice them with all your heart and with all your soul” (*ibid. pasuk* 16).

To which day does the term “this day” refer? Are we to understand that this exhortation is conveyed on the day that *bikkurim* are brought rather than being delivered together with all the other mitzvos when the Torah was given at Har Sinai?

☛ Nowadays, Prayer Is Instead of *Bikkurim*

IN MIDRASH TANCHUMA (*Ki Savo* 1), Chazal interpret this *pasuk* “On this day Hashem, your G-d is commanding you to fulfill...” as follows:

This is (i.e., these words reveal) the meaning of the *pasuk* “Come, let us bow and bend our knees, let us kneel before Hashem, Who made us” (*Tehillim* 95:6). [Now,] surely “bending the knees” is implied by “bowing,” and “bowing” is implied by “bending the knees.” What are we being taught by the double formulation, “Let us bow and bend our knees, let us kneel?”

However, Moshe looked ahead with his Divine inspiration and foresaw that the Beis Hamikdash would be destroyed and that *bikkurim* would stop [being brought], so he arose and instituted that Yisrael should pray [in the course of which we both bow and bend our knees] three times a day, because prayer is more precious to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* than all good deeds and all the sacrifices.

In other words, “this day” alludes to our current situation. There is no *Mikdash*, yet even so, the essence of the mitzvah of *bikkurim* can still be fulfilled through prayer, to which “bowing and bending” allude.

☛ What Aspect of Prayer

Parallels Bringing First Items?

THE COMMENTS OF this Midrash seem quite difficult to understand.

We see elsewhere that prayer is a substitute for sacrifices, as it is written, “We shall proffer cows of our lips” (*Hoshei’a* 14:3), for like offering sacrifices, prayer is a way of serving Hashem. How does prayer serve as a substitute for *bikkurim*? In what sense does prayer represent a person bringing something of his that is a “first”?

How does Chazal’s answer reconcile their question as to why it is written, “Let us bow and bend our knees, let us kneel”? How does the fact that it refers to prayer explain the double formulation?

Quoting his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, the Sefas Emes explains this Midrash as meaning “that prayer, too, involves giving the beginning of each day to Hashem *yisbarach*, like *bikkurim*.” In other words, the same way that a person dedicates the first fruits of his new crop to Hashem, as soon as he has been granted a new, additional day of life, he devotes its beginning to Hashem and prays.

Indeed, the idea of praying at the very beginning of the day

appears in the Gemara (*Berachos* 9b) in the context of davening Shacharis *k'vasikin* (humble folk, who cherish a mitzvah — Rashi): “The *vasikin* would conclude [their reading of *shema* and its blessings] with sunrise so as to say the blessing of redemption (i.e., “*ga'al Yisrael*”) adjacent to [the *amidah*] prayer, so that they prayed [the *amidah* prayer] during the day.”

However, further study of this passage reveals that all prayer — not just Shacharis — should be offered during the daytime, though not necessarily at the beginning of the day. The Gemara continues by sourcing this practice in the *pasuk*, “They shall fear You with the sunrise and before the moon [rises], forever and ever” (*Tehillim* 72:5).

Rashi explains:

“With the sunrise” — in other words, when the sun comes up, meaning at sunrise;

“And before the moon” — the optimum time for the Minchah prayer, too, is at twilight.

Minchah is thus also subject to the same provision of praying by day — it should preferably be prayed before sunset so that it is still during the day.

The daily prayers thus seem to be more a matter of praying during the day in general — when Heaven’s kindness is openly revealed, rather than at night, when it is concealed — than of devoting the first part of the day in particular to prayer.

Indeed, for this reason, the Gemara tells us that “davening Maariv is optional” (*Berachos* 27b). According to the well-known explanation of R. Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (*Tzidkas Hatzaddik* Vol. 1, *Berachos* 8), this is because prayer calls for standing in Hashem’s presence, which is harder to achieve during the darkness of night, and thus nighttime prayer cannot be made compulsory. It remains optional, to be prayed by those to whom Heaven has granted the insight that renders “night lighting up like the day” (*Tehillim* 139:12).

The question therefore remains: in what sense are prayer and *bikkurim* — representing the dedication of something brand new to

Heaven — being equated? Where does this parallel exist in regard to Minchah, for example?

☞ Prayer and *Bikkurim* Share a Common Root

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the *Chiddushei HaRim*'s intention with his explanation was that by bringing his first fruits to Hashem as *bikkurim*, a person conveys that everything he has comes from Hashem. This idea is also the basis of prayer, whose purpose is to show that right from its inception, every process is wholly dependent upon and issues from Hashem's will. The deeper connection between the two is thus clear — they convey the same lesson and share the same goal. (See also our discussion of this point in the Introduction.)

☞ What Constitutes Renewal?

WE STILL NEED to understand the relevance of this lesson to the *pasuk*'s words “on this day,” upon which Chazal note the connection between these two mitzvos. In explaining this, the Sefas Emes reveals a further level of depth regarding the topic of renewal:

The same Midrash (Tanchuma, *Ki Savo* 1) continues: “What lesson do the words ‘on this day’ convey? Moshe told Yisrael: every day, the Torah shall be as precious to you as if you received it on this day from Har Sinai.”

In his commentary to these words, Rashi explains, “On this day Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you...” — every day, you should consider them new, as though you had been commanded about them on that very day.”

What is the significance of relating to an ancient text as though the instructions it contains had been issued today? It seems very contrived and artificial to regard an old tract as something new.

This has to mean that there is actual, literal novelty in everything that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created — for through His word, Hashem created an entire world, where nothing whatsoever had previously

existed. In contrast to making something out of something else, creation *ex nihilo* by definition means that whatever is brought into existence is completely new. Such creation has no inherent endurance and must be sustained every moment by Hashem's word that creates it anew; otherwise, it would collapse, reverting to its "natural" state of nothingness. In other words, nothing in the world can exist and endure unless it is imbued with inner spiritual vitality bestowed upon it by G-d every moment anew.

Everything in the world thus experiences renewal, for as we say daily, in every moment *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* "renews, every day, constantly, the act of creation" (*Birkas Yotzer*).

When a person witnesses some phenomenon that is renewed each moment, he should realize that he himself — his very own eyes and intellect — are also being constantly renewed. This is true not only of the object of his attention; he himself also experiences constant renewal.

Not only does everything undergo re-creation at every moment, but also the world at any given moment is not a direct continuation of its existence a moment earlier. The world's source is the word of Hashem, who is the Source of life. Unlike a man-made fountain, where the same water is pumped around a closed circular path, a natural wellspring is always being replenished with new water that flows constantly; so it is with the word of Hashem, the Source of all life.

The person for whom faith in Hashem is real and immediate — who experiences faith as the source of life — thus experiences creation's renewal and its constant re-creation.

The difficulty in experiencing this sense of renewal lies in the concealment of this core of Divine vitality beneath a mantle of physical "reality" that people perceive as a constant, stable, unchanging given, operating according to fixed, natural laws and enduring permanently. The person who perceives only the world's physical aspect indeed experiences routine and is subject to aging and decay, for it is the nature of physical matter to age, fade, and expire.

Thus, only the person who succeeds in focusing upon the inner,

spiritual, Divine aspect of reality will experience constant renewal. By contrast, for the individual who misses this point, life is a matter of deadening routine that induces boredom and accelerates aging, from which relief can only be found in the gratification of desires, with this too being only a temporary remedy that soon enough grows old and stale. Constantly seeking new physical experiences as a substitute for spiritual renewal is comparable to drinking saltwater, which can never quench a person's thirst — in order to remain effective, the excitement threshold has to keep rising, and contentment always remains out of reach. Obsolescence becomes overpowering, as renewal grows ever more elusive.

This is the meaning of the *pasuk* in *Koheles*, “There is nothing new under the sun” (1:9). “The sun” is used here as a collective term referring to the array of natural forces that operate in the world in which there appears to be “nothing new.” Hand in hand with the sun's illumination of the physical world, even as we perceive its powerful, life-giving illumination, is the fact that it obscures the world's concealed, hidden, spiritual aspect, as the prophet Yeshayah says, “The darkness covers the earth” (60:2).

As Chazal point out, though, “*Above* the sun, there is novelty” (see *Koheles Rabbah* 1). Man has the ability to access and focus upon this inner, spiritual core and draw it out of its obscurity into the open. Experiencing creation's constant renewal on the spiritual plane enables him to transcend the natural processes of aging and decay and experience true renewal.

☞ How Can We Undergo Renewal?

THE SEFAS EMES uses this idea to explain the *pasuk*, “On this day Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you to fulfill these statutes and these laws, and you shall observe and fulfill them with all your heart and all your soul.” In light of the above, these words resonate with new meaning, and the difficulty we raised earlier vanishes, for the *pasuk* means as follows:

- “On **this** day” — man must be able to discover and connect to the novel aspect of each new day;
- “On this **day**” — “day” is the period when light reigns and the inner spiritual illumination within everything created is apparent;
- “**to fulfill**” — Hashem’s word that creates should be discernible even within physical actions that conceal the inner spiritual core within every activity;
- “**these statutes and these laws**” — Hashem imparts to man the ability to discern the special quality belonging to “this day” — a function of its spirituality and its renewal — even amid physical action and accomplishment, through the practical mitzvos. The way to reveal the spark of Divine light that illuminates physical activity is by fulfilling the practical mitzvos, for it is written, “A mitzvah is a lamp” (*Mishlei* 6:23). A mitzvah is likened to a lamp that provides illumination, a physical vessel that nonetheless emits light. In a similar manner, a mitzvah act involves physical activity, yet it reveals the spiritual vitality bestowed by Heaven — from whence comes the command to man to carry it out — thereby enabling man to connect to the Hidden Light.

Man can experience renewal even while he engages in physical pursuits as long as he focuses on their inner core of spiritual vitality, which undergoes constant renewal.

☞ Torah Is a Wellspring of Novelty and Renewal

IT IS HASHEM’S word that renews the act of creation on a daily basis.

Hashem’s word through which the world was created is synonymous with the Torah, for as the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 161b) states, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* looked into the Torah and created the world.” The Torah thus holds the key to the world’s renewal. Torah is the constantly flowing wellspring of everlasting life with which we were imbued when it was given to us at Har Sinai.

Chazal indeed teach us (*Berachos* 11b) to make the daily blessing on Torah study, praising Hashem as “Giver” — in the present tense — of the Torah,” for the giving of the Torah wasn’t a one-time, historical event, but is a constant, ongoing process that renews itself in every moment, as Hashem’s word resonates anew every moment.

This is the basis for Chazal’s interpretation (*Berachos* 40a) of the *pasuk*, “He said, ‘If you constantly listen...’” (*Shemos* 15:26), about which they say, “If you ‘listen’ to the Torah teachings that you heard formerly, ‘you will listen’ to the new ones, whereas ‘if your heart turns away’ (*Devarim* 30:17), you will no longer listen.”

Torah is a wellspring that undergoes constant replenishment. With the novel insight a person gained yesterday, there is new water and new novelty to be gained today. It is up to him to draw from this inexhaustible wellspring that constantly yields fresh content, “for [Torah teachings] are our lives and the length of our days” (second blessing of Maariv).

A person can traverse his entire life while experiencing the rebirth, vitality, freshness, and novelty of renewal and creation. Life never nears its end — it is constantly updating, becoming younger and fresher each day. Through the Torah, Hashem has indeed “imbued us with everlasting life,” as we say in our blessing on the Torah.

☛ The Aspect of Renewal

Common to *Bikkurim* and Prayer

AS WE HAVE seen, the *pasuk*, “On this day Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you to fulfill these statutes and these laws, and you shall observe and fulfill them with all your heart and all your soul” conveys the concept of constant spiritual renewal and alludes to the various paths open to us for experiencing it. Immediately following the section dealing with the mitzvah of bringing *bikkurim*, the Torah conveys our ability to access the kernel of spiritual renewal that lies within every physical act, which we experience through fulfilling the mitzvos. We have seen that Chazal cite this *pasuk* as conveying

Torah's ongoing renewal and note that prayer, like *bikkurim*, devotes every beginning to Hashem, for it is predicated upon the same understanding of the basis of all renewal, as we shall now explain.

☛ The Power of Prayer

MAN'S MAIN PROBLEM when it comes to experiencing renewal is that materialism eclipses spiritual illumination. While man remains immersed in the darkness of physicality, he doesn't perceive the inner, Divine light sustaining the world anew every moment. A person must therefore pray to Hashem, "Uncover my eyes so that I shall see wonders from Your Torah" (*Tehillim* 119:18).

But novel Torah insights are not all that is yielded upon the revelation of this Divine light. The constant renewal of everything in existence that the Giver of the Torah carries out through Torah at every moment can also be perceived only with open eyes that take in an unhindered view of the inner, spiritual core. This light is accessible through prayer, supplication, and entreaty, and it is therefore required that prayer be offered during the daytime.

The foundation of prayer is thus man's realization that it is Hashem who makes everything happen in the world and that if not for Him, man on his own has no understanding, health, livelihood, etc. In a moment, he can *chalilah* lose all hope and all purpose. When he arrives at this realization, he will take his place in humility and powerlessness before his Creator and pray from the depth of his heart. Prayer is relevant to every single realm of life, both material and spiritual, and the person who prays understands that he needs to ask Hashem to help him, because when he is on his own, he has nothing and can achieve nothing.

Prayer thus involves casting aside the mantle of nature that connects cause to effect and an event to its outcome, perceiving instead the inner, Divine light that runs the world, sustaining life and constantly renewing it.

The Sefas Emes further employs this idea to elucidate the intent

of the Midrash quoted above in citing the *pasuk*, “Come, let us bow and bend our knees, let us kneel before Hashem Who made us.” *Nichre’ah*, a passive form, is the word used for “[Let us] bend our knees,” rather than *nichra*, which denotes actively bowing. In other words, we are not the ones bowing — we are allowing an outside Cause to make us bow, while we ourselves remain passive.

This conveys the lesson that once a person bows down and submits to Hashem, his eyes open, and he realizes that in all his actions in this world, his role was passive — it was *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that was acting. After his prostration and the surrender of his private agenda, he merits his knees bending, passively, and the attendant revelation of the light of inner truth.

SUMMARY

The secret of experiencing renewal within a physical world whose contents are destined to grow worn and old, where man chases after fleeting novelty whose moment passes as soon as it is attained, is to tap into the Divine wellspring of life that sustains everything in existence, rebirthing it and renewing its vitality at every moment.

In order to experience genuine renewal, a person must therefore live according to this truth, abandoning the obscurity of materialism in favor of the light of spirituality that illuminates from deep within.

This is the meaning of the Torah’s directive to us to undergo constant renewal, as conveyed by the words, “On this day, Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you to fulfill these statutes...” that follow the section dealing with the mitzvah of *bikkurim*. This renewal captures the essence of the mitzvah of *bikkurim*. This is also the essence of prayer, and it is the special property

with which Torah, which constantly yields novel insight and understanding, is endowed.

Indeed, to paraphrase the words of the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 4:4), it is only “you, who are attached to Hashem, your G-d,” who “are living, all of you — *today!*”

Nitzavim



The Natural Inclination to “Choose Life!”

☞ Drawing a Parallel between Yisrael, and Heaven and Earth

ON THE LAST day of his life, Moshe exhorted the Jewish people about how to conduct themselves in the future, telling them at Hashem’s behest, “Today, I call heaven and earth to witness against you; I have put before you life and death, the blessing and the curse, and you shall choose life so that you and your descendents shall live” (*Devarim* 30:19). What was the nature of the testimony that Moshe solicited from heaven and earth?

Rashi explains, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Yisrael: ‘Look at the heavens that I created to serve you — have they perhaps acted out of character? Has the sun perhaps failed to rise in the east and illuminate the entire world, as it says, “The sun shines and the sun sets [constantly]” (*Koheles* 1:5)? Look at the earth that I created to serve you; has it perhaps acted out of character? Have you perhaps sown and it has failed to sprout? Or have you perhaps sown wheat and instead it yielded barley? If these [creations] that were not made for reward or for damage — if they are worthy, they receive no reward, and if they sin, they receive no punishment — haven’t veered from their regular pattern, all the more so should you, who if you are worthy will receive reward and if you sin will receive punishment, [emulate them and refrain from aberrant conduct].”

Hashem thus called heaven and earth to testify against Yisrael, citing their perfect track record of following Hashem's dictates, to serve as an example to Yisrael not to digress in the slightest from all that He had commanded them.

However, the parallel actually isn't clear at all: heaven and earth don't digress from the paths they were instructed to follow because they never need to choose between good and evil. Yisrael, by contrast, must make a choice between good and evil; they have to grapple with the *yetzer hara* that incites them to sin. How can the situation of heaven and earth be equated to that of Yisrael?

☛ Yisrael Are Naturally Inclined to Choose Good

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the parallel to heaven and earth is drawn in order to indicate that man shares with them a natural inclination to hearken to Hashem's word. From heaven and earth, it is possible to learn that Hashem implanted a natural tendency within everything in creation to fulfill His will. Even heaven and earth exhibit this tendency, and therefore man, who is created in the Divine image, is certainly no less inclined to do so and is by nature drawn towards fulfilling Hashem's will. Man indeed has freedom of choice and both a *yetzer hatov* and a *yetzer hara*, but the latter just attempts to prevent him from following his inherent nature. If man succeeds in freeing himself from the clutches of his *yetzer hara*, he is naturally drawn towards doing what Hashem desires. All in all, then, a person just has to enable himself to avoid his *yetzer hara* and follow his natural inclination, and he will realize instinctively how to fulfill Hashem's word and will be drawn to good.

☛ The Force of Divine "Gravity"

IN *SEFER HAYASHAR* (*Shaar I*), attributed to Rabbeinu Tam, the author discusses a Divine gravitational pull that draws man towards

good, similar to the natural force that pulls everything in creation towards its source:

Every thing aspires to return to its source. For example, if we pick up a stone from the ground and throw it upwards with our hand, it will ascend with the force of that throw, and upon reaching the zenith of its climb powered by the thrower, it will naturally fall again to the place where it was taken from. Water, too, when thrown upward, ascends to the highest point it can reach by virtue of the thrower and then naturally returns back down to its place. Wind too, when you catch it inside a swollen skin (i.e., container) and seal it, it inevitably remains trapped inside so long as the container remains closed, and when it is opened, it will quickly escape back to its source. Fire, too. When a flame ignites, we see it struggling to ascend higher and higher towards its [heavenly] source, but because it is attached to the burning wood, it cannot ascend completely; however, when it separates from it, it rises to its place. It is the same with the soul, for it comes from heaven and is attached to a body, like the flame that is attached to the wood, and it cannot part from it until the strength of the body holding onto it gives out. Then the soul can return to its source and place, way up above.

☞ How Can Having a Natural Inclination Be Reconciled with Having Free Will?

HOWEVER, FURTHER CLARIFICATION of this idea is called for.

At first glance, man is created with two opposite inclinations that struggle with each other in the same arena, each trying to get him to gratify its own set of yearnings. On one hand, man has a physical body that is drawn towards material pursuits, while on the other hand, he has also been given a soul that aspires to return to its Divine source.

If these forces are not equally balanced — if one is stronger than the other — there is no free will.

However, if they are perfectly balanced, what role can a naturally good inclination play? When two equal and opposite directional

forces act upon a body, each one pushing it in the opposite direction, the effect of one cancels out the effect of the other, and the body remains stationary.

How are we to reconcile the role of this natural inclination with the existence of free will?

☞ The Good and Evil Inclinations Do Not Compete in the Same Arena

THE SEFAS EMES apparently understands that good and evil are not competing against one another in the same arena.

In order to understand what this means, let us study a Gemara (*Nedarim* 32b) in which Chazal elucidate the *pesukim* in *Koheles* (9:14–15): “There was a small town with [only] a few people in it, and a great king came against it, surrounded it, and built great barricades against it. But a poor, wise man was there, and he delivered the city through his wisdom, yet no one ever mentioned that poor man.”

Chazal explain:

“A small town” — this is the body;

“with a few people in it” — these are the limbs;

“and a great king came against it and surrounded it” — this is the *yetzer hara*;

“and built great barricades against it” — these are sins;

“But a poor, wise man was there” — this is the *yetzer hatov*;

“and he delivered the city through his wisdom” — this is repentance and good deeds;

“yet no one ever mentioned that poor man” — because while the *yetzer hara* holds sway, there is no one who remembers the *yetzer hatov*.”

Indeed, while a person is engaged in sin, the force of evil overpowers him. Once he has veered onto his physical plane, the *yetzer hara* reigns supreme and is able to “score into an empty goal,” for during these moments, his *yetzer hatov* is silent and has no influence over him.

On the other hand, though, when a person moves into his spiritual plane, his *yetzer hatov* reigns supreme and “can score into an empty goal,” for now his *yetzer hara* is silent and unable to influence him.

A person thus isn’t torn between two opposing forces that work on him simultaneously, paralyzing him. The forces that act upon him aren’t active within him at the same time; when one of them is active, the other is passive and faint.

Man’s choice is thus a knowing choice that he makes in advance as to which path to take. Once he has chosen, he is drawn in that direction automatically according to the natural urges that operate within him after having put himself on one path or the other.

It is in regard to this initial choice between the two paths that his natural inclination for good operates, as his soul is drawn to its source.

All man therefore needs to do is to let himself take the path of good, which deep down is the path he truly wants to take.

☛ Choosing between Two Different Arenas

THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES present the above idea in more immediate, everyday terms: The person who spends his time in the *beis midrash* in an atmosphere of holiness, immersed in exciting, productive Torah study, debating new and spectacular insights with colleagues of caliber who are growing and developing along with him, will clearly avoid evil and won’t be tempted in the slightest to contemplate some lustful sin. This scenario usually plays out as a win for the *yetzer hatov*.

When a person is situated in a place where material urges abound, keeping company with unsavory friends whose hearts are restless for the indulgence of their desires, it is natural that he becomes more bohemian, materialistic, and crass and that no delicate, refined stirrings of holiness will penetrate his heart. On the whole, such a battle is a lost cause.

In the first scenario the *yetzer hatov* wins an easy victory; in the second scenario, the *yetzer hara* wins easily.

However, these two opposing inclinations aren't pitted against each other in the same setting. Man makes his choice in advance — towards which arena will he turn? To the *beis midrash*, or to the setting where physical desires are inflamed?

It is in regard to this choice that man's free will operates.

☞ The Inclination towards

Good Is a Kindness from Heaven

THE SEFAS EMES explains the *pasuk* in *Tehillim*, “And Yours, Hashem, is the kindness, for You pay each person according to his deeds” (62:13) in light of the above. At first glance, the *pasuk* seems very strange, as the Gemara indeed asks in *Rosh Hashanah* (17b): If Hashem pays a person “according to his deeds,” i.e., commensurate with the extent of the good deeds he has amassed, where is the kindness? He deserves this reward by rights, not as a favor.

Hashem's kindness lies in having implanted in each person a natural inclination to choose the path of good.

Once a person has made this choice and his spiritual qualities are aroused, they become the dominant feature in his personality, and his path forward lies open. Thus, even after a person has chosen good and done good, he was able to earn his reward solely by virtue of Hashem's kindness to him, thanks to which he chose good and set himself on a good path.

☞ How Is It Possible to

Regulate Emotions upon Command?

THE SEFAS EMES explains further that this idea can be used to resolve the difficulty raised by the Rambam as to how a person can be commanded a positive mitzvah such as, “You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart” (*Devarim* 6:5) or a negative mitzvah such as, “Do not covet” (*Shemos* 20:14).

The Rambam asks how a person can be commanded regarding

the emotions in his heart — does he choose what to feel and what not to feel? Actions and thoughts can be controlled subject to command, but feelings arise spontaneously. It isn't possible to manufacture genuine emotion upon demand.

The person who loves solely because he has been commanded to do so doesn't love at all. How is a command to love relevant?

In light of the above, the answer is clear, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has implanted in man a **natural** inclination to love Him — the Source from which man's soul is hewn — in the same way that a person naturally loves his parents, who are the source of his physical life. In order to attain love of G-d, it should therefore suffice for man to refrain from intensifying his physical desires and free himself from all such interfering and opposing urges, allowing himself to act in accordance with his natural inclination.

Man has not been commanded to experience feelings that run counter to his nature. On the contrary, his obligation lies in refraining from blurring and weakening the natural feelings that he already has. This certainly lies within his power.

SUMMARY

Hakadosh Baruch Hu calls heaven and earth to testify, for within these magnificent, inanimate systems, too, He has implanted a natural inclination to fulfill His will. In this regard, man can be compared to heaven and earth, for he too has been given a natural inclination to do good and strive to return to his Divine source. This inclination is a kindness bestowed by Heaven, and it doesn't detract from man's free will. Man still retains the ability to overpower this natural inclination and choose evil. In doing so, he negates his *yetzer hatov*. With foresight, though, he can choose in advance to take the path of good and emulate the ways of the righteous.

Vayelech

A True Elucidation of Chazal's Teaching: “To Confer Reward upon Those Who Bring Them”

☞ The Mitzvah of *Hakhel* Includes Bringing Young Children

ON SUKKOS FOLLOWING the *shemittah* year, it is a mitzvah for men, women, and children to gather in the Beis Hamikdash and participate in a sublime event where the king reads from the Torah to the entire nation.

The Torah writes:

Moshe then commanded them, saying, “At the end of [every] seven years, at the time of the *shemittah* year, on the festival of Sukkos, when all Yisrael comes to appear before Hashem, your G-d, in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all Yisrael for them to hear. Assemble the people — the men, the women and the small children, and the proselytes who are in your towns — so that they shall hear and in order that they may learn and thus fear Hashem, your G-d, and be careful to carry out all the words of this Torah.” (*Devarim* 31:10–11)

This event — at which all were present, even the youngest children — provided powerful inspiration, greatly illuminating the souls of all Yisrael. Yet the inclusion of the smallest children seems

puzzling, for Torah study requires a basic level of comprehension that very small children still lack. Chazal pondered this question, as we find in the Gemara (*Chagigah* 3a):

The Rabanan learned: It happened that R. Yochanan ben Beroka and R. Elazar ben Chisma went to pay their respects to R. Yehoshua in Pekiin. He said to them, “What novel teaching was heard in the *beis midrash* today?” They said to him, “We are your disciples, and we drink from your [Torah] waters (i.e., we came to hear your Torah, not to repeat ours to you).” He said to them, “Nevertheless, no gathering [of scholars] in the *beis midrash* fails to yield some novelty. Whose Shabbos was it (i.e., whose turn was it to deliver the discourse this past Shabbos)?”

“It was R. Elazar ben Azaryah’s.”

And what topic of *agaddah* was [discussed] today?

They told him, “The section of *hakhel*.”

And what did he expound concerning it?

“Assemble the people — the men, the women, and the small children.” The men come to learn, the women come to hear, but why do the small children come? In order to provide reward to those who bring them.

He said to them, “You had a valuable pearl in your possession, and you wanted to withhold it from me!”

☛ Encountering Holiness at a Very Young Age Leaves an Impression on the Soul

THE GEMARA’S QUESTION, “Why do the small children come?” is itself puzzling, for an event so sublime and uplifting as the entire nation’s assemblage in order to hear Torah teachings surely leaves some impression upon any child who witnesses it, even if he is too young to take in the experience intellectually.

We thus find in the Mishnah (*Avos* 2:8): “Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai had five disciples: R. Eliezer ben Horkenos, R. Yehoshua ben Chananiah, R. Yosi Hakohen, R. Shimon ben Nesanel, and R. Elazar ben Arach. He used to list their qualities: R. Eliezer ben Horkenos

is a limed pit that doesn't lose a drop; R. Yehoshua ben Chananiah, happy is the one who gave birth to him..." The *Bartenura* explains:

"Happy is the one who gave birth to him" — for she (i.e., his mother) led him to become a scholar, for she would make her way around all the *batei midrash* in her town and say to them (i.e., the Torah scholars), "Please, appeal for Heaven's mercy on behalf of this fetus in my womb that he should be a sage." And from the day he was born, she didn't take his cradle out of the *beis midrash* so that his ears should absorb nothing besides Torah teachings.

The source for this is the following passage from the *Yerushalmi* (*Yevamos* 1:6): "R. Dosa saw R. Yehoshua and applied to him the *pasuk*, 'To whom shall he convey comprehension — to [babes just] weaned from milk?' (*Yeshayah* 28:9) — 'I remember that his mother would take his cradle to the *beis haknesses* so that his ears should cleave to Torah teachings.'"

Hearing Torah teachings thus leaves an impression even upon a baby in its cradle. What difficulty, then, prompted the Gemara's question, "Why do the small children come?"

☛ If Bringing Small Children Indeed Has No Purpose, Why Do Those Bringing Them Deserve Reward?

THE SEFAS EMES adds another question, this one on R. Elazar ben Azaryah's explanation for bringing small children: if there is indeed no purpose to the small children coming, why do those who bring them receive reward for doing so? If nothing is gained by bringing them to the Beis Hamikdash, what have those who brought them achieved?

He concludes that there must be some purpose in bringing the small children to the Beis Hamikdash, for even though they cannot understand what they hear, their souls absorb some inspiration from the words of Torah.

Note that in regard to the covenant with Hashem into which Moshe brought all of Yisrael, as described at the beginning of the previous *parshah*, it is written, "You are standing today, all of you,

before Hashem, your G-d... your small children” (*Devarim* 29:9–10). Here too, the youngest children stood before Hashem. Not only were they physically present, but they also absorbed inspiration and holiness from participating in the event.

So we return to our original question. What leads Chazal to ask, “Why do the small children come?”

☛ Inspiration Can Only Be Absorbed into a Prepared Receptacle

THE SEFAS EMES explains the Gemara’s question in light of a principle that regulates the absorption of holiness into something or someone: attaining holiness is only possible after a person has made some prior effort of his own in that direction. In the Sefas Emes’s words, “For everything, a person’s awakening (*isarusa*) is needed.” Or in other words, in order to be able to absorb illumination from Above, suitable receptacles must first be prepared down below.

The source of this idea is the *Zohar*’s statement (Vol. I, 88a): “In an awakening down below, there is [a consequent] awakening Above, for nothing is awakened Above until there is awakening below.”

Similarly, the *Zohar* also states (ibid. 210b): “The upper level isn’t awakened Above until there is an awakening below first.”

Chazal therefore ask, “Why do the small children come?” Since they lack the understanding to awaken themselves to absorb this holiness and thus cannot make the necessary effort to prepare themselves, they will be unable to take any of it in.

☛ “For It Will Not Be Forgotten from the Mouths of Their Descendants”

THERE ARE NO exceptions to this rule, the Sefas Emes points out. In order to receive holiness bestowed from above by Heaven, it is first necessary to prepare one’s heart down below. This is a non-negotiable condition.

Now, Hashem has indeed assured Yisrael that “it (i.e., Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouths of their descendants” (*Devarim* 31:21), and this is explained by Rashi as being “a promise to Yisrael that Torah will never be altogether forgotten by their descendants.”

This apparently amounts to a Divine promise to keep the hearts of all Jews open and receptive to Torah, even if their spiritual situation doesn’t warrant it, which might be seen as contradicting the above principle. However, this doesn’t imply that Torah will flourish without its seeds first being sown and without any effort being made to study it. Hashem promises Yisrael only that we will always have an affinity for Torah study and that each and every one of us will always find inspiration in Torah teachings and prayer. Receiving this inspiration from Above nonetheless remains conditioned upon an awakening on man’s part. Torah knowledge doesn’t just appear unless effort is made to study it. The *pasuk* actually says, “For it will not be forgotten **from the mouths** of their descendants,” implying that even after this promise, amassing Torah’s wisdom still requires effort, one aspect of which is enunciating its teachings verbally.

☞ “A Mitzvah’s Reward Is a Mitzvah”

THIS PRINCIPLE IS valid not only in regard to Torah study. When it comes to mitzvos, too, a person can only receive holiness from Above after having readied his heart. The Sefas Emes explains this as follows:

All a person is capable of doing in this world is making the effort to render himself a worthy recipient of Heaven’s spiritual gifts. He has no guarantee that he will succeed; there is no direct link between his efforts and their success. Man can only try. Whether or not he succeeds depends on the Heavenly assistance that he merits.

There is nothing a person can accomplish — no task that lies wholly in his power to complete — without receiving assistance from Hashem, as it is written, “For what power [of our own] do I or my People have to marshal the strength to donate such [a vast amount

of materials for the building of the Beis Hamikdash], **for everything is from You, and from Your Hand we have given [back] to You**" (*Divrei Hayamim I* 29:14). A person needs Heaven's assistance not only with his worldly endeavors, but in serving Hashem as well.

Since it is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that brings every endeavor to completion, how can the fulfillment of any mitzvah be reckoned as a person's own accomplishment?

The inevitable conclusion is that a person's role in performing a mitzvah amounts to his desire and his heart's awakening to fulfill it.

The Sefas Emes explains the Mishnah's statement (*Avos* 4:2), "A mitzvah's reward is a mitzvah" accordingly. A person's ability to fulfill a mitzvah and see it through to completion is his reward for having initiated its performance and awakened his heart to fulfill it. In other words, the reward for rousing oneself to perform a mitzvah is being granted the opportunity of actually fulfilling that very mitzvah in practice.

Since the mitzvah's ultimate fulfillment constitutes the reward for the effort to perform it, in a case where no initial effort is made, no reward is forthcoming, and Heaven's assistance in bringing it to completion will be withheld.

☛ Does Including Small Children in the Assembly Contradict the Principle, "No Holiness without Prior Effort"?

SINCE NO HOLINESS is bestowed from Above unless a person has first readied his heart below, Chazal's question, "Why do the small children come?" is perfectly justified.

The Gemara is asking: since such young children lack comprehension, they do not awaken themselves prior to doing a mitzvah. Without any effort on their part, what purpose is served by their inclusion in the assembly? Doesn't the requirement to bring these youngsters along to attend *hakhel* contradict the principle that Heaven never bestows holiness unless there is prior preparation down below?

☞ Their Parents' Efforts Render the Small Children Worthy of Heaven's Bestowal of Holiness

TO ELUCIDATE THE Gemara's response that the young children are brought "in order to give reward to those who bring them," the Sefas Emes presents a startling and highly novel idea — indeed, "a valuable pearl," as R. Yehoshua exclaims in the aforementioned Gemara. The key to understanding the Gemara's response is the Sefas Emes's explanation of the principle, "A mitzvah's reward is a mitzvah," which as we have explained means that bringing the fulfillment of a mitzvah to fruition is itself the reward for the initial effort to perform it. This also applies to the young children's participation in *hakhel*.

☞ The Holiness Absorbed by the Young Children Is the Reward for the Efforts of Their Parents Who Bring Them

IT REMAINS TRUE that no holiness is bestowed from Above unless there has been prior effort below. However, when a father and mother make sacrifices for the sake of their children's spiritual training, this certainly counts as the requisite effort below. The young child can't yet make any effort of his own, but his parents do so on his behalf, and their efforts yield the reward of holiness being absorbed into their child's heart.

☞ A *Tzaddik*'s Efforts Create the Vessels for Absorbing Holiness among Their Adherents

ONE PERSON CAN thus create the capacity for absorbing holiness in another person on whose behalf he intercedes if their souls are connected through a common root. From this, the Sefas Emes concludes that through his efforts, a teacher can instill the capacity for absorbing holiness into his student. Thus, throughout the generations, righteous Torah leaders, through their efforts on behalf of their

contemporaries, have succeeded in instilling the ability to receive spiritual inspiration in the members of their flock, including the simplest among them who lack the means to attain such levels on their own.

In the Sefas Emes's words, "This phenomenon is applicable to all members of Bnei Yisrael's rank and file who lack sufficient intellect and desire [to render themselves worthy of receiving Heaven's spiritual gifts]. Nonetheless, by submitting themselves to those who are greater and worthier than they, the *tzaddik*'s own aspiration can be effective in attaining reward for all who are attached to him."

Now, it is straightforward that a holy individual can confer some of his own spiritual radiance upon all who attach themselves to him. The great Chasidic leaders' play on the words, "*l'hazhir gedolim al baketanim*," which literally means "to warn the adults in regard to [the conduct of] the minors," can be rendered, "to confer the radiance of great men upon the ordinary folk."

However, the Sefas Emes's suggestion goes way beyond this. He asserts that through his efforts on their behalf, the great man can actually create the vessels for receiving holiness within those who are close to him. In other words, they will not merely reflect his greatness. Rather, he can instill in them the capability of cultivating greatness of their own.

☞ "Reward for Those Who Bring Them" — *Tzaddikim* Who Elevate Their Flocks to Spiritual Heights

A PERSON THUS has enormous capacity for creating vessels for absorbing holiness not only within himself, but also within his offspring and in those who are attached to him. One individual can elevate an entire community, and through his efforts on their behalf will attain "mitzvah reward" that has the nature of communal reward rather than simply private reward. The person within whose heart flickers powerful aspiration to serve Hashem is thus able to help himself, his family, and all who follow him.

“In keeping with the above approach,” writes the Sefas Emes, “we can delve deeper and understand the genuine meaning of Chazal’s response, ‘To confer reward upon those who bring them’ — but this is not to be put in writing, and the astute will grasp it easily.” Apparently, the Sefas Emes refers here to the righteous Torah leaders of the generations who, as reward for the mitzvah of their efforts on behalf of others, are able to elevate their entire flocks to sublime spiritual heights.

SUMMARY

We have clarified three principles here:

1. No spiritual illumination from Above is bestowed on a person unless he has first made his own efforts to render himself worthy below.
2. A father and a mother’s efforts are effective on their offspring’s behalf, opening the gates of spiritual illumination for them and paving the way for them to absorb sublime holiness. The “mitzvah reward” for the parents’ efforts is the “mitzvah” of the creation of vessels in their children’s hearts for absorbing holiness.
3. Through his efforts, a *tzaddik* can instill the ability in his flock to receive spiritual illumination. Not only is he able to fill their spiritual receptacles with Torah’s radiance, he can also instill within them the vessels necessary for this.

These concepts heavily underscore parents’ responsibility towards their children and leaders’ responsibility towards their flock, for it is they who determine not only the content that they pour into the hearts of their protégés, but also the level of holiness of those very hearts.

Haazinu

“He Has Implanted Everlasting Life within Us”

☞ The Call to Heaven and Earth to Listen

ON THE LAST day of his life, Moshe Rabbeinu delivered his parting message. We might have expected him to address the people directly, calling to them, “Listen, Bnei Yisrael,” but he addressed himself instead to heaven and earth.

The Torah records his opening words: “Listen, the heavens, and I shall speak, and the earth should hear my mouth’s utterances” (*Devarim* 32:1).

Why did Moshe speak to heaven and earth?

Rashi explains that he was addressing them as witnesses in light of the halachic principle that when a sinner has incurred the death penalty, “the witnesses’ hand shall be against him first to kill him” (*ibid.* 17:7).

In Rashi’s words:

Listen, the heavens that I am warning Yisrael — so that you shall be witnesses to this. Why did he appoint heaven and earth to testify against them? Moshe said, “I am flesh and blood — tomorrow I will be dead. If Yisrael say, ‘We never accepted the covenant,’ who will come and contradict them? He therefore appointed heaven and earth, witnesses who endure permanently. Moreover, if they are meritorious, the witnesses will give them their reward; the vine will produce its fruit, the ground will give its yield, and the heavens will

bestow their dew. And if they are guilty, the witnesses' hand will be the first against them — 'He will close the heavens, and there will be no rain, and the ground won't give its yield' (ibid. 11:17), following which, 'You shall be destroyed swiftly' (ibid.) by the nations."

However, Rashi's explanation raises a number of questions:

1. Although Moshe was admittedly conferring a pivotal role upon heaven and earth, rather than addressing them as his principal audience, we would still expect him to first direct his message to Yisrael, and only later, when concluding, designate heaven and earth as witnesses.
2. Beyond the mere physical stimulus of passive hearing, listening to something denotes actively taking it in and absorbing the message it conveys. It therefore seems strange to speak of "listening" in the context of heaven and earth. In what sense does the earth "listen"?
3. Do heaven and earth need to listen in order to serve as witnesses? Do they need to be addressed at all and asked to fulfill this role?
4. Heaven and earth had actually already been designated as witnesses, as it is written, "Today, I call heaven and earth to witness against you; I have put before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; and you shall choose life so that you and your descendents shall live" (ibid. 30:19). Why was it necessary to summon them again to serve as witnesses?
5. Do heaven and earth enjoy autonomy, taking independent action in their capacity as witnesses? Surely reward and punishment are meted out by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who operates heaven and earth according to His command.

☛ What Is Added by the Comparison to the Descent of Dew and Rain?

AFTER ADDRESSING HIMSELF to heaven and earth, Moshe continues, "Let my teaching drip like rain, my speech flow like dew; like storm

winds [blowing] on vegetation, like rivulets [of rain] on grass” (ibid. 32:2), likening his words to rain and dew that descend from heaven.

What did he wish to convey with this comparison? What new insight does it add that we would otherwise lack? And altogether, how are we to understand the comparison of Torah, which is spiritual, to rainfall, which is physical? Is a Torah scholar in some way akin to an agricultural laborer?

Rashi explains, “‘Let my teaching drip like rain’ — this is the testimony that you shall attest — that I am saying before you, ‘I have given Yisrael a Torah that gives life to the world, like rain that brings life to the world, when the heavens drip dew and rain.’” In other words, the rain’s descent from heaven attests to the Torah. What is the significance of this testimony?

☞ Rain Is the Consort of the Ground

THE *PASUK*’S COMPARISON of Torah to rain — “like storm winds [blowing] on vegetation, like rivulets [of rain] on grass” — relates not just to the descent of precipitation from the sky to the ground, but also to its role in the latter’s fertility, enabling it to produce crops.

The Gemara (*Taanis* 6b) draws a parallel between rain and the process of bonding and fertilization that leads to the creation of new life: “R. Abahu said, ‘What is the meaning of the term *reviah* [which Chazal employ to refer to the heavy seasonal rains of autumn]? This denotes something that mates with the ground.’” In other words, the rain falling from the heavens is akin to the union of heaven and earth, resulting in the ground’s fertilization.

The Gemara continues, referring to rain as the ground’s mate and citing another *pasuk* to this effect: “For as the rain and the snow descend from the heavens and do not return there without having irrigated the land and made it germinate and sprout [vegetation]...” (*Yeshayah* 55:10).

How does this process relate to Moshe’s message?

☞ Moshe Was Addressing the Heavens within Man

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the heaven and earth that Moshe addressed were the “heaven” and “earth” that exist within every person, for these expanses have a parallel in the makeup of each human being.

We find a dialogue in the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 91b) between Antoninus Pius and R. Yehudah Hanasi concerning this topic. The Roman Emperor asserted, “Body and soul are able to exempt themselves from [Heaven’s] judgment,” each rejecting responsibility for having sinned, with the body arguing that on its own it is devoid of intellect and the soul arguing that it is wholly spiritual and isn’t subject to any desires or urges.

R. Yehudah Hanasi rejected this idea, responding that their situation can be likened to that of a lame person mounted on the shoulders of a blind person who together succeed in entering another person’s orchard and plucking fruit from the trees. He explained that the partnership of the two enables each of them to overcome his own limitations and engage in sin, so they will be judged together, as a single unit.

“*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* too,” said R. Yehudah Hanasi, “brings the *neshamah*, casts it into the body, and judges them both together, as it says, ‘He will call to the heavens above and to the ground for a reckoning with Him’ (*Tehillim* 50:4). ‘He will call to the heavens above’ — this refers to the soul, ‘and to the ground for a reckoning with Him’ — this refers to the body.” From this Gemara, it is evident that the soul is likened to the heaven and the body to the ground.

While this is a spectacular idea, we still need to understand why Moshe employed this parable of heaven and earth if he was referring to body and soul. What new depth and insight does the parable afford us?

☞ The Life within the Depths of the Material World

THE SEFAS EMES explains that within every Jew is an inner core of spiritual vitality that needs to be awakened so that it can exert an effect upon him at every level. The way to fan this spiritual core into

life is through Torah study. Through Torah, even the physical, transient body can become a generator of eternal, spiritual life.

This is a miraculous phenomenon, which Moshe sought to elucidate and to demonstrate. When speaking to Bnei Yisrael about Torah study, he therefore employed the parable of heaven and earth, the latter being the prime example of a physical commodity that is invested with the power to bring forth life from potential concealed deep within it.

Nothing seems coarser and more inanimate than a clod of earth. Yet all it takes is a few raindrops to bring forth living matter from the silent, immobile earth. Everything that grows draws its vitality from this inanimate substrate; suddenly, the ground sprouts trees, plants, produce, and luscious fruits containing carbohydrates and other vital nutrients that sustain animal and human life. How does all this life burst forth from the silent earth? It is only thanks to the moisture that falls onto the dry clods of earth that the power of vitality hidden within the ground is activated. This comparison to the effect of the rain falling from heaven upon the ground illustrates the power of Torah, which is likened to water in the *pasuk*, “Hear! All who are thirsty [for wisdom] go to the water[-like Torah]” (*Yeshayah* 55:1).

The same way that rain activates the dry earth’s power of vitality, enabling it to send forth life from its depths, Torah’s spirituality fertilizes the body, enabling it to yield spiritual, eternal life.

☞ Man and the Earth

LIKE THE EARTH, explains the Sefas Emes, man also harbors latent powers that he must dig deep into himself to uncover and activate. Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 17:4) tell us that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* asked Adam, whom the Torah (*Bereishis* 2:20) tells us conferred names upon all living creatures, “And what is your name?” Adam responded, “It is appropriate that I be called Adam, for I was created from the *adamah*, the ground.” What was Adam’s special relationship to the ground? After all, every living creature was created from

the ground exactly as he was, yet none of their names reflect this. Adam's unique connection to the ground lies in the sublime, spiritual powers that are buried within him, which have no counterpart in any other living creature.

In this sense, man is similar to the ground, and just as the ground needs rain in order to realize its potential, man requires Torah to activate and bring to fruition the holiness and tremendous intellectual and emotional capacity that are buried within him.

☞ Man's Advantage over Animals:

His Ability to Realize His Spiritual Potential

THE BASIS OF this idea seems to appear in the Maharal's comments (*Tiferes Yisrael* Chap. 3), which we discussed earlier (in our essay on *parshas Bamidbar*): "It is appropriate that man in particular should bear the name *adam* on account of being created from the ground, for the ground is unique in that represents [both] potential as well as its actualization, [in the form] of all the things that issue from it: plants, trees, and all the other things, and it holds all of this potential within it. This typifies man, who is invested with potential which comes to its full fruition. Thus, his name, *adam*, is appropriate, indicating the feature that he shares with the *adamah*, the ground, which has the special property of cultivating the potential of the produce, plants, and everything else it yields."

We saw too — in that earlier essay — that the Hebrew word for animal (*beheimah*) is a combination of two smaller words: *bah*, meaning "within it," and *mah*, meaning "what." In other words, the animal's *mah*, whatever it is and whatever more it is capable of becoming, can already be encountered *bah*, for an animal has no potential whatsoever that can be developed. In the Maharal's words, "The entire matter for which it was created is already there in it." Chazal (*Bava Kama* 65b) say, "A day-old ox is [already] called an ox; a day-old ram is [already] called a ram." Animals grow in size, but their essence doesn't change or develop. They have no latent,

undeveloped potential — whatever they are born with is all that we will ultimately ever get from them. Therefore, says the Maharal, “In the lower world, too, with the exception of man, there is no actualization of potential, for whatever was created exhibits no change [or development].” Only one other thing besides man demonstrates the fulfillment of potential — the ground. The ground yields an array of bounty; it is invested with the power of growth and creation. Man in particular is therefore said to have come from the ground, for both are invested with the capacity for growth, creation, yielding content and actualizing potential.

☞ The Oral Torah Is Fertile Ground for Man’s Creative Yield

THUS FAR, WE have shown how soul and body correspond to heaven and earth. For Jews, there is an additional, wondrous parallel to heaven and earth: the Written Torah is akin to the heavens, while the Oral Torah is comparable to the ground.

The Oral Torah is fertile ground from which man can cultivate a crop of his own based upon the Written Torah that comes from Heaven. After every *tefillah*, we ask, “And grant our portion in Your Torah,” referring to each individual’s potential for gaining novel Torah insight of his own. Man receives Torah as a means of developing his creative, intellectual powers. Torah study is akin to planting a tree in the ground, for just as a tree harnesses and channels the earth’s strength into producing fruit, Torah is the means by which man is able to channel his creative power, producing a spiritual yield and empowering his inner spark. Chazal (*Tanchuma, Noach 2*) interpret the *pasuk*, “A *tzaddik*’s yield is a tree of life, and he who draws souls [to good] is wise” (*Mishlei* 11:30) as meaning that the principal yield of a person’s life is not his biological offspring, but the spiritual yield he produces, through the Torah and mitzvos he amasses during his lifetime and their life-giving effect upon the people around him whom they impact.

☞ Growth Is Contingent on Planting

THE SEFAS EMES points to another aspect of the analogy of rain inducing growth from the ground, thereby further elucidating the topic at hand.

In the parable, rain penetrates the ground, yet in order for it to produce a yield, a tree must first be planted that sends roots deep into the ground to draw up the streams of water that are absorbed therein.

In regard to Torah, too, the Torah must penetrate deeply into a person's soul, and he must be firmly planted in Torah in order to bring forth a spiritual yield.

In our daily blessing on the Torah, we thus bless Hashem, "Who has given us a Torah of truth and has **implanted** everlasting life within us." The *Tur* explains (O.C. 139), "A Torah of truth' refers to the Written Torah, while 'and Who has **implanted** everlasting life within us' refers to the Oral Torah, concerning which it is written, 'The words of the sages [direct man] like goads and are [permanent] like **implanted**, large-headed nails...' (*Koheles* 12:11)."

Growth through the Oral Torah is thus contingent upon it being firmly planted in a person and him being firmly planted in it.

☞ Studying Torah with Pure Motivation Transforms Earth into Heaven

TAKING SOMETHING PHYSICAL and transforming it into a source of spiritual growth sanctifies the world.

Just as rain represents heaven's union with the ground — to the point where rain is referred to as the ground's consort, fertilizing it — Torah study represents a parallel process. In the person who studies Torah, heaven and earth unite, producing a wonderful spiritual yield.

The purpose of the entire creation is in fact to broaden and further Heaven's glory in this world.

It is thus written regarding Bnei Yisrael, “You will be a land [I] desire” (*Malachi* 3:12), meaning that Bnei Yisrael sustain all of creation, for it is clear and obvious through the “land” that they reveal Hashem’s rule in the world. The person who absorbs the Torah’s teachings in his heart joins together heaven and earth and is regarded as yielding fruit, as it says, “Light is sown for the righteous” (*Tehillim* 97:11) — the *tzaddik*’s virtue is referred to by the word “sown,” meaning the seed planted in the ground that yields fruit, while the “sown light” refers to Torah’s illumination.

☛ Torah Study with Impure Motivation Transforms Heaven into Earth

BUILDING ON THE above profound ideas, the Sefas Emes arrives at a further, breathtaking insight.

Chazal (*Taanis* 7a) interpret the word *yaarof* in the *pasuk*, “*Yaarof kamatar likchi*” — in which *arifah* is usually understood as dripping, as in, “Let my teaching drip like rain” — as conveying an alternative connotation of *arifah*: killing by beheading (where the head drops from the body). In other words, Moshe is saying that Torah study can also have a fatal outcome — for the person who studies it with impure motivation. The Gemara says that a Torah scholar who is upstanding imparts life to others and is compared to dew, “but if not, it kills him like rain.” The Gemara then adds, “Whoever studies Torah with pure motivation, his Torah becomes a life-giving elixir for him, as it says, ‘It is a tree of life for those who hold onto it’ (*Mishlei* 3:18)... and whoever studies Torah with impure motivation, it becomes poison for him, as it says, ‘Let my teaching kill like rain.’” Why does the person who learns Torah with impure motivation deserve such a terrible fate?

The Sefas Emes explains as follows: Rain and dew descend to the ground from the sky, representing the union of the two and resulting in the growth of produce. Similarly, the person who learns Torah with pure motivation is taking his heavenly aspect and fusing it with his physical aspect to produce a spiritual yield. Regarding this

process, the Kotzker Rebbe remarked, “‘The heavens are heaven for Hashem, and the land, He gave to man’ (*Tehillim* 115:16) — so that he should transform it into heaven!”

However, a person who learns Torah with impure motivation seeks to harness the spiritual powers of heaven not as a way of converting the physical into the spiritual, but in order to serve his worldly desires and ambitions.

The severity of including alien considerations in Torah study thus arises from the subversion of the entire purpose of heaven and earth and of the pattern built into creation whereby heavenly rain unites with physical earth, facilitating the latter’s production of a spiritual yield.

Such an individual is driving in reverse, for instead of transforming earth into heaven, he is transforming heaven into earth.

SUMMARY

Man encapsulates within himself heaven and earth — he is partly physical and partly spiritual. He shouldn’t aspire to cling only to the latter and break away from the former, for his physical aspect is a fertile substrate for spiritual growth and renewal. He is composed of physical matter that originates in the earth, and like the earth, his physical aspect retains its capacity for yielding life that sprouts from the farthest recesses of inanimate matter. This involves digging deeply into oneself and instilling life into those places. In the case of the ground, it is the rain that descends from heaven, awakening the latent life force rooted there. In man, it is Torah that achieves this wonder. The Written Torah that descended from Heaven is the foundation, the framework within which man can exercise his creativity, producing a breathtaking spiritual yield, adding to and enhancing the Oral Torah.

The *Sefas Emes* asserts that Moshe's Song of Haazinu with its parable of heaven and earth should be listened to carefully, and the two following lessons should be heeded:

1. Depth — for there to be growth, blossoming, and a subsequent yield of fruit, there must first be planting. Spiritual creativity can only take place after Torah is firmly planted within a person, penetrating to the deepest levels of his soul.
2. Direction — once rain has fallen and fertilized the ground, the direction of the growth it yields is upward.

Man's spiritual yield must also be upward and heaven-oriented rather than *chalilah* exploiting spirituality to further worldly desires. Man must take the earth and turn it into heaven.

U'zos Haberachah



Breaking the Time Barrier

☛ May the End Resemble the Beginning

MOSHE'S FINAL BLESSING to the Jewish People on the last day of his life opens with the words, "Your locks [to your land] are [like] iron and copper, *uchyamecha dovecha*, and [even the days of] your decline will be like the days [of your prime]" (*Devarim* 33:25). Rashi explains that unlike the previous blessings that were addressed to each tribe individually, in this blessing, "He spoke to all of Yisrael."

The word *dovecha* (your decline) is explained by Rashi as a construct of *daavah*, meaning distress or ache, as in *daavon lev*, heartache. Moshe's blessing was thus, "Like the days that were good for you — your early days, the days of your youth — so shall be the days of your old age, which [are typically beset by] ache, discharge, and faltering." In other words, *dovecha*, your old age — which is usually a time of melancholy, instability, and loss, when physical powers fade and waste away — shall be *k'yamecha*, like a person's best days, when he is young and is starting out in life.

Moshe thus blessed Yisrael that their end should be like their beginning.

Are we to understand that this climactic, final blessing, the summation and conclusion of Moshe's parting blessings to Yisrael, was for nothing more than an easy old age? What deeper message do these words contain?

☛ Old Age and Infirmary Are a Welcome Phenomenon

THE DIFFICULTY IS compounded by a Gemara from which it is clear that the process of aging and decline that herald the body's demise and the soul's return to its Creator are actually positive phenomena. Man doesn't expire suddenly, without warning, but fades away gradually. This affords him the opportunity to come to terms with his impending death and prepare himself for his transition from this world to the next.

Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 87a), tell us, "Until the time of Avraham, nobody would grow old; then Avraham came and prayed that there should be aging, as it says, 'And Avraham was old, advanced in days' (*Bereishis* 24:1). Until Yaakov's time, there was no infirmity; then Yaakov came and prayed that there should be infirmity, as it says, 'He told Yosef, "Behold, your father is sick"' (*ibid.* 48:1)." Rashi (*Bava Metzia* *ibid.*) explains that Yaakov prayed "that a person should become sick before his death and instruct his household." This closing stage of life is evidently beneficial, for it is something that the *avos* prayed for. How then are we to understand Moshe blessing Yisrael with being as youthful in old age as when starting out in life?

☛ Holding One's Own during Life's Waning Years

THE SEFAS EMES cites the elucidation his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, offered of the words preceding this blessing: "Your locks [to your land] are [like] iron and copper." The *Chiddushei HaRim* explains them as meaning that to the extent that a person guards his emotional resources and good character traits with locks of "iron and copper" — meaning that he dedicates every drop of his resources and individual strengths solely to serving Hashem — he will retain his strength into his old age, and that period of life will be beneficial for him. In short, then, the *pasuk* means that to the degree that a person ensures that "your locks are like iron and copper," he will

merit that “even the days of your decline will be like the days of your prime.” The Sefas Emes adds, “And the words of a scholar’s mouth are charming.”

In other words, a person must amass spiritual resources during his youth which will later serve him in his old age, preventing any diminishment of his capacity for serving Hashem.

In his *Chiddushei Agaddos* (*Niddah* 31a), the Maharal explains that “The time a person spends in this world is divided into three: his years of progress, his static years, and his years of decline.”

Accordingly, Moshe’s blessing was that despite a person’s old age being beset by weakness and infirmity, there should be no regression of his spiritual resources or alckening in his serving Hashem.

“An Intelligent Son Gathers Grain during the Summer”

According to the *Chiddushei HaRim*, Moshe’s parting blessing was akin to the counsel offered by the wisest of men in *Mishlei* (10:5), “An intelligent son gathers grain during the summer, whereas a shameful son sleeps through the reaping season.”

When parting from Yisrael as an aged man on the day of his death, Moshe shared the benefit of his years, teaching them that “The wise person looks ahead” and builds up spiritual resources during his developing years and middle age upon which he will be able to draw during his old age and decline so that he will preserve his ability to serve Hashem as he did during his youth.

This message evokes the following poem written by the *Chazon Ish* (*Kovetz Igros*, 85):

How precious is youth;
 how pleasant is young adulthood,
 [When] life is productive and vigorous,
 [propelled by] the carefree power of young manhood
 How pleasant are [life’s] songs,
 enmeshed in the wind of its wings,
 Pealing, singing,
 banishing every worry.

How keenly [life's] understanding develops;
 how determined is the power of its youth,
 Radiant and pure, lovely to behold;
 its embrace is finer than fresh wine.
 Happy is the man who values his youth,
 for he will shun obstinacy;
 He will not pursue vanity;
 the Fool (i.e., the *yetzer hara*) does not control him.
**He will gather an abundance of understanding
 and uncover the vistas of wisdom.**
 From the start, he invests his powers in understanding;
 studying thoroughly and grasping hidden [depths],
 He will get to know his heritage
 and his paths will not stray [elsewhere];
 He will brace himself
 to take huge strides to the peaks of wisdom;
 Ascend, succeed,
 and ride astride the word of truth.

☛ “They Will Continue to Yield in Old Age”

THE SEFAS EMES explains the *pasuk* in *Kobeles* (12:1) in light of the above idea: “And remember your Creator in the days of your youth before the days of frailty arrive and years come of which you will say, ‘I have no desire for them.’”

Here, the wisest of men advises the young man to rejoice during his youth in empowering his resources of character and mind and in focusing on developing his spiritual realm. If he does so, then even in old age — which from the physical standpoint are “days for which there is no desire” — he will not experience “days of frailty.” The Gemara (*Shabbos* 154b) explains that “the days of frailty” mentioned here refer to old age.

However, the Sefas Emes cites the comment of the *Zohar* (Vol. I,

204a) that for the righteous who remember their Creator during their youth, old age is not a negative experience. A person can enjoy good days during this period of life despite physically waning as long as he has stored up extensive spiritual resources. It is thus about *tzaddikim* in their old age that the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 92:14–15), says, “Planted in Hashem’s house, in the courtyards of our G-d they will flourish; they will continue to yield in hoary old age; they will be fertile and fresh.”

☛ Conquering the Dimension of Time

THE SEFAS EMES explains, “Now, the truth is that ‘The days of your decline will be like the days of your prime’ is addressed to Bnei Yisrael, who are above time, for Scripture refers to the days of youth as ‘days’ (‘like the days [of your prime]’), for as far as time goes, young adulthood is the time when strength is at its peak.”

In other words, the person whose life is spiritually oriented transcends the bounds of time and rises above them. It is the fate of every physical object to wither with the passage of time as it moves ever closer to its demise. When time is the sole parameter of a physical object’s lifespan, youth assumes prominence that soon begins to gradually fade. By contrast, whatever is spiritually oriented is above time; it neither withers nor falls into obsolescence, and its significance is eternal and unlimited. Along with a person’s advancing spiritual development, his ability to break free from the bounds of nature and transcend time also increases.

In *Gur Aryeh* (on *Shemos* 12:17), the Maharal writes, “Matters of the intellect operate above time, for they are not time-bound and do not operate within the movement [of the heavenly bodies] which yields time — and according to the degree of their importance, they operate independently of time.” In other words, every physical object occupies three spatial dimensions (length, width, and height) as well as a fourth dimension — time — which determines for how long it exists and endures. These four dimensions are the parameters of physical existence, determining the coordinates of space and time

that all things occupy. However, whatever belongs to the spiritual realm is not dominated by physical limitations. Thus, the person who lives a life of spirituality is able to break free from the bounds imposed by time.

☛ With the Body's Decline, the Soul Soars

REVEALING A FURTHER level of depth in the idea of the *Chiddushei HaRim*, the Sefas Emes explains that a person can escape the constraints of time and overcome the aging and decline that his physical component is fated to experience by intensifying his spiritual aspect during this period of life. In other words, beyond the admonition to cultivate spiritual resources during youth, the Sefas Emes asserts that a person's older years have an advantage in terms of ability to experience spiritual flourishing.

Moshe's blessing therefore conveyed that instead of experiencing melancholy over the decline of physical powers and diminishing ability to experience physical pleasures, a person should be brimming with joy over the spiritual resources burgeoning within him at this very time of life. The reason that advancing age leads to spiritual empowerment is that physical pleasures prevent the soul from fully expressing itself. Therefore, during the very time that the body is growing weaker, the soul's powers intensify. With advancing age, physical strength declines, and even memory deteriorates, but whatever a person has learned becomes ever more deeply and firmly rooted. His ability to probe deeper and to grasp the larger, broader picture increases with the ongoing ripening of his spiritual world, enabling him to attain new heights of comprehension and expanded breadth of vision. It thus lies within a person's power to transform his old age into a period of happiness, fulfillment, growth, and ever-advancing accomplishment.

In the Sefas Emes's words, "If one merits breaking free from [the constraints of] nature and time, then 'the days of your decline will be like the days of your prime,' as it says, '*od yenuvun*, they will

yield further’ — the word *od*, implying increase.” In other words, *od*, meaning “still” or “further,” can be understood not only in the temporal sense as “continuing to yield,” but in a quantitative and qualitative sense, meaning that they will produce an even greater and better yield than before. “They will yield further” thus means that during old age, not only will their spiritual resources not diminish, but they will actually intensify and become stronger.

☞ “You Will Eat the Old, Vintage Crop”

WE ENCOUNTER A similar idea from the Kotzker Rebbe, cited by the *Shem Mishmuel*, quoting from his father, the Rebbe of Sochatchov,* in regard to one of the blessings at the beginning of *parshas Bechukosai*: “You will eat the old, vintage [crop]” (*Vayikra* 26:11). What is the significance of this promise? What advantage is conferred by eating from an old crop? The Kotzker Rebbe explained that this blessing refers to wine, which exhibits freedom from the usual constraints of time, for the older wine grows, the more mature and fine it becomes. This is because, as Chazal (*Eruvin* 65a) teach, “Upon the entry of wine, the secret emerges,” meaning that wine empowers a person’s inner resources and dismantles the barriers that restrain them. Drinking wine lowers inhibition and self-control, loosening the grip of physical strength and empowering the soul. Since time has no dominion over spiritual commodities, wine transcends time.

As the *Shem Mishmuel* writes, “‘Sages’ minds find aged wine pleasing’ (*Megillah* 16b; Rashi on *Bereishis* 45:23) — the reason being that everything materialistic and external is under the dominion of time and therefore decays as time progresses. Wine, however, is principally inner content, and its external aspect departs from it as time goes on — the older it gets, the better it gets.”

* R. Avraham Bornstein, who was not only a renowned Chassidic leader, but also a major Torah scholar and one of the main halachic authorities of his day. He authored *Teshuvos Avnei Nezer* and *Eglei Tal*.

SUMMARY

We have seen here that whereas physical objects decay, that which is spiritual is imbued with everlasting life. Man has the ability to live his life on the spiritual plane that transcends aging and obsolescence. Moshe's parting blessing to Yisrael was therefore that "the days of your decline will be like the days of your prime." The period of life when melancholy is usually experienced over physical waning will nevertheless be as good a time as youth, for old age can be good and beneficial if a person has led a spiritually oriented life. Moshe himself was a living example of this phenomenon, having ascended to the heights of Har Sinai and remaining there without eating or drinking for forty days. He led a spiritual life, and the Torah tells us that even on his last day, "his eyes did not weaken, nor did the freshness of his skin disappear" (*Devarim* 34:7). But this is not confined to Moshe — anyone can transcend the limitations of time, for it is particularly when physical powers wane that spiritual resources flourish and intensify. With advancing years, a person matures and grows deeper; his understanding develops prudence and breadth. An older, spiritual person is not subject to the buffeting of time; his spirit transcends time, rising way above it. Happy is his lot.

Sefas Emes
on the
Mo'adim

Elul

Finding Strength and Focusing as the Finish Line Approaches

☞ Elul — The Month of Repentance

A NUMBER OF early *sefarim* discuss the special nature of the month of Elul as an auspicious time for repentance, finding allusions to this in the letters that spell its name. For example:

- The *Avudraham* (in the Order of the Prayers for Rosh Hashanah) writes, “In some places, it is customary to rise early from Rosh Chodesh Elul [onwards], because Moshe ascended the mountain a third time on Rosh Chodesh Elul to receive the second *luchos*. He prayed for Yisrael during this time, his prayer was accepted, he was given the *luchos*, and he descended on Yom Kippur, which was established as a day of forgiveness and pardon for all future generations. As an allusion to this, some cite [the words of the *pasuk*], “*Ani l’dodi v’dodi li* (I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine)” (*Shir Hashirim* 6:3), whose initial letters spell Elul and whose last letters are four *yudin*, whose *gematria* is forty, corresponding to [the] forty days [from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur].”
- The *Akeidas Yitzchak* (*Shaar* 97) writes: “They also said that the initial letters of ‘*Ani l’dodi v’dodi li*’ spell Elul and that the last letters add up to the forty days until Yom Kippur, when

Moshe came down from the mountain. For behold, just as he went up then to rectify the smashing of the first *luchos* by receiving the second *luchos*, every thinking person should ascend on high through his finest intellectual effort to rectify the breakage of the first *luchos*, referring to [the restoration of] whatever purity the souls have lost.”

- In *Shaar Hapesukim* (on *Shir Hashirim* 6:3), R. Chaim Vital quotes from the Arizal that the initial letters of ‘*Ani l’dodi v’dodi li*’ spell Elul, alluding to the fact that during the month of Elul, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is reconciled with Yisrael, becoming their *Dod*, their Loving One, drawing them close [to Him] in repentance and being close to those who call to Him during this month.
- Similarly, in *Pri Eitz Chaim* (*Shaar Rosh Hashanah*, Chap. 1), R. Chaim Vital quotes the Arizal, who notes the *pasuk*, “*Va’asher lo tzadah* (If he did not lie in wait) *v’ha’Elokim inah l’yado* (but G-d caused it to happen to him, i.e., he was responsible for another Jew’s inadvertent death), *v’samti lecha makom* (then I will assign you a place) *asher yanus shamah* (to which he may flee)” (*Shemos* 21:13). He pointed out that the initial letters of this *pasuk*’s fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh words — *alef*, *lamed*, *vav*, and *lamed* — spell Elul, this being an allusion that Hashem has designated this month for atonement for anyone who mistakenly sinned or committed any transgression throughout the year. He further points out that it also alludes to Hashem being close to those who call to Him during this month, “for the initial letters of these [four] words [promising refuge for having sinned inadvertently] spell Elul. And similarly, the initial letters of ‘*Ani l’dodi v’dodi li*’ spell Elul.”

These allusions convey that Elul is imbued with the special character of being the month of our return to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the renewal of our connection with Him.

The month of Elul indeed has a special character.

☞ Elul as Preparation for Tishrei

HOWEVER, THIS APPROACH to Elul as a period with a unique role of its own raises a difficulty.

The days of judgment are Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur — in the following month of Tishrei — whereas Elul is apparently merely a period of preparation in anticipation of the judgment that takes place in Tishrei, lacking a distinct character of its own.

This is akin to the halachic principle that the halachos of a festival should be discussed during the thirty days preceding it. Apparently, in the same way that this preparation for Pesach begins in the preceding month of Adar, our preparations for Tishrei should also begin in Elul. Obviously, though, preparing for Pesach from Adar doesn't confer any special character upon Adar; the special nature of the festival is confined to Nissan, with the study of the halachos in Adar serving as preparation. We therefore similarly shouldn't regard Elul as having a special nature of its own beyond serving as a period of preparation for Tishrei, to which it is secondary. Why do these early sources point to Elul possessing a special quality and properties of its own?

We shall now examine the Sefas Emes's explanation of the matter, which comprises three stages.

☞ Defining Elul's Role

THE FIRST STEP of his explanation involves clarifying the role of the individual during Elul.

Quoting his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, the Sefas Emes cites a further allusion to the name Elul based on the *pasuk*: “*De'u ki Hashem, Hu Elokim* (Know that Hashem, He is G-d), *Hu asanu v'lo anachnu* (He made us, and we are His), *amo v'tzon mariso* (His people and the flock He tends)” (*Tehillim* 100:3).

The word *v'lo* is written *vav-lamed-alef*, meaning “and not,” i.e., Hashem made us, and we did not make ourselves. However, the

word is read as though it were spelled *vav-lamed-vav*, meaning “and His,” i.e., Hashem made us, and we are His. A word that is written one way but read differently is referred to as a *kri-uksiv*, literally meaning “read [one way but] written [differently].”

Combining the letters that are written, *lamed* and *alef*, with those that are read, *lamed* and *vav*, yields the word *alef-lamed-vav-lamed*, i.e., Elul. The *kri-uksiv* of the two versions of the word *v'lo* thus gives us the month of Elul.

The significance of this connection lies in the relationship between the meanings of the two versions of *v'lo*. The greater the extent to which a person subdues his pride and negates himself — as in *v'lo anachnu* spelled with an *alef*, meaning “not us” — the stronger his relationship with his G-d — as in *v'lo ananchnu* spelled with a *vav*, meaning “we are His.” Every Jew must be ready to utterly negate every narrow, personal interest of his own (not us) and devote his entire life to realizing the goal of increasing Heaven’s glory in the world (we are His), in the sense of the *pasuk*, “I created this nation for Myself so that they should recount My praise” (*Yeshayah* 43:21). This sums up the role of the individual during Elul.

To the extent that we conduct ourselves in this manner, Hashem’s Divine guidance of our affairs will be apparent, for, as the Sefas Emes writes, “The creation of the entire world and the revelation of various Divine illuminations that are apparent in the world are done solely for Yisrael.”

The significance of the month’s name of Elul — as spelled out by the initials of *ani l’dodi v’dodi li* — thus lies in the necessity of Yisrael’s devotion to their role as a nation that increases Heaven’s glory in the world, as this is a precondition for finding favor in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s eyes.

☞ Elul — Coming Full Circle

THE SECOND STAGE of the Sefas Emes’s explanation involves defining the nature of the Elul period.

The Sefas Emes cites the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b), which comments on the *pasuk*'s words concerning Eretz Yisrael, "Hashem, your G-d, keeps a constant eye on it, *meireishis hashanah*, from the beginning of the year, *v'ad acharis shanah*, until the end of the year" (*Devarim* 11:12): "R. Yitzchak said, 'Every year that starts out impoverished (the word *reishis* (beginning) is written here without an *alef*, thus also denoting *rash*, meaning poor — Rashi] becomes enriched at its end."

Rashi explains that "starting out impoverished" means "that Yisrael render themselves impoverished [in merits] on Rosh Hashanah, expressing supplication and prayer, as it says, 'The pauper [who recognizes the precariousness of his situation and the need to humble himself] speaks [the language of] supplication' (*Mishlei* 18:23)."

It is evident from here that "the beginning of the year" refers to Tishrei and that "the end of the year" refers to Elul.

Elul is thus not to be regarded solely as a time of preparation for Tishrei of the following year, but as a time of its own — a distinct "concluding period" of the year that began with the previous Tishrei.

☞ Elul as the Climax of the Concluding Year

THE THIRD STAGE in this exposition synthesizes the nature of the month with the individual's role.

The end of a process represents its climax. The extent to which the process has achieved its purpose can be discerned at its conclusion.

Yisrael's overall purpose is to annul any private program they may have of their own and to increase Heaven's glory. The time for evaluating the attainment of this goal is at the end of the year; in other words, during the month of Elul. Yisrael must therefore toil during Elul at realizing their destiny for the sake of which they were granted a year of life back at the beginning of the year.

If they succeed in fulfilling their destiny, then when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* comes to judge whether they deserve another year of

life, having attained the goal in the course of the departing year will stand in their merit. The yardstick by which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* judges His creations on the Day of Judgment is the extent of their capability and willingness to realize their destined role. Rosh Hashanah is the time when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* examines who will be needed in the coming year for furthering the expanse of Heaven's glory in the world and determining accordingly who will be granted another year of life. Elul's essence thus doesn't lie in its preparatory role for the coming year, but in its role as the climax of the departing year.

🔗 Finish Line of the Previous Mission and the Granting of a New Mission

AS HE APPROACHES the finish line, a person gives his all, devoting every last drop of his strength and energy to the fulfillment of his mission and its completion in the best possible manner.

Elul represents the climax of the year that is ending. As Chazal say, the year becomes enriched towards its conclusion — and this is expressed in the spiritual sense as well.

It is therefore no surprise that the early scholars quoted above discovered allusions to Elul's being a self-contained time period. This is also why the essence of the month is captured in the words *lo/lo anachnu*, denoting, "We are not our own, but His" — for a Jew's task during this period is to devote his entire being and every drop of his strength to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

This period is thus also alluded to in the words, "I am my Beloved's," denoting the negation of one's private agenda in order to live a life whose goal is the increase of Heaven's glory. The person who fulfills his mission and attains this goal merits being issued an additional mission for the coming year, but this is an incidental, almost automatic consequence.

In other words, the goal of this race to the year's finish line is the completion of the concluding year's mission, but once a person has

accomplished *ani l'dodi* — once he has demonstrated his devotion to his Beloved — he will experience the fulfillment of *v'dodi li* as well: his Beloved will reciprocate, and he will once again receive a mission for the coming year.

In the Sefas Emes's words;

The time for awakening to repentance is actually at the year's end, which is the intended culmination of all the deeds of the entire year. When [at that point] we see that we have no merits whatsoever, we repent for our dearth of good deeds and clarify [thereby] that He created us solely for His glory, and we yearn to make the glory of Hashem's kingdom apparent in the world. This automatically ushers in the renewal of Rosh Hashanah solely for Bnei Yisrael, in fulfillment of "and my Beloved is for me."

☞ Revealing the Core of Truth in Its Pristine Purity

WHILE RUNNING THE course, a person sometimes gets distracted or sidetracked. While he continues carrying the banner of the mission he undertook, he can nevertheless lose sight of his goal, because he tends to channel his energy into attaining his own desires and wants. However, as he nears the finish line, he becomes hyper-focused, seeing nothing besides attaining the holy goal that lies ahead. No other desires distract him now; nothing else can divert his attention.

The Sefas Emes reveals yet greater depth in this idea, further elucidating Elul's special character as the climax of man's mission to negate his own agenda and devote himself totally to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*: The goal is Heaven's glory — the road to achieving it lies in utterly negating one's personal agenda. The acknowledgment that "there is none besides Him" (*Devarim* 4:35) and the understanding that the purpose of existence is to increase Heaven's glory take place at a very deep level within a person. Along the year's highways and byways, there is a tendency to forget these fundamentals. It is hard for a person to break away from all his desires and longings.

However, when he finds himself at the final stage of his journey

and is trying to get to his destination, he concentrates fully on that goal, to the exclusion of all else.

Elul represents that final stage and is thus the time for attaining the goal in its full purity. To do so, a person must access his deepest, innermost point where no extraneous desire exists.

☞ Elul's Constellation Is a *Besulah*

IN *SEFER YETZIRAH* (5:3), we find that “the dominant constellation during Elul is ‘*Besulah* (Virgo).” In light of the above, this is clearly understood, for it is during this month that a person accesses his deepest, innermost point, where the truth reigns in all its pristine purity.

As the Sefas Emes's expresses it so wonderfully:

There exists an inner point in the Jewish soul where no alien contact has influence — a locked garden, a sealed well — this [point] is called “*besulah*.” Of this point, it can be said, “I am for my Beloved,” for this point never moved away from its connection with its root, and it is reserved for Heaven's sake. But this point cannot be accessed at all times. Now, though, when Bnei Yisrael are awakened to repentance and their souls are drawn to Hashem *yisbarach*, the moment is auspicious. And likewise, on His part, too, “My Beloved is for me,” for up Above, there are special attributes that are reserved solely for dealing with Bnei Yisrael.

☞ With the Mission's Accomplishment in Purity, a Good, New Year Begins

IN LIGHT OF the above approach, the comments of R. Avraham of Slonim (*Yesod Ha'avodah*, Vol. II, Letter 15) resonate clearly:

The month of Elul is therefore composed of the initial letters of *ani l'dodi v'dodi li* — through repentance and regret, a person becomes as though newly created. Chazal say in *Sotah* (2a), “A person doesn't transgress an *aveirah* unless a spirit of folly enters him.”

He therefore needs to pour out his soul in prayer before Hashem to remove every extraneous desire from him so that he is left like “a young woman whom no man has known intimately” (*Bereishis* 24:16) — this refers to Elul, whose [dominant] constellation is “*Besulah*,” following which comes Rosh Hashanah, which represents the kingdom’s renewal.

SUMMARY

Beyond being a time of preparation for the approaching year, the month of Elul has independent significance as the “finish line” of the departing year. This novel angle is supremely important because of what it teaches us about our role during Elul.

As the finish line approaches, a person becomes completely focused on his goal and devotes all his energy to attaining it, not allowing himself to be distracted by any other wish or desire.

At the finish line, he reestablishes contact with the inner point deep within himself where his ultimate, deepest, and truest desire — to do his Maker’s will and increase Heaven’s glory — finds expression.

At this time, he is able to annul his “I” completely in favor of “my Beloved,” and if he does so, he will merit “My Beloved is for me.”

Rosh Hashanah

A Sign Has Significance

☞ Eating *Simanim* (Signs) on Rosh Hashanah

THE GEMARA (*KERISUS* 6a) tells us that it is inadvisable to carry out any inauspicious practice, for a person's soul thereby suffers. The Gemara then states: "Abayei said, 'Since we see that [such] indicative practices have significance, a person should accustom himself to eat on Rosh Hashanah *kara*, *rubiya*, *karti*, *silka*, and *tamrei*,' for these provide an auspicious omen."

Abayei's recommendation is codified by the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 583:1):

A person should be accustomed to eat on Rosh Hashanah *rubiya* (this is *tilsan*), *karti*, *silka*, *tamrei*, and *kara*. And when eating *rubiya*, he should say, "May it be [Your] will *sheyirbu zechuyoseinu* (that our merits should be many)" — this prayer is based on the similarity in sound and meaning between the words *rubiya* and *yirbu*; when eating *karti*... "*sheyikarsu soneinu*" (that those who hate us should be cut off); when eating *silka*... "*sheyistalku oyeveinu*" (that our enemies should disappear); when eating *tamrei*... "*sheyitamu soneinu*" (that those who hate us should cease to exist); when eating *kara*... "*sheyikara gezar dineinu v'yikaru l'fanecha zechuyoseinu*" (that the decree of our judgment be ripped up and that our merits be read out before You).

The Rama appends to this, "And some are accustomed to eat an apple sweetened in honey and to say [when eating it], '*Tis'chadeish aleinu shanah mesukah* (that there should ensue a sweet year),' and this is the custom. Some eat pomegranates and say, '*Nirbeh zechuyos*

k'rimon (may we have as many merits as the pomegranate [has seeds]),' and [in addition,] it is customary to eat fatty meat and every type of sweet food."

In the following *se'if* (583:2), the *Shulchan Aruch* adds, "A sheep's head is eaten, [as if] to say, 'We should be a head and not a tail' and also to commemorate the ram [that Avraham offered instead] of Yitzchak."

☞ Why by Way of Allusion?

THIS HALACHAH IS surprising: does a person's menu choice influence the verdict of his judgment? Is eating pomegranate a way of multiplying one's merits?

Either a person is deserving of having a good and sweet year, in which case he will merit it even if he eats none of the *simanim*, or he isn't (*chalilah*), in which case eating *simanim* shouldn't help.

Should we answer that it isn't the actual eating that is influential but the accompanying prayers and requests? The Sefas Emes asks why these requests are made by way of allusion, through eating an item whose name is reminiscent of the subject of our prayers. If it is our prayer that is crucial, why not pray outright?

"Why," asks the Sefas Emes, "is this only done through *simanim* and allusion rather than praying for and requesting the matters that they indicate, as we do throughout the rest of the year?"

☞ Showing the Love We Have for Our King, without Any Personal Interest

THE SEFAS EMES cites the *Zohar's* comment that on Rosh Hashanah, we offer no prayers and make no requests whatsoever for our material wellbeing. The sole focus of our prayers is the revelation of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* rule.

In *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Tikkun* 6, 22a), it is written of the evildoers among Yisrael:

They all cry out in their prayers on the Yamim Nora'im like [barking] dogs, "*Hav! Hav!* (Give! Give!); give us sustenance, forgiveness, atonement, and inscribe us for life!" They are brazen like dogs. The nations of the world cry out to Him and are not embarrassed [to do so], and of them it says, "They mingled with the nations and learned [from] their ways" (*Tehillim* 106:35); they are the *eirev rav*, and any kindness that they perform is solely for themselves.

On Rosh Hashanah, a person should therefore refrain altogether from praying for his own needs. It is inappropriate to behave selfishly, showing the King that he prays for His welfare solely for the sake of obtaining his own needs. Our Rosh Hashanah prayers are therefore wholly devoted to seeking the increase of the honor of Heaven's rule to the exclusion of all else. Our prayers on this day have a single theme:

And so, Hashem, our G-d, impose Your fear upon everything You have made and Your dread upon all that You have created. And everything that You made shall fear You, and every creature shall prostrate itself before You, and they shall all form a single group to wholeheartedly do Your will. As we know, Hashem, our G-d, control [over the world] is Yours, power is in Your hand and might in Your right hand, and Your Name instills awe in everything that You created. And You, our G-d, should reign swiftly alone over all Your handiwork, on Har Tziyon, the dwelling of Your glory, and in Yerushalayim, Your holy city, as it is written in Your holy words, "Hashem, Your G-d, Tziyon, shall rule forever, for all generations, *halleluyah*" (from the third blessing of the *amidah* for Yamim Nora'im).

☞ Our Requests Are Allusions

Because the Focus Is Not on Man's Needs

THE SEFAS EMES explains accordingly that if a person wants to pray for his personal needs on Rosh Hashanah, he shouldn't do so outright, using explicit language; he should merely allude to his needs.

Eating the *simanim* is an indirect approach in which the person who loves his Creator doesn't ask outright — for now is not the appropriate time — but merely hints to his Beloved that he would be glad if He would assist him in solving his problems. It is as if he is saying, "Master of the world, whatever pertains to Heaven's honor is explicit and central in my prayers, whereas my personal needs are entirely incidental."

☛ "For Your Sake, Living G-d"

SOME DIFFICULTY NONETHELESS persists, for if we are striving to focus on our King and leave ourselves out of the picture altogether, why are we mentioning our needs at all, even indirectly? Even though we only allude to them, in an appropriate manner, it is evident at the end of the day that we also have our own interests in mind.

Addressing this point, the Sefas Emes further deepens his explanation, clarifying that seeking our material wellbeing is in order so long as our needs don't represent an independent, private concern of our own, but are a means of enabling us to serve the King. As we pray during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, "Remember us for life, King who desires life... **for Your sake**, living G-d."

The Sefas Emes's line of thought is as follows:

A person's needs are channeled to him with the intention that he use them to serve his Creator. Therefore, on Rosh Hashanah, when Hashem assigns renewed vitality to all His creations for the coming year, they each need to be ready to receive their physical life in this world solely for serving Him.

Each person merits life in accordance with the extent of his desire to serve Hashem during his allotted years. The duration and the quality of his life depend upon the degree to which he yearns to use them to increase Heaven's honor.

In granting us some material request of ours, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is indicating to us that He has acceded to our wish to thereby attain some spiritual goal, which is its ultimate purpose. It would therefore be

entirely inappropriate to focus upon our own material needs, for they represent only a means to an end, not an end in themselves.

For example, if a soldier is loyal, his prayers won't focus on being issued effective ammunition, but on his army achieving victory in battle.

We therefore pray openly for the revelation of Heaven's rule, for this is our ultimate goal. On the other hand, we do mention — though only by allusion — our material needs, which are meant to enable us to carry out our life's mission of increasing Heaven's honor. It is not merely appropriate that we allude to them — they are an entirely legitimate, if secondary, request. By merely alluding to them, we convey that our request for our material needs is itself simply an allusion to the spiritual goals and the service of Hashem that they render possible.

☞ The “Condensation” of Spirituality

THIS ELUCIDATION SHOULD clarify the role of the various *simanim* regarding our material needs. What of the pomegranate, though, whose consumption is accompanied by our prayer that we should “have as many merits as [the seeds of] the pomegranate?” What is the meaning of this *siman*, which addresses the spiritual realm?

The Sefas Emes explains further that all the bounty that a person attains on Rosh Hashanah is in fact wholly spiritual in nature. We might contest this assertion, citing proof from the prayer *Unesaneh Tokef* (from Mussaf for the Yamim Nora'im), where we say that on Rosh Hashanah, it is inscribed, “Who shall live and who shall die... who shall be impoverished and who shall be wealthy; who shall be degraded and who shall be exalted.”

The Sefas Emes's response to this is (as we explained at length in our essay on *parshas Vayishlach*) that at its root, heavenly bounty is entirely spiritual. However, with its descent into this world, it is subjected to the physical constraints of space and time, physical reality, and established natural laws, thereby altering its spiritual character, coarsening it, and changing it from something purely spiritual into

something physical. Rosh Hashanah is thus the source from which heavenly bounty begins its flow prior to its change from being wholly spiritual to becoming material.

We have thus arrived at a more nuanced appreciation of the nature of our prayers on Rosh Hashanah. Our main focus is on the revelation of Heaven's kingship and the acknowledgment by all of creation of this reality. Any prayer we offer by allusion for ourselves — whether for our physical or for our spiritual wellbeing — is a prayer that we merit the spiritual and ultimately the material bounty that we seek in order to work towards this goal.

☞ Rosh Hashanah — The Year's "Head"

IN LIGHT OF this profound idea, the Sefas Emes explains why the Day of Judgment is known as Rosh Hashanah, the "Year's Head."

This day is not referred to as the "head" solely because it is the first day of the new year. It is known as the "head" because it is the most important day of the year, in the sense of the halachic concept (*Eruvin* 41a), "The rest of the body follows the head." The head is the foundation of a person's existence, and whatever his head is involved in, the rest of him is also involved in. In the same way that the head is the source of the life of the body beneath it, the rest of the year derives its vitality from its "head." Rosh Hashanah is the head from which the year's life force flows and that shapes and defines the entire year. It is the day on which bounty flows to the entire year. That bounty is spiritual, but it is the source of all of a person's material needs and represents the fulfillment of all of his wishes for the realm of existence to which he alluded.

☞ The Physical World Is an Allusion and a Reflection of the Spiritual Realm

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the physical world that we experience through our senses does not represent real existence, but is merely a *siman* and allusion to whatever is transpiring in the spiritual world

above, which is the real world. In the same way that a person's body can't withstand a high-voltage electrical current, and he can only have contact with it once it has passed through a transformer, physical man is unable to apprehend the spiritual world with his physical eyes and can only perceive that which has taken on some physical form.

The basis of this idea can be found in *Tikkunei Zohar* (Introduction, 17b), where it is written:

You created heaven and earth and brought forth from them sun, moon, stars, and constellations; and on earth, trees, grasses, Gan Eden, vegetation, wild animals, birds, fish, domestic animals, and people through which they should [come to] recognize the worlds, how the upper and lower [creations] conduct themselves within them, and how to discern the upper worlds from [what transpires in the] lower worlds.

Our physical world is thus a mere reflection and end stage of that which happens in the sublime, spiritual worlds.

Our world represents the physical embodiment of Hashem's sublime wishes in a form that can be perceived and grasped by the eyes of flesh belonging to beings whose souls have been placed within physical bodies.

Every part and aspect of this world is thus an allusion, assisting and enabling man in discerning the "allusion to wisdom and serving Hashem" that lies within every physical being and phenomenon. It is thus clear why on Rosh Hashanah, we only tender our request for our material needs by way of allusion.

SUMMARY

In addressing the topic of *simanim*, the Sefas Emes affords us insight into the essence of Rosh Hashanah, which is not

a time of bestowal of material bounty, but a wholly spiritual day devoted to Heaven's kingship and therefore unsuited for requesting human needs.

Nonetheless, prayers for material needs can be offered by way of allusion, for these needs are bestowed on man to enable him to serve his Creator, and he merits life according to the extent of his desire and yearning to serve Hashem in the course of his allotted years. The fulfillment of a material request thus represents granting a wish to attain some spiritual goal, which is the purpose of existence.

It is therefore understood that our explicit prayers are for the revelation of Heaven's rule, the ultimate goal, whereas we request our material needs, which constitute mere allusions to spirituality and serving Hashem, only by way of allusion.

Moreover, Rosh Hashanah is the year's head and its most important day. It determines the character and essence of the whole year and is the source of all material bounty that is obtained in the course of it. However, the real world, where human prayers are effective, is the sublime, spiritual world. The bounty a person receives on this day is wholly spiritual, whereas the physical world is merely a "parable" and coarse allusion to the spiritual realm from whence it issued. We therefore offer prayers for material needs only by way of allusion, for their necessity is itself an allusion to the spiritual realm from whence everything flows.

Indeed "a *siman* (indication) has significance." It has substance — it is the means by which we are able to appreciate the essence of this holy day.

Yom Kippur



“A Day of Bringing about Love and Friendship”

☛ Why Is “Before Hashem Be Purified” Dependent on Appeasing One’s Colleague?

THE TORAH TELLS us about Yom Kippur: “For on this day He will atone for you, purifying you from all your sins — in Hashem’s presence, you shall become pure” (*Vayikra* 16:30).

In the Mishnah (*Yoma* 85b), R. Elazar ben Azaryah interprets this *pasuk*’s concluding words as indicating that the purification that Yom Kippur achieves is limited to sins that took place “in Hashem’s presence,” i.e., that solely affect a person’s relationship with G-d. Accordingly, he teaches, “For sins between man and G-d, Yom Kippur atones, but for sins between man and his fellow man, Yom Kippur does not atone until he has appeased his colleague.”

The words “in Hashem’s presence, you shall become pure” apparently imply that Yom Kippur solely addresses man’s relationship with G-d and has no bearing whatsoever upon the state of his relationship with his fellow men. However, the Mishnah’s wording “until he has appeased his colleague” suggests otherwise, namely, that once a person has reconciled with the offended party, it is Yom Kippur that rectifies the blemish of his sin.

Why should Yom Kippur's cleansing effect still be required in order to secure atonement once his colleague has already reconciled with him and forgiven him?

We might answer that sinning against a fellow Jew is a double offense, affecting the sinner's relationship both with his colleague and with Heaven. A thief, for example, injures his victim monetarily and also transgresses Heaven's will.

If that were all, though, we would expect the sin against his colleague to be atoned for upon the colleague forgiving him, and the offense toward Heaven to be atoned for with repentance on Yom Kippur. From the Mishnah it is evident that this is not the case. Why are the two components of a sin against a fellow Jew intertwined such that even the part between man and G-d isn't forgiven until the sinner and his victim have reconciled, yet even after this has happened, the sin still isn't erased unless Yom Kippur atones for it?

☞ The Day Itself Atones

THIS DIFFICULTY INCREASES in light of the opinion that Yom Kippur itself has the power to effect atonement even for a person who has not repented.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 85b) states, "Rebbi says, 'Yom Kippur atones for every sin in the Torah, whether or not a person has repented.'"

The Rambam doesn't rule in accordance with this view of Rebbi, for he writes, "The day itself atones for those who repent." Nonetheless, in regard to "minor" sins — "positive and negative commandments that do not incur the *kareis* penalty" — the Rambam rules (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 1:2) that the goat offered on Yom Kippur atones even for a person who has not repented.

Accordingly, it would seem justified to argue that even the person who has sinned towards others should merit atonement by virtue of the power of Yom Kippur itself — at least for that aspect of his sin that is between himself and Heaven — even if he has not repented.

This would seem to strengthen our earlier question as to why failure to appease the injured party should interfere with at least partial atonement by virtue of the day's special character.

☛ Unity Is the Day's Defining Characteristic

THE SEFAS EMES answers these questions with a novel insight: Yom Kippur atones by virtue of the unity that it fosters.

- Yom Kippur fosters unity in the realm of time.
- Yom Kippur fosters unity among people, thus necessitating their reconciliation with one another. So long as people remain unreconciled, unity has not been attained, detracting from the day's special meaning and its purifying effect.
- Yom Kippur fosters unity between Hashem and His single and united nation. This union is the basis of the atonement that this day bestows.

Let us now explain all these ideas in greater depth.

☛ Unity in the Realm of Time

THE *PASUK* STATES, “Your eyes beheld my form, and in Your book all of them are written; days are formed, and one of them is His” (*Tehillim* 139:16). In *Tanna D’bei Eliyahu Rabbah* (Chap. 1), Chazal interpret this as a reference to Yom Kippur. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* made many days, but only one of them — Yom Kippur — is His alone. We are also told (*ibid.*) that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave this single day to His nation, Yisrael: “There was great joy before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* over having given it lovingly to Yisrael.”

How are we to understand the idea of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* having just one day?

Furthermore, the Aramaic name by which Chazal refer to the *maseches* that discusses Yom Kippur is “*Yoma*,” meaning “day.” Why

would they refer to such a special day simply as “a day”? Wouldn’t it be more fitting to call it, for example, *Yoma Kadisha* (the Holy Day)?

The only explanation can be that Yom Kippur’s uniqueness lies in it being one of a kind — it alone qualifies to be called a day, with all other days and times being mere offshoots of it.

In *Moreh Nevuchim* (Vol. II, chap. 30), the Rambam writes, “I have already informed you that the foundation of the entire Torah is that G-d brought the world into being where nothing had previously existed, without any beginning of time [prior to creation]; rather, time was created [along with the rest of creation], for it is a function of the movement of the firmament, and the firmament was created.”

Time is a creation, just as every object — be it inanimate, growing, living, or human — is a creation. Prior to creation, nothing whatsoever existed — not even time. Time is an entity that exerts its own influence upon its surroundings. Every expanse and every aspect of time represents movement towards a specific destination. This destination is the singular day of Yom Kippur.

This day is not assimilated into the regular time flow, but represents a point of origin to which all other times lead and from which all times flow.

Yom Kippur’s uniqueness thus lies in it being one, single, and on its own. Its uniqueness is its very unity.

☞ Yom Kippur Unites Yisrael with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*

SIN DISTANCES A person from his origin, placing a barrier between him and his Creator. Sin can be likened to a screen separating the sinner from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, “Your sins were dividing between you and your G-d” (*Yeshayah* 59:2).

On Yom Kippur, man returns to his root and is reunited with his G-d. He abandons his physical desires and is imbued with holiness.

He becomes altogether spiritually oriented. On this day, his soul, which is always yearning for its Source, overpowers his body, which is shunted aside as he becomes elevated, and he thereupon unites with his Creator. Screens collapse and barriers vanish — it is as though sin never existed. The soul's root unites with the Divine Source from which it was hewn. On this day, unity of man and G-d prevails.

☞ Unity Among Yisrael

THE SOULS OF all Jews issue from a single source: *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who is One.

In the same way that sin distances man from his root, though, it also places distance between him and his colleagues.

The aforementioned *pasuk*, “Your sins were dividing between you and your G-d” can be understood in two ways: either, as above, that sin imposes a barrier separating the Jewish nation collectively from G-d, or as meaning that the sins separate “between you” i.e., between individuals, in addition to separating man from G-d. This is because no true unity exists within a group whose members are all drawn to follow their own personal desires. This phenomenon is referred to by Shlomo HaMelech in the *pasuk*, “Desire seeks separateness (i.e., solitude)” (*Mishlei* 18:1).

In *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (1:31), Rabbeinu Yonah explains this principle:

The person who seeks to follow his own desire and wishes parts company from every friend and colleague, for friends and comrades will distance themselves from him, because people's desires and their traits vary — this one's desire differs from that one's. However, if he follows the path of the intellect, friends will join him, and he will have many friends. This very idea can be used to explain [the *pasuk*], “Desire seeks separateness” — a person who parts ways with every colleague and friend is seeking [to indulge his] desire, and because he wants to follow his desire, his colleagues therefore distance themselves from him.

On Yom Kippur, though, with man's return to his Source, he is also reunited with his colleagues who, like him, are returning to their common root. The person who abandons his personal, egoistic, physical desires now discovers that he has close friends.

We mention this aspect of the day on Yom Kippur itself in Mussaf (in the section in which we describe the special Yom Kippur service in the Beis Hamikdash), where we say:

Therefore, in Your great mercy, You have given us this day of the fast of Yom Kippur and this day of pardoning sin, to pardon sin and atone for iniquity; a day on which eating is forbidden, a day on which drinking is forbidden, a day on which bathing is forbidden, a day on which anointing is forbidden, a day on which marital relations are forbidden, a day on which wearing [leather] shoes is forbidden, **a day of bringing about love and friendship, a day of abandoning envy and competitiveness...**

Yom Kippur's uniqueness thus lies in it being a day when man returns to his Source and is thereby also reunited with his colleagues.

In the Sefas Emes's words, "In the same way that this day unites all days, all souls also unite then, for the souls are actually close to one another, but due to sins, distance and divisiveness are introduced."

☞ The Obligation to Appease One's Colleague and Restore Warm Relations — The Path Leading to Unity

IN LIGHT OF the above, it becomes clear why in order to reap the benefit of Yom Kippur, it is imperative to reconcile with anyone whom we might have harmed or offended, for this creates unity among the Jewish nation. Any lingering divisiveness is a sign that people have not returned fully to their source, for at the Source, there is no separation, only unity. Reconciliation with his colleagues is thus the litmus test of whether a person has returned to his spiritual source and cleansed himself from any trace of physicality and

selfishness. It is straightforward that without having appeased a wounded colleague, Yom Kippur will not atone for a person, because he has evidently not fully returned to his source, which is that which effects the day's atonement.

It is similarly straightforward that we are not speaking here about offering a perfunctory, *pro forma* apology, but about attaining genuine connection. The Sefas Emes explains that forgiveness thus needs to be obtained not only for out-and-out sins such as theft and robbery, but for any offense or infraction that causes disharmony. For example, it is especially urgent to restore goodwill between ourselves and a person towards whom we have transgressed; "Do not hate your brother in your heart" (*Vayikra* 19:17). He may know nothing about this, and it may seem superfluous to seek his forgiveness, but of course, even hidden hatred leads to divisiveness. In keeping with the principle of mutuality, in interpersonal relations — as it is written, "Just as person's image is reflected in water, his feelings towards another are reflected in that person's feelings for him" (*Mishlei* 27:19) — their dislike is mutual. Even if they weren't openly hostile to one another, they certainly weren't on good terms. With the approach of Yom Kippur, he must therefore instill loving feelings in his heart towards this person and feel true kinship for him. The stipulation that Heaven's forgiveness is withheld "until he has appeased his colleague" should thus be understood as imposing the further necessity to reach the point where "he again loves his friend and desires his friendship."

☞ "This Is a Major Torah Principle"

THE SEFAS EMES asserts further that unity among the Jewish nation is a precondition for being able to receive the Torah. The Torah, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and Yisrael are all one, as the *Zohar* (Vol. III, 73a) states. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is One, His Torah is one, and His people are one.

If there is divisiveness among the people, they are unable to

become one with the Torah, which is one, and with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who is One.

This renders R. Akiva's statement, "Love your brother as you love yourself" (*Vayikra* 19:18) — this is a major Torah principle" all the clearer. R. Akiva is not merely conveying the importance of one particular mitzvah, but telling us that the entire Torah hinges upon fulfilling it.

Returning to his spiritual source on Yom Kippur thus unites a person with his Creator and with his fellow Jews, and this unity and closeness to Hashem make receiving the Torah possible.

The two events that took place on Bnei Yisrael's first Yom Kippur are thus interrelated:

1. They were pardoned for the sin of the Golden Calf;
2. They received the second *luchos*.

The Sefas Emes explains that following the sin of the Golden Calf (which took place on the seventeenth of Tamuz) and prior to Yom Kippur, it says, "Moshe saw that the people were in disarray" (*Shemos* 32:25), for the unity they had achieved upon arriving at Har Sinai had disappeared. On Yom Kippur, though, when Moshe descended from Har Sinai bearing the second *luchos*, it says, "Moshe gathered the entire community of Bnei Yisrael" (*ibid.* 35:1). The nation's unity was restored "and," says the Sefas Emes, "the Torah depends upon this unity."

☛ It Is Obligatory to Appease, Even without Any Guilt and without Any Guilty Party

THE GEMARA (*YOMA* 87a) records the following incident: Rav was reading a section from the Torah and explaining it. R. Chiya then entered, and Rav started again from the beginning for him. Then Bar Kapara entered, and Rav started again from the beginning. Then R. Shimon entered, and Rav again went back to the beginning of the section for him. Then R. Chanina bar Chama came in, but this time,

Rav didn't start again (for a fourth time) and said, "Shall we start again from the beginning so many times?" His disciple R. Chanina took umbrage at this. Rav [therefore] went to appease R. Chanina on thirteen separate Yom Kippur eves to seek his forgiveness.

The Sefas Emes asks why Rav had to do this. Had he really been obliged to repeat everything once again for R. Chanina?

His response is, "Even though R. Chanina was not entitled to take offense, Rav nevertheless went to appease him, because when it comes to Yom Kippur, it is particularly important that people reconcile with one another irrespective of whether it is the other party who is at fault and if he actually has a right to feel offended. It is important to reconcile nonetheless."

The reason for this is clear. When unity among Bnei Yisrael must be achieved, it doesn't matter which side was at fault or, indeed, whether anybody was at fault. Unless there is unity, Yom Kippur will be unable to effect atonement.

It is therefore clear why Rav made thirteen visits to R. Chanina to appease him.

☞ "Until He Appeases His Colleague" and "Until Hashem, Your G-d"

IN LIGHT OF the above, it is clear why atonement cannot be attained unless a person has appeased his friend. While *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is indeed willing to pardon that aspect of an interpersonal sin that relates to Heaven, Yom Kippur cannot exert its effect until the parties have reconciled and reunited. If there is no unity among the Jewish nation, it means that the individuals' repentance is incomplete and that they have not returned wholeheartedly to Hashem, their G-d. Something is still keeping them apart. A person must therefore reconcile with his colleague, for only once there is complete unity and commonality of purpose can he reunite with his G-d in fulfillment of the words of the prophet Hoshea, "Return, Yisrael, all the way to Hashem, your G-d" (*Hoshea* 14:2).

SUMMARY

The requirement to appease one's fellow Jew is an integral part of Yom Kippur. On this day, a person returns to his spiritual roots, unites with his G-d, and is thereby cleansed and purified. This purity is likened to immersion in a *mikveh*.

We thus find (*Yoma* 85b): "R. Akiva said, 'Happy are you, Yisrael — before Whom are you becoming pure, and Who is purifying you? Your Father in heaven, as it says, 'I shall sprinkle pure water over you, and you shall become pure' (*Yechezkel* 36:25). And it says, 'Hashem is the *mikveh* of Yisrael' (*Yirmeyahu* 17:13). In the same way that a *mikveh* purifies the impure, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* purifies Yisrael."

Immersion in a *mikveh* only achieves purity when no intervening substance on the person or object immersing is acting as a barrier to the waters of the *mikveh*. Even the smallest, flimsiest item can potentially intervene, rendering the immersion invalid.

Similarly, the purity bestowed by Yom Kippur is contingent upon a person achieving utter unity with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, without the slightest sin intervening.

Thus, when a person returns completely and wholeheartedly to his Source, there should no longer be anything intervening between him and his fellow Jew, whose soul was hewn from the very same Divine source. If their hearts are nonetheless divided, this indicates that they haven't achieved complete unity with their Divine Source and that some barrier remains, preventing Yom Kippur from being effective.

A person can return all the way "until Hashem" without reservation only if he has fulfilled the stipulation of "until he has appeased his colleague" without reservation.

Sukkos

Love of Hashem Intensifies Faith, Replacing Worry with Joy

☞ Which Aspect of Dwelling in the Sukkah Intensifies Faith?

MANY MITZVOS ARE mentioned by the Torah as commemorating our nation's departure from Egypt. The mitzvah of *sukkah*, however, is unique in not merely commemorating Bnei Yisrael having dwelt in *sukkos* when they left Egypt, but in the fact that by dwelling in our own present-day *sukkos*, we actually experience the holiness and the profound effect of faith in G-d. The *sukkah* is referred to by the *Zohar* as "the shadow of faith."

In the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 186b), it is written, "In *sukkos* you shall dwell for seven days' (*Vayikra* 23:42) — the holy nation must dwell beneath the shade of the *sukkah*, in the profound embrace of faith."

It is written further (ibid. Vol. III, 103a), "Every native among Yisrael shall dwell in *sukkos*' (ibid.) — everyone who issues from the root and [who belongs to the] race of Yisrael 'shall dwell in *sukkos*' beneath the protection of faith. When a person lives in this dwelling, in the shade afforded by faith, the *Shechinah* extends its protection over him from above, and Avraham, together with another five *tzad-dikim*, make their dwelling with him."

However, we need to understand what all this means. Surely, a person who believes in G-d doesn't believe in Him any less when he dwells beneath a ceiling of solid concrete. What is special about dwelling beneath the sticks of the *sechach* that intensifies faith?

☞ What Is the Nature of the Spiritual Illumination That Abounds during Sukkos?

THE RAMCHAL (*DERECH Hashem* 4:7) writes, "The root of all the festivals is an arrangement imposed by Divine wisdom whereby every [spiritual] rectification that took place and every powerful [spiritual] illumination that shone at a particular time — whenever that season [of the year] recurs, illumination akin to the original one shines upon us, and the ramifications of that rectification are experienced anew among those who received it [originally]."

In other words, time is circuitous such that when moving forward from year to year, we regularly encounter the same special junctures on given days.

The festivals are times when Divine illumination shone, and this illumination remains associated with its particular season, casting its glow upon all who come around to that time once again. With the arrival of every festival, therefore, we make the blessing, "Blessed are You ... who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season." The illumination of "this season" remains in place, radiating its own specific, spiritual emanation, and we offer thanks for having completed another yearly cycle and once again reached this specific point in time that is suffused with the Divine illumination that we experience anew.

What illumination shone on Sukkos? Tishrei doesn't seem to be associated with any particular miracle or event whatsoever.

In fact, the *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 625) asks why the Torah commands that Sukkos be celebrated in Tishrei when our nation's departure from Egypt took place in Nissan. The *Tur*'s answer is that indeed, there was no special event in Tishrei. He explains that

“although we left Egypt in Nissan, He didn’t command us to make *sukkos* then, because it is the [beginning of the] summer season, when people usually make a hut for shade, and it would not be evident that constructing them [at that time] was due to the Creator’s command. He therefore commanded us to make [them] in the seventh month, which is the [beginning of the] rainy season, when people usually leave their huts to dwell indoors, whereas we leave the house to dwell in the *sukkah*. This makes it evident to all that this is the King’s command upon us to fulfill.”

Nonetheless, what novel spiritual illumination was there in “this season” of Tishrei, when we celebrate Sukkos?

☞ What Is the Significance of Our Rejoicing?

WE REFER TO each of the festivals in our prayers by a name that captures its character and alludes to the past event that it commemorates. Whereas we refer to Pesach as “the season of our freedom” and to Shavuot as “the season of the giving of our Torah,” we refer to Sukkos — which, as we have seen, doesn’t commemorate any particular past event — as “the season of our rejoicing.” Since it does not refer to any specific event in the past, “the season of our rejoicing” must refer to our rejoicing in the present.

This name for Sukkos has its source in the special obligation to rejoice on Sukkos, as the Rambam rules (*Hilchos Lulav* 8:12), “Although it is a mitzvah to rejoice on all the festivals, on Sukkos, there was excessive rejoicing in the *Mikdash*, as it says, ‘You shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for seven days’ (*Vayikra* 23:40).”

What is the reason for this excessive rejoicing on Sukkos, the only festival on which no special historical event took place?

☞ Rejoicing Inspired by Love

THE SEFAS EMES offers the following explanation of why Sukkos is referred to as “the season of our rejoicing”:

Chazal (*Shabbos* 130a) tell us that “every mitzvah that they accepted upon themselves joyfully — such as *milah*, about which it is written, ‘I rejoice over Your utterance like a person who finds great treasure’ (*Tehillim* 119:142) — they still perform joyfully.” Rashi (*Shabbos* *ibid.*) explains that “Your utterance,” in the singular, refers to the single utterance that preceded all the others, i.e., the mitzvah of *milah*, which was given to Avraham Avinu before the Torah was given.

The joy we experience over Sukkos thus indicates that this mitzvah was originally received joyfully. What aspect of dwelling in *sukkos* engendered that original joy?

Our nation’s departure from civilization for the desert demanded that we relinquish our sense of security and our reliance on the relative availability of our physical needs. This is contrary to human nature; a person will not normally head into surroundings that lack any regular source of sustenance. To do so involves believing wholeheartedly in Hashem — enough to go after Him into the desert. The *navi* says, “For you, I recall the kindness of your youth, the love you showed at the time of your wedding, when you followed Me (i.e., My emissaries) into the desert, an uncultivated land’ (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2). Chazal (*Mechilta*, *Beshalach*, *Masechta D’vayhi* 3) interpret this as referring to the fact that Bnei Yisrael didn’t say to Moshe, “How can we go out to the desert when we have no provisions for the journey?’ Instead, they believed and followed Moshe.”

What indeed led an entire nation to go out to the desert without provisions for the way? The answer lies in Yirmeyahu’s words, “The kindness of your youth, the love you showed at the time of your wedding.” A person who is in love isn’t troubled by worries, because when there is love, no deficiencies are felt. It is written, “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men; I yearned for his shade and sat in it, and his fruit is sweet to my palate” (*Shir Hashirim* 2:3). Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni* 986) interpret this as meaning that due to their powerful

yearning for G-d, Bnei Yisrael were untroubled by the lack of food that the Torah mentions in connection with their swift departure from Egypt ("And they had also not made provisions for themselves" *Shemos* 12:39).

In other words, when a person is consumed by love, he can forgo his needs unquestioningly. The *sukkah* represents a shared dwelling, where a person lives together with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in perfect unity amid mutual love.

R. Chaim Vital (*Pri Eitz Chaim*, *Shaar Chag Hasukkos* Chap. 4), explains the minimum size for the *sukkah* — two perpendicular walls with a third wall one *tefach* wide — as resembling an arm extended in a loving embrace.

A person who loves is a very happy person. This is expressed in the last blessing of the *sheva berachos*: "Blessed are You...who has created joy and rejoicing, *chassan* and *kallah*... love and fraternity and peace and friendship..."

Love displaces sober realism and engenders great happiness, for a person in love doesn't worry about the future, and nothing instills greater happiness than being liberated from worry.

The constant scramble to secure our own and others' physical needs is a preoccupation that imposes worry. The person who is free of this burden, who is not enslaved to any needs, is a happy person.

The Sefas Emes (*parshas Noach*, 5650) explains further that the *sukkah* envelops a person completely, on every level, liberating him even from the limitations imposed by his surroundings and location. In the very same way that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not situated in the world, but is the world's location, the Jew is not limited by his physical location.

In the Sefas Emes's words, "When Hashem brought us out of Egypt, He elevated us to a special level of living at which we are separate from the realm of nature and physicality, where we shelter in the shade of faith."

☞ Our Complete Negation to Hashem on the Festival of Sukkos

HOW CAN A person relive this joy today? By once again experiencing the liberation from material concerns that Bnei Yisrael experienced upon their departure from Egypt due to their all-encompassing faith in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

And how can we recapture this sense of liberation? The Sefas Emes's answer is that experiencing powerful love for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is the key to this liberation.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the days of heavenly judgment, cleanse a person of all sin — he has attained repentance, inspired by fear and awe of Heaven.

Following the bestowal of Hashem's kindness in forgiving him and purifying him from his sins, he is overcome with love towards Hashem — upon the heels of reconciliation comes great love.

Sukkos is the season when the love between us and our Father in heaven — which Bnei Yisrael experienced when they went out into the desert — overpowers all else. The consequence of this love is the fulfillment of the *pasuk's* words, "And to the upright of heart, [there is] joy" (*Tehillim* 97:11).

Therefore, although this season doesn't commemorate any specific event, it is nevertheless the time we can recapture the joy of "the time of your wedding," arising from our total reliance on Hashem.

This love, representing the climax of the repentance process, is renewed each year. In the wake of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we have attained spiritual heights, but there is a danger that we might fall from the high peaks we have scaled. The Jewish nation therefore opts to demonstrate again how "you followed Me." The Jewish people negate themselves wholly to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in the great love they feel towards Him. This represents the most sublime form of repentance — negating oneself entirely to Hashem — and is only possible when a person loves Him.

On Sukkos we realize that we truly have no other place to be besides sheltering in the shade of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* protection.

SUMMARY

Sukkos is thus indeed “the season of our joy,” because after the Yamim Nora'im, having experienced Hashem's kindness in pardoning us, our love towards Him is restored. The specialness of this time isn't due to any specific miracle that took place in the past, but to it immediately following the Yamim Nora'im when, in the wake of our forgiveness and our reconciliation with Heaven, powerful love is awakened.

This love leads people to forgo material needs, in the way of any lover who, when in the company of the object of his love, is oblivious to any lack or shortage. This love leads people to annul themselves entirely to Hashem, even relinquishing their free will, replacing concern about the future with perfect faith and feeling both physically and emotionally liberated.

A person's self-nullification before G-d in every realm of existence fills him with great joy. This joy — which is the essence of the festival of Sukkos — expresses our full and complete faith in Hashem. It is thus evident that the *sukkah's* significance extends way beyond its physical features, representing our dwelling together with Hashem in a spiritual “*yichud* room,” as it were, where we shelter in the shade of faith and celebrate our union with Him.

Hoshana Rabbah



The Willow Branch as an Empty Receptacle Ready to Be Filled

☞ Taking the Willow Branch on Hoshana Rabbah

THE LAST DAY of Sukkos is known as Hoshana Rabbah. The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 664) rules, “On the fifth day of Chol Hamo’ed, which is Hoshana Rabbah, it is customary to say extra songs (i.e., chapters of *Tehillim*) as is done on Yom Tov. The major *kedushah* is said in Mussaf, and some extra lamps are lit as is done on Yom Kippur, because ‘on Sukkos, they are judged regarding [the coming year’s] water (i.e., rainfall)’ (Mishnah, *Rosh Hashanah* 1:2), and everything depends on the [festival’s] conclusion, and all human life is dependent on water. Some have the custom to untie the knot binding the *lulav* on this day, make seven circuits [around the *bimah*], and offer many entreaties for water. **And a willow branch is taken in commemoration of the Beis Hamikdash, where they would circuit [the *Mizbei’ach*] on that day holding willows.**”

The source for taking willow branches on Hoshana Rabbah is one of the teachings of the latter prophets, Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi, who were members of the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* who instituted various enactments to be followed thereafter by Klal Yisrael.

Now, we find a difference of opinion in the Gemara (*Sukkah* 44a) as to whether this measure is “an enactment of the prophets” or “a custom of the prophets.”

“An enactment of the prophets” means it was instituted by the prophets as a binding measure, while “a custom of the prophets” means that the prophets introduced this custom among the people, but it was not made binding. According to this second view, the Torah’s warning not to stray from the Sages’ injunctions is therefore not applicable, nor is the blessing, “Blessed are You... who has sanctified us with His mitzvos **and has commanded us...**” made when taking the willow branch, as is done on rabbinic obligations.

At any rate, on no other festival do we encounter any measure either enacted or introduced by the prophets. Why is Sukkos special in this regard? And why did the prophets see fit to introduce this measure on Hoshana Rabbah?

☛ Going Out to Do Battle without Ammunition

THE SEFAS EMES raises a fundamental question about the prophets’ enactment to take willow branches on Hoshana Rabbah.

Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12) regard the four *minim* that are taken on Sukkos as representing four groupings within Klal Yisrael:

- The *esrog* is a fruit that has both taste and aroma, corresponding to those who possess both Torah knowledge and good deeds.
- The fruits of a *lulav* tree — dates — have taste but no aroma, corresponding to those among Klal Yisrael who possess Torah knowledge but not good deeds.
- The *badas* has aroma but no taste, corresponding to those who have good deeds but no Torah knowledge.
- The *aravah* has neither taste nor aroma, corresponding to those among Klal Yisrael who possess neither Torah knowledge nor good deeds.

“What does *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* do to them?” ask Chazal. “To eliminate them (i.e., the unworthy among them) is impossible. Therefore,

Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, ‘They should all join together in one bundle and atone for one another.’”

The willow is thus acquitted in its judgment despite possessing no redeeming characteristic of its own through its connection to the other groups within Klal Yisrael.

How is it possible, asks the Sefas Emes, that on Hoshana Rabbah, we take the willow on its own? How can it symbolize attaining acquittal in the fateful judgment of Hoshana Rabbah when standing on its own? Is this our most effective approach to such a pivotal day, thrusting the willow — which symbolizes those who lack any worthy accomplishment — into the spotlight unaccompanied? This is tantamount to going into battle without any weapons or ammunition.

☞ The Willow Is an *Aravah* — Related to *Areiv*, Pleasant-Tasting

THE SEFAS EMES explains that the term *aravah* is derived from the root *areiv*, meaning tasty, something of which the person who eats it is fond.

The novel idea here is that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is fond of Klal Yisrael *per se*, even without any compelling reason or merit.

Klal Yisrael’s special quality is an integral part of their very identity, irrespective of their deeds.

Whereas deeds and accomplishments can always be analyzed and criticized, Klal Yisrael’s inherent qualities are beyond all criticism.

What are these sublime qualities?

The Sefas Emes lists four fundamental characteristics of the Jewish people that are symbolized by the willow.

☞ The Sublime Jewish Soul

THE GEMARA (*SUKKAH* 34a) explains how the *aravah* can be distinguished from the similar-looking *tzafzafah*, which is unfit for taking with the other three species:

“The stalk of the *aravah* is red, its leaf is elongated, and its ‘mouth’ is smooth, whereas the *tzaftzafah*’s stalk is white, its leaf is rounded, and its edge is shaped like a scythe (i.e., it is jagged).” Rashi explains that “Its mouth is smooth” means, “The edge of its leaf is smooth, not serrated.” The salient feature of the *aravah* thus lies in it having a smooth surface. Its uniqueness is in its inherent simplicity.

Yisrael’s uniqueness also lies in their very being, in their essence, and in the sublime source of their souls, rather than in their deeds or Torah attainments. Therefore, even the individual who possesses no merits of his own — neither Torah nor good deeds — is pleasant in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s eyes simply by virtue of being a descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

A Jew’s closeness to G-d is due to his soul being hewn from a sublime, heavenly source and its consequent yearning for G-d, even when it lacks attainments in the realm of Torah and mitzvos.

“Even if he has sinned, a Jew remains a Jew” (*Sanhedrin* 44a) — his soul contains a Divine spark, having been hewn from a sublime and holy source.

☞ Humility Facilitates Absorption — The Self-Effacing Individual Can Receive

THE SEFAS EMES emphasizes that the individual who seeks Heaven’s mercy by virtue of his soul’s yearning — his prayer conveying the request that Heaven “grant us favor and respond to us, for we possess no deeds” — is especially pleasing, for nothing surpasses the trait of humility.

The person who has nothing but also realizes that this is his situation possesses the most sublime trait of all. He is essentially superior to the person who possesses merits and who knows that such is the case. The individual who regards himself as an empty vessel is able to absorb and retain whatever Heaven endows him with; his awareness of his true situation renders him a receptacle that can be filled.

No characteristic is more sublime than a person rendering his heart capable of absorbing instruction.

One of the things we say after making the blessing on the new moon is, “David, king of Yisrael, lives on and endures.” The moon, which has no intrinsic light and merely reflects the sun’s light, is associated with and likened to David Hamelech, the quintessential example of the trait of royalty. The Divine emanation of “royalty” is nourished by all the other emanations which are united within it, but it possesses nothing of its own. “R. Yochanan said, ‘Wherever you encounter *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s greatness, there you will encounter His self-effacement” (*Pesikta Zutrasa, Devarim* 15a).

The Hebrew word for humility, *anavah*, is derived from the idea of the humble person regarding himself as a pauper, an *ani*, who possesses nothing. David Hamelech introduced his own prayer as, “The prayer of a pauper who languishes” (*Tehillim* 102:1). David Hamelech regarded himself in his relationship with Heaven as a pauper who possesses nothing of his own and is wholly dependent for his needs upon others. He saw in this trait an approach to meriting acquittal in judgment. In order to utilize this trait’s power, he adopted this mindset when he prayed.

This explains why the prophets chose the willow in particular, which is tantamount to declaring, “We possess no merits whatsoever of our own.” We amount to nothing. We are like paupers, but we have the capacity hold content — so please fill our vessels with water.

Towards the final sealing of their judgment, Yisrael therefore come before Heaven utilizing the ultimate tactic for meriting a favorable verdict. The most extensive treasure is bestowed upon those whose vessels are empty and who can therefore receive and hold onto it. This is the ultimate goal.

Chazal (*Shemos Rabbah* 45:6) tell us accordingly:

At that time, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* showed him (i.e., Moshe) all the storehouses of reward prepared for the righteous. He (i.e., Moshe) said, ‘Whose storehouse is this one?’ *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him, “It is for those who perform mitzvos.” “And whose is

this one?" "It is for those who raise orphans," and so on for each different storehouse. He [Moshe] then saw a huge storehouse. He said, "Whose storehouse is this?" *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him, "Upon whomever has merits, I bestow from his merits; to he who has no merits, I give him for free, and I give from this one (i.e., from this largest storehouse, as it says, 'And I shall favor whomever I shall favor' (*Shemos* 33:19)."

☞ The Trait of Truth

THE PERSON WHO stands before G-d when he is being judged and admits, "I have no merit whatsoever" is speaking the truth from the depths of his heart.

The Sefas Emes quotes the Chozeh of Lublin as having remarked, "The person who realizes that he is nothing [nonetheless] holds onto *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* by virtue of acknowledging the truth."

It takes strength and courage for a person to admit that truthfully, he lacks any merit, neither of Torah nor of good deeds. It takes even greater strength and courage to admit this truth in the moments when he is being judged.

The prophets instituted the mitzvah of taking the *aravah* on Hoshana Rabbah, corresponding to the person who lacks Torah and good deeds, because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* chose His nation on account of the trait of truth that is seared into their souls, as it says, "And I planted you with strong roots, *kulo zera emes*, an entirely true (i.e., pure) breed" (*Yirmeyahu* 2:21).

"The *gematria* of *aravah* is 277, which is also the *gematria* of *zera*," the Sefas Emes points out, "alluding to this lesson, namely, that even the least worthy members of Yisrael are part of this 'true breed' when they cling to truth and acknowledge that they are lacking in merit. The individual who charts his path in light of his acknowledgment of his true situation will merit Heaven's salvation. This is the praise of the *aravah*, which shrivels up well before any of the other *minim* do, yet through which we merit salvation."

☞ Straightforward, Instinctive Faith

THE PERSON WHO does not believe that his limited human intellect must be the final arbiter of that which he does or does not accept is able to accept ideas that are rooted in faith and tradition even when they seem incomprehensible to him.

As we mentioned, Chazal note that the *aravah*'s "stalk is red; its leaf is elongated, and its edge is smooth."

The willow leaf is long and thin, like a *nachal* (river), alluding to the propensity to flow like a river and follow an established and well-trodden path. This is a characteristic for which Yisrael are praised, as Chazal note in the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 27:1): "Yisrael said, 'Master of the world, we are like humans, but save us as though we were animals, because we are drawn after You [instinctively], like animals, as it says, 'Draw me after You; let us run' (*Shir Hashirim* 1:4)."

The leaf's elongated, river-like shape also alludes to *nachalah* (inheritance), which also denotes flow and continuity from father to son and from one generation to the next.

Klal Yisrael's faith has deep roots, extending back to previous generations; we are often referred to as "believers, descendants of believers." Our staunch, unswerving faith reflects it being rooted in the sublime soul implanted within us by virtue of our ancestors' deeds. The *avos* secured an extremely high level in their souls and thereby in the souls of their descendants. Their souls comprehend G-d and perceive Him. For those within whom these souls are implanted, no intellectual "proofs" or sensory "evidence" of G-d's existence are necessary — they are inherently aware of His presence and they perceive Him.

Taking the *aravah* on Hoshana Rabbah thus has the status of a custom instituted by the prophets, in keeping with the idea conveyed by the halachic principle that "Jewish custom carries the weight of Torah." Our ancient, longstanding customs represent our nation's instinctive, intuitive knowledge of G-d and concurrence with the

Divine will, which is all we have to pin our hopes on at this moment of final judgment.

As the Sefas Emes explains:

[This custom of *aravah*] demonstrates that they [Klal Yisrael] are spontaneously aligned with the Divine intention, attesting to their inherent attachment up Above. The [Satan's] principal prosecution against them actually centers upon this point, and they are in need of great salvation in this respect of being (i.e., rendering themselves) akin to the *aravah*. It is not for nothing that they instituted saying many supplications on this day, called it Hoshana Rabbah (i.e., a day of great supplication for salvation) and that it is the last day of Sukkos.

SUMMARY

In the fateful moments of the sealing of our final verdict on Hoshana Rabbah, we don't seek acquittal based on the merits of our Torah study and good deeds. Instead, we take our position holding onto the simple willow branch that has no merits of its own.

This expresses our nation's essence. Even the most ordinary, unremarkable members of our ranks are pleasing to G-d due to their souls' special quality, their humility, deep integrity, and their firm, ingrained faith.

Taking the *aravah* on Hoshana Rabbah is a custom of the prophets, and "Jewish custom carries the weight of Torah," for the souls of Yisrael are hewn from a sublime source that aligns them with the Divine will. The customs that take root among them are thus holy.

On the day we are judged regarding water, man stands before his G-d bearing an empty receptacle that is ready to be filled and rendering himself as such, yearning to receive living waters and Divine illumination.

Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah

“Bring Us Back, Our Father,
to Your Torah”

☞ Why Is Simchas Torah Celebrated on Shemini Atzeres?

THE CONCLUSION OF the festival of Sukkos ushers in the start of a new festival: Shemini Atzeres.

The Torah tells us: “You shall bring a fire offering to Hashem throughout seven days. The eighth day shall be designated for you for holiness, and you must not do any laborious work” (*Vayikra* 23:36).

In addition to the day’s festive character as mandated by the Torah, we celebrate this day as Simchas Torah.

The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 669) writes: “The Torah reading starts from *Bereishis*, which is read on Simchas Torah because that is [also] when the Torah is completed, and it is correct to rejoice over having completed it.”

The Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah Unesiyas Kapayim* 13:1) also writes, “The widespread custom throughout Yisrael is to complete the reading of the entire Torah in one year, starting from the Shabbos following the festival of Sukkos with the reading of *parshas Bereishis*, then on the second Shabbos, *Noach*, on the third, *Lech Lecha*,

reading in this order until the Torah is completed on the festival of Sukkos.”

However, the Rambam continues, “There are some who take three years to complete the Torah, but this custom is not widespread.” The Gemara (*Megillah* 22b) mentions that the communities in Eretz Yisrael would complete the cycle of Torah reading only once every three years. From the existence of this custom, it is evident that Simchas Torah need not inevitably coincide with Shemini Atzeres and that the reason it does so is connected in some way with the festival’s essential character.

What is the nature of this connection? What renders Shemini Atzeres and the preceding festival of Sukkos particularly worthy of “hosting” the celebration of Simchas Torah?

☞ Three Levels of Repentance

BASING HIMSELF ON a distinction drawn by the *Zohar* (*Ra'aya Meheimna* Vol. III, 123a) between three types of repentance, the Sefas Emes explains this connection:

People’s repentance takes several forms, all of which are worthy, but not all of which have the same nature:

- A person might have been thoroughly wicked his entire life, having transgressed several negative commandments, which he then regrets and confesses to having done. Subsequently, he does neither good nor evil. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will certainly pardon him, though he doesn’t attain a high level of repentance.
- Another person, after repenting his sins and attaining atonement, follows the path of mitzvos and devotes all his energy to fearing and loving *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This individual attains the lower level of repentance.
- Then there is the person who regrets his sins and repents, occupying himself with Torah study and fear and love of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* without intending to receive any reward. This is the highest form of repentance.

☞ On Simchas Torah, We Celebrate the Highest Level of Repentance

THE LOWEST LEVEL of repentance is that of the person who is inspired to leave his sinful path by his fear of Hashem. Such a person doesn't yearn for closeness to Hashem. The level above this is the person who repents in order to purify himself and become closer to Hashem. Above this is the highest, most sublime level where a person repents in order to cleanse his mind from the mental opacity that lustful thoughts engender so that he will be able to learn Torah, which is the most sublime level attainable of closeness to Hashem. The goal of such repentance is not solely to cleanse his soul from its sins, but to bring him close to Hashem.

"Meaning," writes the Sefas Emes, "that this repentance is not for his soul's atonement, but so that he should become pure and be able to engage in serving the Creator. He thus repents in order to remove the barrier that his sins have created in his soul."

This level of repentance is undertaken by a person so that he will be able to learn Torah.

The Sefas Emes explains that following the days of repentance and the subsequent days of fulfilling the mitzvos of Sukkos, we immediately start learning Torah and sincerely undertake the yoke of its study so that our repentance should be on the highest level attainable.

By celebrating Simchas Torah, Yisrael indicate that they rejoice more in renewing their acceptance of Torah than in their sins being pardoned — thus demonstrating that their repentance attained the highest level possible.

☞ A Positive Note of Acquittal

THE SEFAS EMES explains further that this is why we find that "[dispatch of] the notes [bearing the verdict of each individual's heavenly judgment] are delayed until Shemini Atzeres."

The *Zohar* (Vol. I, 220a) states, “Come and see, when judgment is awakened in the world, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sits upon the throne of judgment to judge the world, a person should awaken [himself to] repentance, repenting his evil ways, for on that day, the notes are written, all of which are [kept] written on file. If a person merits repenting before his Master, the notes that were written about him are torn up.

“*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* then brings Yom Kippur, the Day of Repentance, before a person. If he repents his sins, good. If not, the King gives instructions to place a seal on the notes. Woe, for [the opportunity for] repentance wants to depart from him. If he merited repenting but not completely, as is fitting, his verdict is suspended until the last day of Atzeres, which is the eighth day of the festival [of Sukkos]. If he repents thoroughly before his Master, the notes are torn up. If he didn’t merit doing so, those notes leave the King’s house and are transferred to the *malach* of judgment, the judgment is carried out, and the notes don’t return to the King’s house anymore.”

Thus, if a person uses his repentance to cleanse his mind and draw close to Hashem through Torah study, he raises his repentance to a sublime level, and the note upon which his verdict was inscribed is torn up and his judgment is rendered good.

☛ The Meaning of the Two Blessings Made on the Torah

THE SEFAS EMES reveals further depth in this idea through an explanation that his grandfather, the *Chiddushei HaRim*, shared in connection with *birkas hamazon*. Before eating, a person makes a blessing thanking G-d for making his food available to him. However, another blessing is made after eating — for what is he again offering thanks?

In the blessing after eating, a person thanks *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for investing food with the ability to satiate him, renew his strength, and keep him alive. Since this is the basis for making the

blessing, it is evident that the blessing can only be made while the food is still being digested, for it relates to the vitality and energy that a person absorbs while digesting his food.

We find in the Gemara (*Berachos* 21a): “R. Yochanan said, ‘We derive the obligation to make a blessing after [reading from] the Torah from the blessing made over food.’” The *Chiddushei HaRim* explains that one of the blessings we make over the Torah acknowledges the fact that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave His nation, Yisrael, the Torah, whereas there is also an additional blessing in which we offer thanks for the Torah’s ability to influence a person and illuminate his soul. This is the blessing that follows reading from the Torah, corresponding to the blessing made after consuming food, praising G-d for the properties He invests in it.

☛ On Shemini Atzeres, the Blessing after Torah Is Made

IN THE MIDRASH, we find that the “blessing made after Torah,” i.e., after Torah study, is derived from the *parshah* of *V’zos Haberachah* that is read on Shemini Atzeres. The Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah* 8:2) says:

The halachah is: a Jewish person who is about to read from the Torah, what blessing does he make? Thus taught the Sages: the first person to read and the final one to read [from the Torah] make blessings both before and after. From where do we learn that it requires a blessing both before and after? For it is written, “Blessed are You, Hashem” and [immediately] thereafter, “Teach me Your laws” (*Tehillim* 119:12). And from where do we learn that a blessing is required afterwards? Because following the Song [of Haazinu], it says, “*V’zos haberachah*, and this is the blessing” (*Devarim* 33:1). After repeating the Torah to them, Moshe blessed [them] — thus, a blessing is required afterwards.

The Sefas Emes explains accordingly that whereas on Shavuos, our blessing is for actually having received the Torah — corresponding to the blessing made before reading from the Torah — on

Shemini Atzeres, our blessing relates to the Torah's special property of drawing a person's heart closer to G-d and illuminating his soul, corresponding to the blessing made afterwards.

In the Sefas Emes's words: "The festival of Shavuos marks the actual giving of the Torah, whereas Simchas Torah on Shemini Atzeres 'shall be designated for you,' referring to the power of the Torah to illuminate and proliferate in Bnei Yisrael's hearts."

☞ Like Water, Torah Imparts Life and Renewal

THE ILLUMINATION THAT enters the heart of the person who learns Torah is likened to the blessing of water that saturates the earth. The Sefas Emes explains that water has two properties:

1. It imparts life.
2. It enables the ground "to act upon the seeds and **generate growth**."

It is due to water that vegetation is able to harness this power of generation, proliferation, and renewal.

Torah, too, has two corresponding properties:

1. "This is Torah's blessing — that it imparts life to those who occupy themselves with it, referring to that which is said [in the blessing made on the Torah], 'And He has implanted everlasting life within us.'"
2. In the words of the Sefas Emes, Torah is like water in that it yields fruits — of scholarship — within a Jew's heart. We find in the *Zohar* (Vol. III, 160a) that "Torah proliferates within the person studying it." The person who learns the Oral Torah develops the ability to yield novel ideas and insights, [his Torah knowledge thereby] proliferating and burgeoning, [and he] becoming a font of creative scholarship and ever-deepening comprehension. This too is a gift from Hashem, as it says, "From Me, your fruits are forthcoming" (*Hoshea* 14:9). This is the ability that Moshe Rabbeinu bequeathed to Klal Yisrael in all future generations.

The Sefas Emes explains that this is why Simchas Torah is celebrated on Shemini Atzeres. Judgment on the coming year's rainfall takes place on Sukkos. Just as the rain that falls from the heavens waters the ground, enabling it to yield growth and produce, so too in man's case: "The main assistance is received from Heaven through Torah that helps the servant of Hashem yield a [creative] output."

SUMMARY

On Shemini Atzeres, Heaven examines the extent to which the penitent has succeeded in purifying his heart.

If he learns Torah and rejoices in doing so, this is a sign that the goal of his repentance was to lead him to Torah study, the pursuit that engenders the greatest possible closeness to Hashem. The source of the joy of the person who learns Torah is Torah's life-imparting and proliferating nature, enabling him to yield novel insights of his own. A novel Torah insight results from the Heavenly assistance granted to the person whose heart is pure, as we pray, "Purify our hearts to truly serve You."

It is thus straightforward that on the day a person completes the great process of repentance, he ought to purify his heart and rejoice in his Torah, in "*V'zos Haberachah*," which is the blessing following the giving of the Torah that refers specifically to Torah's life-giving and novelty-imparting power.

Chanukah



“These Lights Are Holy”

☞ The Blessings over the Chanukah Lights

THE *SHULCHAN ARUCH* (*Orach Chaim* 676:1) rules that when kindling the Chanukah lights, we make the blessings, “...to kindle the Chanukah lamp” and “...Who performed miracles for our ancestors.” This has its source in the Gemara (*Shabbos* 23a): “R. Chiya bar Ashi said in the name of Rav, ‘The person kindling the Chanukah lights must make a blessing.’ And R. Yirmiyah said, ‘A person who sees Chanukah lights must make a blessing.’ Which blessing does he make? He says, ‘Who has sanctified us with His mitzvos and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah lamp.’”

This Gemara raises two major difficulties:

1. Why do we refer to kindling a “Chanukah lamp” rather than kindling a “lamp on Chanukah?” Although we kindle the lamp on Chanukah, it remains the same lamp that it is every day and doesn’t become designated for Chanukah use. Is the lamp somehow different on Chanukah than on other days?
2. A mitzvah whose purpose is to publicize a miracle is supposed to awaken some memory within the person fulfilling it.

To this end, on Purim, for example, having a *megillah* read publicly isn’t enough. To fulfill his obligation, a person must actually be present while it is being read and listen to it himself. It’s not enough that the miracle is being publicized

somewhere out there; it must be publicized to the person fulfilling the mitzvah through an act that he performs publicly. Accordingly, it isn't enough to have Chanukah lights lit in the city square. Rather, every person must kindle lights for his own home. How are we therefore to understand R. Yirmeyahu's view that a blessing is made not only upon kindling the lights, but even upon seeing a lamp that someone else has kindled?

☞ The Chanukah Lights — Not Merely Commemorating the Past, for the Miracle Is Still with Us

THE SEFAS EMES mentions having heard from his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim* that the miracle is embodied in the Chanukah lights that are kindled at this time. In other words, kindling the lights is not just a symbolic act commemorating a past miracle, for in our days, too, each year's lights actually embody the essence of the miracle.

In order to commemorate a past event, a person indeed needs to reawaken some memory within himself, for which seeing something done that has this effect upon someone else is insufficient. Seeing Chanukah lights burning, though, is to witness the actual miracle in real time, not merely an action that sparks its memory in the person watching. Therefore, even if another person lit these Chanukah lights, seeing them creates an awakening in the person viewing them, for it amounts to witnessing the miracle anew, and he is able to make a blessing on them.

☞ Same Miracle, Different Setting

HOW ARE WE to understand the concept of a miracle taking place in the present?

The Sefas Emes explains that when lighting the Chanukah lights, a person is facing the *Menorah* of the Beis Hamikdash that is

burning in his own home. The logic is straightforward: the miracle in the time of the Chashmonaim was that the *Menorah* burned for eight days even though it only contained sufficient oil for one day. What difference does it make, then, whether we are missing oil, a *Menorah*, or the Beis Hamikdash itself? The *Menorah* continued burning miraculously, without enough to burn naturally, and the miracle of that Chanukah remains for all subsequent generations, enabling the *Menorah* of the Beis Hamikdash to be lit even in the absence of the *Mikdash*.

The same light that shone in the past for those eight days reappears anew each and every year. Therefore, during Chanukah, when the *Menorah* burned in a supernatural manner, the *Menorah* of the Beis Hamikdash burns miraculously each year anew.

With this, we understand that even in the present, when we lack a lit *Menorah* in the Beis Hamikdash, with its lamps burning pure oil, the *Menorah* of the Beis Hamikdash nonetheless burns, and the same miracle takes place nowadays.

☞ The Mitzvah Itself Is the Receptacle within Which the Miracle Unfolds

TO THE QUESTION of within what, in the absence of a Beis Hamikdash and a *Menorah*, the lights of the *Mikdash* are contained, the Sefas Emes responds that the receptacle that holds them is the mitzvah act of kindling the Chanukah lights.

This should come as no surprise, for every mitzvah is referred to as a lamp, as in the *pasuk*, “For a mitzvah is a lamp, and Torah is light” (*Mishlei* 6:23).

The term *ner* (lamp) in Chazal’s usage refers to the earthenware receptacle that holds the oil and wick that yield the flame and its illumination. In the very same way, the two hundred and forty-eight positive mitzvos provide the framework for fulfilling Hashem’s will, whereby some physical item becomes “a mitzvah object.” The Torah is the light that shines as a result of this act. Torah’s light is

dependent on our mitzvah acts; through them, Torah's light illuminates the person performing them.

☞ Hashem's Light Illuminates the World through the Chanukah Lights

THE SEFAS EMES further elucidates his statement that the light of the *Menorah* shines from the Chanukah lights.

Regarding the command to kindle lights in the *Menorah* in the Beis Hamikdash, Chazal clarify that as the “*Yotzeir Hame'oros* (Maker of the luminaries),” as we refer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in the daily *Yotzeir* blessing, He does not need the light of any lamp that we kindle in order to see. Rather, the *Menorah* of the *Mikdash* symbolized G-d's Divine light illuminating this world.

This illumination is continued by the Chanukah lights.

The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 671) therefore writes that the purpose of the Chanukah lights is to commemorate, i.e., perpetuate, the miracle, rather than writing that their purpose is to remember it. Our lighting is thus not intended to serve as a reminder of the miracle, but to reawaken its illumination in the world so that the *Shechinah*'s light can shine today, illuminating our coarse, physical world.

☞ “To Kindle the Chanukah Lamp”

ACCORDINGLY, THE SEFAS Emes explains why the blessing that Chazal formulated on the lighting is “...to kindle the Chanukah lamp.” This is not a lamp like any other that happens to be lit on Chanukah; it is a special lamp, a Chanukah lamp. A regular lamp emits ordinary, physical light, whereas the Chanukah lamp emits Divine, spiritual light to illuminate the world, the light of a miracle taking place here and now — the light of Torah whose receptacle is the Chanukah lamp.

This lamp is indeed different — it is a Chanukah lamp.

☞ “These Lights Are Holy”

THE SEFAS EMES explains that this idea affords us insight into Chazal’s words (*Maseches Sofrim* 20:6), which we say each day of Chanukah after kindling the lights, “These lights, they are holy, and we have no permission to use them, but solely to see them, in order to thank and to praise Your great Name for Your miracles, Your wonders, and Your salvation.”

What holiness do the lights have, and why is it forbidden to use them? It must be that the Chanukah lights are essentially holy, because the illumination of the miracles that happened in the past continues shining from them in the present. The Chanukah lights represent the lights of the Beis Hamikdash and are therefore imbued with holiness and may not be used.

☞ A Mitzvah Object — The Rabbinic Mitzvah of the Chanukah Lights

THE SEFAS EMES’S idea finds a strong echo in the following scholarly debate.

R. Yosef Engel (*Asvan D’oraysa* 10) discusses whether something prohibited rabbinically centers upon the person to whom it is directed or upon the object to which it is relevant. Some scholars maintain that while the Sages are empowered to forbid a person to act in a certain way, their decree cannot alter reality by rendering a permitted object forbidden. They can rule, for example that an object must be treated as though it is impure even though it actually remains pure. Its essence, though, is defined solely by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Who created it, and therefore, only His Torah prohibitions are able to alter its nature and definition, though the Sages can dictate how a person may or may not relate to it.

This idea also applies to a mitzvah object. While the Sages can obligate a person to perform a mitzvah, they cannot alter reality and confer upon an ordinary object the status of a “mitzvah object.”

This is the view taken by R. Yaakov of Lisa (*Nesivos Hamishpat* 234:3), where he asserts that a person who has inadvertently eaten something forbidden by the Torah requires atonement and repentance to escape punishment, for he ate a forbidden item. However, if what he ate by mistake was rabbinically forbidden, “He requires no atonement, and it is as though he has not transgressed at all.” This is because a rabbinic prohibition doesn’t render an item essentially forbidden; all it does is prohibit the person from disobeying the Sages who have decreed that he may not eat it. Thus, if he did so unintentionally, he hasn’t sinned at all; since he acted inadvertently, he has not disregarded the Sages’ words, for he never intended to disobey them, and since this is a rabbinic prohibition, neither has he ingested a forbidden item.

R. Yosef Engel takes issue with this view, arguing that “Since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* consents to the Sages’ words, once they have forbidden an item, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* agrees that it is forbidden. It is henceforth G-d’s desire that this item should not be eaten, and since this is something He — who owns the world and everything in it — views with displeasure, it becomes forbidden essentially.”

He then makes a similar argument regarding the object of a rabbinic mitzvah: “Once the Sages have commanded to carry out this act, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* agrees with them, and this act has now become G-d’s will, and the object concerned becomes imbued with holiness, for it is reserved for use in fulfilling G-d’s will in the same way that an object designated for use in fulfilling a Torah mitzvah is imbued with holiness... take note of this, for it is a novel and correct point.”

R. Yosef Engel substantiates his opinion from the Midrash Tan-chuma (*parshas Naso*, 29):

Our teacher should teach us: a Chanukah lamp in which oil remained from the first day, may it be kindled on the second day?
Thus learned our teachers: A Chanukah lamp in which oil remained

on the first day, a small amount should be added to it, and it may be lit on the second day; and if oil remained in it on the second day, he should add to it on the third day and light it, and so forth on the other days. However, if oil remained on the eighth day, he should burn it separately. Why? Since it was designated for a mitzvah, it may not be used.

A person should not say, "I shall not fulfill the mitzvos of the Sages, since they are not from the Torah." *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told them, "My sons, you may not speak like this; rather, whatever they decree for you, you shall fulfill, as it says, 'You shall act in accordance with the Torah that they instruct you' (*Devarim* 17:11). Why? Because I agree to their words as well, as it says, 'You enunciate a decree, and it endures for you' (*Iyov* 22:28)."

The relevance of the second paragraph to the first is unclear. What is the connection between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s declaration that He supports the Sages' utterances and the halachah of "designation for mitzvah fulfillment" in relation to the Chanukah lights?

R. Yosef Engel explains that a rabbinic enactment also has the authority of Torah law, since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* consents to the Sages' rulings. Since the mitzvos they instituted carry the weight of Torah law, it is straightforward that a Chanukah lamp has the status of a mitzvah object and that the Chanukah lights are "designated for a mitzvah."

This seems to furnish conclusive proof to this approach, for although the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah lights is rabbinic in origin, the Midrash Tanchuma asserts that the Chanukah lights are a mitzvah object that should not be put to any mundane use, for they are "designated for a mitzvah." How will the *Nesivos Hamishpat* respond to this passage in the Midrash Tanchuma?

According to the Sefas Emes, the discussion in the Midrash is perfectly straightforward, for the Midrash only discusses the Chanukah lights and doesn't refer to rabbinic mitzvos in general. This mitzvah is an exception in that it creates a mitzvah object

according to all opinions, for Chazal tell us, “These lights are holy.” The holiness of the Chanukah lights isn’t a consequence of the Sages’ command to kindle them. Rather, it is a function of the holiness of the *Menorah* in the Beis Hamikdash, which is a Torah obligation. Chazal have revealed that the light of the *Menorah* of the *Mishkan* shines even nowadays in the form of the Chanukah lights. According to this approach, while Chazal can’t alter an object’s essential status, they *can* draw upon the holiness of the *Menorah* of the *Mikdash* and determine that it imbues the Chanukah lights, which emit the very same light, with identical holiness.

This is apparently the meaning of the Ran’s comments (on the Rif, *Shabbos* 9a) explaining why “these lights are holy, and we have no permission to use them.” The Ran explains that the Chanukah lights “may not even be used for some mitzvah purpose, because they instituted this on account of a miracle that took place with the *Menorah*, and they made it (i.e., the Chanukah lamp) like the *Menorah*, which may not be used at all.”

This also seems to explain the Sefas Emes’s approach to the question of why we refer in the blessing to “the Chanukah lamp.” It isn’t altogether clear what difficulty this wording poses, for the blessing upon kindling lights for Shabbos and Festivals has the very same format: “to kindle the Shabbos lamp,” “...the Yom Tov lamp,” and “...the Yom Kippur lamp.” The explanation must be that no problem arises with there being a specifically designated mitzvah item for those days, whose holiness is of Torah origin. The problem only arises with Chanukah, which is entirely rabbinic in origin and whose lamp doesn’t become a mitzvah item (according to the approach of the *Nesivos Hamishpat* that the Sages can only impose obligations on a person but cannot alter an item’s status). As we have seen, the Sefas Emes’s response to this is that Chazal imbued today’s Chanukah lamp with the holiness of the *Menorah* of the Beis Hamikdash, and thus it too is a mitzvah item despite its rabbinic nature and can justifiably be referred to as “the Chanukah lamp.”

SUMMARY

The Chanukah lamp thus differs from every other lamp in that its light is that of the seven lamps of the Beis Hamikdash. This miracle takes place in the present, every year anew. Back then, there wasn't enough oil, and nowadays there is no *Mikdash* either, yet the Chanukah lamp is the receptacle from which Hashem's light shines to illuminate the dark physicality of this world. The Chanukah lamp is a mitzvah object even according to the opinion that rabbinic obligations don't change an item's status, because the light of the Beis Hamikdash glows in the darkness of this world even nowadays. The Chanukah lamp is thus the receptacle for the *Shechinal*'s illumination to fill our homes. Indeed, "these lights are holy."

Parshas Shekalim



The Last Lap before the Renewal of the “Heart Year”

☞ Why Are *Shekalim* Announced in Adar?

THE FIRST MISHNAH in *Shekalim* begins, “On the first of Adar, announcements are made about *shekalim* and *kilayim*.”

The significance of the timing of this announcement about the impending obligation to donate towards communal sacrifices lies in it being thirty days before the new *shekalim* are required. As the *Bartenura* explains in his commentary, “On the first of Adar...*beis din* dispatches emissaries to all the cities in Yisrael, and they announce that people should bring their *shekalim*, for on the first of Nissan, the communal sacrifices must be offered [with animals purchased] with the new *terumah* [“tithed” from the newly donated *shekalim*]; therefore, they announce it thirty days in advance.”

This reason is somewhat problematic, however, for the Gemara (*Megillah* 6b) states that if *parshas Shekalim* was read as usual in the month of Adar and subsequently, an extra month (i.e., a second Adar) was added to the year, there was no need to repeat the reading of *parshas Shekalim*. The Mishnah states, “If the *megillah* was read in the first Adar, and then it was declared a leap year, it is read again in the second Adar.” The Gemara infers from this that it is only the *megillah* that must be repeated in the event of a second Adar being

declared, but not the four *parshiyos* read during the month of Adar. In this regard, the two Adars are on an equal footing.

Rashi explains: “‘The order of the [four special] *parshiyos*’ — *parshas Shekalim*, *Zachor*, *Parah*, and *Hachodesh*. ‘The two [months of Adar] are equal’ — if they read them during the first [Adar], they don’t need to read them again in the second.”

In other words, for the purpose of reading *parshas Shekalim*, the first Adar is also considered Adar, even though it is more than thirty days before Nissan. This implies that *parshas Shekalim* has a particular connection to the month of Adar irrespective of whether or not there are thirty days until Nissan. What is the nature of this connection?

☛ Year’s End Is a Time for Repentance

THE SEFAS EMES explains that Adar is the time designated for bringing the *shekalim* because “this is the auspicious time for repenting.”

What aspect of this month creates an awakening to repent?

The Sefas Emes explains that Adar is similar to Elul. Elul is a time of repentance because it is the year’s end (see our earlier essay on Elul’s essence as the “finishing line” for wrapping up the spiritual mission determined for each person at the beginning of that year).

Adar, too, is a time of repentance due to being a year’s end, as we find in the Mishnah (*Rosh Hashanah* 1:1): “There are four ‘New Year Days:’ on the first of Nissan, the year begins for kings and for festivals, etc.”

☛ Repentance Inspired by Love

THE SEFAS EMES adds that whereas the month of Elul is the time when repentance is inspired by awe, due to the approaching days of judgment, Adar is a time when repentance is inspired by love. Chazal (*Taanis* 29a) therefore say, “When Adar begins, rejoicing should increase,” for Adar is a time of serving Heaven amid joy and love, a

time when the heart is stirred by feelings of goodwill and the desire to give, to serve Hashem, and fulfill His will.

☛ “Mind-Year” and “Heart-Year”

THESE IDEAS ASSUME brilliant clarity when elucidated by the Maharal’s insights:

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 10b) cites a difference of opinion as to when the world was created. According to R. Yehoshua, it was created in Nissan, whereas in R. Eliezer’s view, it was created in Tishrei.

Tosafos (ibid. 27a) point to a seeming contradiction between two *piyutim* (liturgical poems) composed by R. Elazar Hakalir, in one of which (the *piyut* said on Shemini Atzeres as part of the prayer for rain) he adopts R. Eliezer’s opinion that creation took place in Tishrei, while in the other (said on Pesach), he follows R. Yehoshua’s view that the world was created in Nissan.

Rabbeinu Tam resolves the contradiction, asserting that “both are the words of the living G-d — one can answer that in Tishrei, the idea of creating the world was conceived, but it was not created until Nissan.”

The original idea was to create a world that would operate solely according to the dictates of Hashem’s trait of judgment, but its actual creation was a function of His trait of kindness as well.

Rashi (on *Bereishis* 1:1) points out that the Name of Hashem that is used in the Torah’s opening words, “In the beginning, G-d created” is the Name that denotes His trait of judgment, rather than the Name denoting His trait of mercy. Rashi explains, “At first, His plan was to create the world according to the trait of judgment. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* saw that the world would be unable to survive, so He first implemented His trait of mercy, partnering it with the trait of judgment; this is why both names appear in the *pasuk*, ‘On the day that Hashem, G-d, made earth and heavens’ (ibid. 2:4).”

This idea corresponds to a further difference of opinion between R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua. In the Midrash (*Mishlei Rabbah* 1),

Chazal interpret the *pasuk*, “And wisdom, from where is it found?” (*Iyov* 28:12) as indicating that “Shlomo Hamelech searched for the physical location of wisdom. R. Eliezer says, ‘It is in the head.’ R. Yehoshua says, ‘It is in the heart.’”

In *Chiddushei Agaddos* (*Rosh Hashanah* 10b), the Maharal explains that in this Midrash, R. Eliezer is following his view that creation is considered as having taken place in Tishrei, because that is when the idea of creation was first conceived. Dating creation from the plan rather than from the execution indicates that prominence is accorded to the head, which is the seat of the mind, where ideas and plans are conceived. R. Yehoshua, on the other hand, takes the view that Nissan is the more significant date in regard to the world’s creation, because that is when it actually took place. The world’s actual creation was a manifestation of Heaven’s kindness, which accords with R. Yehoshua’s view in the Midrash that the heart, the source of emotion and mercy, is the seat of wisdom.

In this context, it is fascinating to note that Tishrei marks the beginning of the 365-day solar year, whereas Nissan is the beginning of the twelve-month lunar year. The mitzvah of declaring the new month was given in Nissan, as the Torah writes, “This month shall be for you the first of months; it shall be for you the first of months of the year” (*Shemos* 12:2).

The first two letters of the word *chamah*, meaning sun, are *ches* and *mem*, which spell *mo’ach*, the brain or mind, while the first two letters of the word *levanah*, meaning moon, are *lamed* and *beis*, which spell *lev*, heart. The moon reflects the light of the sun in the same way that emotions of the heart mirror the thoughts of the mind. And in the same way as the sun’s light is gentler and more refined when it is reflected by the moon, the mind’s thoughts are gentler and more refined after having been processed by the heart.

Perhaps this affords insight into the meaning of the following statement by R. Avraham Abulafia in his *Mitzraf Haseichel*: “And I shall reveal the following deep idea to you and inform you that the mind was created from the sun, yet its main effect is upon the heart,

and its residual effect is on the mind, whereas the heart is created from the moon, and its main effect is upon the mind, and its residual effect is upon the heart.”

Thus, the mind (sun)-year that starts in Tishrei is the time when the idea to create the world was first conceived (in the mind), according to the dictates of the attribute of justice. Then, there is the heart (moon)-year that begins in Nissan, which is when creation actually took place, according to the dictates of the trait of mercy. This is the season in which the heart’s effect is dominant.

In the month of Elul, therefore, which marks the conclusion of one mind-year and the onset of the attribute of judgment with the beginning of a new one, repentance is inspired by awe. By contrast, the month of Adar marks the end of one heart-year and the onset of the trait of kindness with the beginning of another one, and there is a consequent awakening to repentance out of love.

☛ The Announcement about *Shekalim*

Represents a Call to the Emotion of Kindness

THE SEFAS EMES explains that within every Jew is a core of purity that is wholly and entirely devoted to Hashem. It knows only one desire: to fulfill Hashem’s will.

In the month of Elul, a person channels this desire towards increasing Heaven’s glory. In the month of Adar, this desire is channeled into the trait of kindness with which the world was created. The call to bring *shekalim* that is issued in the month of Adar parallels the *shofar*’s wake-up call in Elul for spiritual awakening, but it does so by rousing a person’s mercy and kindness.

The Sefas Emes notes that donating the *shekalim* isn’t merely an act of giving but it awakens feelings of kindness and giving. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is the source of all blessing and abundance. It is self-evident that He doesn’t need the *tzedakah* that a person gives in order to bestow benefit upon its recipient. The purpose of giving *tzedakah* is to benefit the giver, cultivating within him the

trait of generosity. The goal of the command to declare the season of donating *shekalim* is thus to awaken a person's desire to give, help, contribute, and volunteer, becoming a giver and a source of benevolence.

☛ Benevolence Tempered with Caution

THE WORLD WAS created with mercy and judgment in tandem, each one balancing and holding the other in check.

The rededication to the trait of kindness that a person is called to make in the month of Adar upon the conclusion of the heart-year and as part of the building of the world that took place in the month of Nissan, necessitates its amalgamation with the trait of judgment. Why not employ unadulterated kindness, though?

Judgment is measured and calculated, whereas kindness is indiscriminate. Kindness knows no limits or boundaries — “Whoever extends his hand [to receive *matanos la'evyonim* on Purim] is given [without thoroughly checking his eligibility].”

Benevolence is wonderful, but it carries an element of danger, for if unchecked, it can lead to an undesirable outcome. It is akin to water: it can revive and refresh, but unchecked, it can also lead to drowning. When acting upon the prompting of the trait of love, a person must exercise particular caution that his benevolence not extend to anything inappropriate, bringing ruin.

In this context, the Sefas Emes cites the explanation of his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim* on the *pasuk* in *Shir Hashirim* (7:2), “How comely are your footsteps, [encased] in shoes, *bas nadviv* (daughter of nobility).” Nobility (*nadviv*) and benevolence (*nedivus*) share the same root and are linked in meaning.

Chazal comment (*Sukkah* 49b) that Knesses Yisrael is referred to here as “daughter of nobility” on account of our descent from Avraham Avinu, who implanted the trait of benevolence in Yisrael. The *Chiddushei HaRim* explains accordingly that the “shoes” mentioned in the *pasuk* refer to the need for encasing benevolence within

a shoe, i.e., a covering or containing sheath to ensure that it doesn't spread to foreign, inappropriate quarters.

The Sefas Emes extends this to explain the Mishnah's mention of *shekalim* and *kilayim* together: "On the first of Adar, an announcement is made about *shekalim* and about *kilayim*." Whereas *shekalim* alludes to benevolence and generosity, *kilayim* alludes to the need to hold in and restrain these traits so that they do not extend beyond their appropriate boundaries. The Hebrew word *keliah* means containment or imprisonment.

There is a source for this idea in the *Zohar* (Vol. III, 86b), where the word *kilayim* is explained as being "akin to imprisoning another person in jail, as it says, 'to the *beis hakele* (prison)' (*Yirmeyahu* 37:18), as a preventative measure."

The various characteristics and traits that make up each individual's personality are referred to as *middos*, meaning measures, because they must be used in measure. By exaggerating this trait or insufficiently expressing that one, a trait is spoiled. While a person must be good, he must nevertheless also remain calculated and properly balanced.

SUMMARY

With our reading of *parshas Shekalim* in the month of Adar, our hearts are awakened. This is a wake-up call just prior to the end of the "heart-year" and renewal of the world's actual creation through Heaven's attribute of kindness in the month of Nissan.

The Hebrew word for month, *chodesh*, denotes renewal (from *chadash*, meaning new). Nissan marks the beginning of a new year of lunar months and is a time of renewal, which Yisrael receive amid joy and love of Hashem in their service and through repentance inspired by love in the month of Adar.

Upon reading *parshas Shekalim* each year, a person experiences an inner desire to devote his heart to Hashem. His inner, holy core pushes him to repent amid joy.

The declaration about *shekalim* resounds to this day, and we must listen to it carefully and absorb and implement its message.

Parshas Zachor

Renewing Our Fervor

☛ What Is the Reason for the Mitzvah to Remember?

THE TORAH DOESN'T make do with commanding us to erase all traces of Amalek. We are also commanded to remember what Amalek did.

It is written:

Constantly remember that which Amalek did to you on the way when you were leaving Egypt. They encountered you on the way and ambushed all the weakened ones who were straggling after you, and you were faint and weary, and they did not fear G-d. It will be when Hashem, your G-d, gives you relief from all your enemies all around in the land that Hashem, your G-d, is giving you as permanent property to take possession of, you shall wipe out any trace of Amalek from beneath the heavens; do not forget. (*Devarim* 25:17–19)

This command raises two fundamental difficulties:

1. Why are we commanded to remember? Why is it important that we remember what Amalek wanted to do to us?
2. Why were Amalek's deeds more serious than those of any other nation throughout history that tried to eradicate Yisrael, as we read in the Haggadah, "In each and every generation, they arise against us to destroy us"?

☛ What Renders Something Subject to Forgetfulness?

THERE HAVE BEEN times in our nation's history when we feel Hashem has forgotten us. We ask Him, "*Ayekah*, Where are You?"

To this, Heaven responds, as conveyed by Yeshayah, “Tziyon said, ‘Hashem has forsaken me; G-d has forgotten me.’ Can a woman forget her suckling [or forget] to have pity on the child of her womb? [And] even [if] these shall be forgotten, I shall not forget you. I have indeed engraved you on [My] palms; your walls are always before Me” (*Yeshayah* 49:14–16). This question is hard to understand. How is it possible to contemplate such an eventuality when it is axiomatic that, as we say in Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah, “There is no forgetfulness before Your Throne of glory?”

In his introduction to *Ner Mitzvah*, the Maharal explains that there are two degrees of knowledge:

1. A fact that is known to a person concerning something that is external to him.
2. Something he knows about himself that relates to his essence.

Whereas a person is prone to forget knowledge of the first type, he will never forget something of which he is aware concerning himself. As long as he retains consciousness, he is aware of himself, because it is impossible for a person to forget himself. Neither can he forget anything that is connected to the core of his being, such as his children, for example. Forgetting something thus indicates that it is not central to his being, but is a separate entity from him. Forgetfulness is thus evidence that its victim has become separated from its root and source.

In times of difficulty and oppression, Klal Yisrael’s embittered heart wonders, “Where is Hashem while we suffer? Perhaps He considers us an entity separate from Him that can be ignored, just as a person can forget that which is not an integral part of his being.” Hashem’s response to His People is that we are indeed engraved and seared upon His Divine consciousness, as it were. We cannot be forgotten.

☞ Without Feeling Connected, There Can Be No Alacrity

AMALEK TRIED TO introduce the possibility of forgetfulness into Klal Yisrael’s relationship with Heaven by severing their connection

to their Source. He tried prying them away from Him so that the fire and fervor of holiness would no longer burn in their hearts and awareness of G-d would fade.

The trait that typifies a person whose connection with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is seared into his being is his alacrity.

When the fire of love burns strong, the Beloved's bidding is attended to immediately. His word is holy, and His request is a command. The heart rejoices in fulfilling our Beloved's request without delay. He need only ask, and our response of "*Naaseh v'nishma*, We will do whatever You tell us!" is already on our lips, echoing from deep within our hearts.

However, when the fire of love burns low, it becomes wearisome to respond to another's requests. If we regard the supplicant as an extraneous entity, our feelings towards whom do not resonate with our inner being, we find ourselves unable to muster the enthusiasm and alacrity necessary for responding eagerly.

☞ "Who Encountered You —

And Cooled Your Enthusiasm — On the Way"

LEAVING EGYPT, BNEI YISRAEL were in a state of spiritual elevation, their hearts aglow with Hashem's word. It is written, "Bnei Yisrael ascended *chamushim* (armed) from the land of Egypt" (*Shemos* 13:18). *Onkelos* renders the word *chamushim* as *mezarzin*, which, while meaning "armed" or "equipped," also denotes *zerizus*, eagerness, meaning that Bnei Yisrael were galvanized by the trait of alacrity. Their supreme joy over their redemption seared awareness of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* into their hearts such that they felt His every word was holy and should be attended to immediately and enthusiastically.

Amalek wanted to cool off this fervor, depriving Yisrael of the alacrity stemming from the fire of love of G-d that was burning in their hearts. The Torah thus reminds us that Amalek "*karcha baderach*, encountered you (from *mikreh*, chance or happenstance) on the way." Rashi, however, also interprets *karcha* as being related to

krirus, coldness, explaining that Amalek sought to cool Yisarel's ardor and introduce doubt into their hearts, weakening their faith:

“*‘Asher karcha baderech’* — ‘*karcha*’ denotes *mikreh* (happencance); alternatively, it denotes [temperature:] *kor* [cold] and *chom* [heat], i.e., they cooled you off and ‘removed you from the boil.’”

☞ The Command to Remember —

Searing Our Former Awareness into Our Being

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF our nation's first clash with Amalek are thus not confined to the mitzvah of eradicating all traces of Amalek, but extend to fanning the flame of memory with the goal of implanting our faith once again within the core of our being and reigniting its fire in our hearts. The way to prevent disconnect and forgetting something is by engraving it deeply upon our being. Only if it is firmly rooted in a person's innermost being, in his soul, the source from which he draws his vitality, will it be unforgettable.

This is what the mitzvah “Constantly remember that which Amalek did to you” demands of us.

☞ Accomplishing Remembrance

AT FIRST GLANCE, the way to remember something is by committing it to memory. We remember a subject or topic after having studied it well, defining and understanding it, and reviewing it.

Having realized that the mitzvah of remembering Amalek isn't fulfilled by amassing extraneous knowledge, but calls for internalizing the episode's lesson into our very being, we are faced with the question of how to go about fulfilling this requirement. How do we implant our awareness of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* into our innermost being?

☞ The First Way: Cultivating Self-Effacement

IN RESPONSE TO this question, the Sefas Emes charts the following course in serving Hashem:

We have seen that faith burning brightly in a person's heart expresses itself in his alacrity in performing mitzvos.

Alacrity is attained through maintaining a joyful disposition. On the *pasuk's* words, "Yaakov lifted his feet" (*Bereishis* 29:1), Rashi comments, "Having received good tidings [of Hashem's protection]... his heart lifted his feet (i.e., raised his spirits), and it became easy to walk."

A person rejoices in fulfilling Hashem's commands when he realizes just how important his deeds are in Hashem's eyes and that their effects reach the heavens. The person who is about to perform a task that is of crucial importance in Hashem's eyes will do so joyfully and eagerly.

This shouldn't lead us to conclude that this requires an inflated sense of self-worth.

On the contrary, the Sefas Emes asserts that it is self-effacement that fosters joy. A prideful individual is always finding cause for dissatisfaction and complaint and thus is not a happy person. The humble, self-effacing person, who has no grand expectations, is happy with every attainment.

Quoting the *Chiddushei HaRim*, who in turns quotes the *Yid Hakadosh* of Lublin, the Sefas Emes notes that joy and self-effacement are far from being contradictory moods and that in fact, "At their root, they are one and the same."

Cultivating humility and self-effacement before Hashem breeds joy. The person who grasps that he is far from truth and that he suffers from many shortcomings, yet despite this is privileged to draw close to Hashem, will find this knowledge empowering, imparting to him the strength and determination to serve Hashem energetically and eagerly.

The Sefas Emes notes that the words *zar*, meaning foreign or alien, and *zer*, meaning a crown, are not only spelled identically, but also are very close in meaning. When a person realizes that he is actually *zar* and distant from holiness, this very realization confers on him a *zer*, a royal diadem, as it were. The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (31:20) states, "How great is Your good that You have hidden away for those who fear You." "*Tzafanta*, that You have hidden," says the Sefas

Emes, refers not only to the reward being hidden, but also to the G-d-fearing person's virtue remaining hidden and concealed rather than being thrust into the open for all to see and for him to glory in.

Since self-effacement leads to joy rather than sadness, it will lead a person to remember his Creator and make this awareness part of his innermost being.

This is the first pathway to making our awareness of the Creator part of ourselves always.

☛ The Second Way: Torah Study

A SECOND ROUTE to searing awareness of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* into our consciousness at all times is through Torah study.

Leaning Torah also inculcates self-effacement in a person, which in turn breeds joy and alacrity. As the Sefas Emes explains, this happens “through a person witnessing the profundity of His wisdom, thereby instilling in him embarrassment and self-effacement before Hashem.”

☛ Amalek Encountered You: On the Way

TWO REALIZATIONS INSTILL self-effacement:

1. Experiencing Hashem's boundless, immeasurable greatness, perhaps by experiencing a miraculous deliverance from some calamity. In this case, a person's submissiveness arises from his gratitude for the miracle and his realization that “I am undeserving of all the kindnesses... that You have performed” (*Bereishis* 32:11).
2. Perceiving Hashem's limitless wisdom through comprehending His Torah and becoming aware of its profound depth and wisdom.

When leaving Egypt, Bnei Yisrael absorbed the extent of Hashem's greatness and became submissive, thus breeding joy and alacrity within them, due to the huge miracles they had experienced. This was the first type of self-effacement, of which it is written,

“From the strait, Hashem, I called you; He responded to me by taking me to the open space” (*Tehillim* 118:5). However, submissiveness of this type tends to fade once the strait is behind a person and he resumes routine. In order to preserve it and maintain his connection with Hashem, the second type, which is bred of Torah study, is necessary. Therefore, after leaving Egypt, Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, of which it is written, “Hashem shall give His people might” (*ibid.* 29:11), upon which Chazal (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:1) comment, “‘Might’ refers to Torah.” Torah instills in us the might to maintain our connection to the Creator.

Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael when the latter were “on the way” — after they had exited from the strait of their Egyptian bondage but before they received the Torah. It is said that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link and that particular juncture was a weak spot for Yisrael, who stood poised between two factors that foster connection with Heaven but were strongly influenced by neither. The effect of the first factor had worn off, while the second one had yet to exert its influence on them. On one hand, the submissiveness instilled by having exited their strait had faded, while on the other hand, they had not yet been granted that submissiveness which is instilled by Torah. Amalek wanted to subdue Yisrael before the latter attained the level of submitting to Heaven by virtue of the Torah, and they therefore chose to attack at this precise time, when Bnei Yisrael were “on the way” from one source of connection to Heaven to another.

☞ Learning Torah in a Way That It Is Experienced at the Soul’s Deepest Level

IT IS POSSIBLE to learn Torah in order to increase one’s knowledge. But Torah study can take place on an altogether different level such that it penetrates to the deepest levels of the student’s soul and is thereafter unforgettable. The Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:1) states, “When Yisrael heard [the first Commandment], ‘I am Hashem, your G-d’ (*Shemos* 20:1), Torah study became deeply embedded in

their heart, and they would learn and not forget.” When the Torah (with the first *luchos*) was given at Har Sinai, Hashem descended upon the mountain, and His words were seared into Bnei Yisrael’s consciousness. This experience penetrated to the deepest level of their souls such that forgetting was impossible.

Our mitzvah to remember and to keep alight the burning flame of connection to Heaven obligates us to learn Torah in a way that parallels when it was given at Sinai such that it becomes seared into every level of our being. Then, it will be unforgettable.

SUMMARY

Forgetting something implies dissociation from it at the deepest level of one’s being and, by the same token, remembering indicates its connection to the core of one’s being. Amalek attempted to cool the ardor of Bnei Yisrael’s connection with Heaven born of the burning love a person feels towards that which lies at the core of his being. Such a bond engenders enthusiasm and alacrity. The mitzvah to remember our battle with Amalek obliges us to rekindle this fervor by fostering the joy that is bred by self-effacement and not harboring expectations. It can also be rekindled through fully experiencing Torah study such that it engages every level of a person’s being. All this is encompassed by our obligation to remember.

Purim

The Day of Lots

☞ “He Cast the *Pur*”

THE NAME OF the festival marking the Jewish nation’s miraculous deliverance that was instituted by Mordechai and Esther for all future generations first appears towards the end of the *megillah*, as the story draws to a close:

For Haman, the son of Hamdasa, the Agagi, the oppressor of all the Jews, schemed against the Jews to annihilate them, and he cast *pur*, which is the lot, to throw them into confusion and annihilate them. But when she (Esther) came before the king, he said to be recorded in writing that his (Haman’s) evil plan which he devised against the Jews should be revoked [to fall] upon his own head, and they hanged him and his sons on the gallows. Therefore, they called these days Purim, on account of the *pur*. (*Esther* 9:24–26)

Using lots, Haman determined which day was most auspicious for him to destroy the Jewish nation, as it says, “In the first month, in the month of Nissan, in the twelfth year of King Achashverosh’s reign, he cast the *pur*, which is the lot, before Haman, to select which day and which month, [and it came out] to the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar” (*ibid.* 3:7). The transformation of the day yielded by the lot from tragedy to deliverance gives the festival its name of Purim, meaning a day of lots.

☞ How Does the Lot Symbolize the Nature of This Day?

NAMING THE DAY Purim poses a grammatical difficulty and also raises a more fundamental question regarding names in general.

The grammatical difficulty is that Haman conducted just a single lot, as it says, “He cast *pur*, which is the lot.” Surely the festival ought then to have been named Pur, in the singular. Why refer to the day as Purim, using the plural form? Where in the *megillah* do we find that two lots were cast?

The more basic difficulty is that not every festive day receives a name. The festival of the seventh day of Pesach has no name and is known simply by the day of Pesach upon which it is celebrated. The same is true of Tu B’shvat and Lag B’omer, which, though they commemorate specific events, are known solely by the dates on which they are celebrated.

A name is conferred upon a person, object, festival, etc. as a way of expressing its essence. A name thus conveys its bearer’s core quality and reflects its essential nature. If Purim receives its name from the lot cast by Haman, the essential nature of the miracle of Yisrael’s deliverance must somehow be conveyed by this lot.

Were the lot “not to express the day’s meaning,” writes the Sefas Emes, “how can the day be named for some minor detail that isn’t central to its essence?” We therefore need to understand how Haman’s lot relates to the essential nature of the Purim miracle.

At first glance, the lot Haman cast in order to determine on which day to implement his decree seems to be one of the most minor details in the *megillah*’s entire account, which relates how *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* orchestrated events so as to bring about Yisrael’s wondrous deliverance. How are we to understand this seemingly insignificant detail giving the day its name and representing its essence?

☞ What Is the Significance of Casting a Lot?

IN *YEHOShUA* (CHAP. 7), we find the account of Achan’s violation of the ban that Yehoshua placed on anyone taking from the spoils of Yericho after its collapse. Following Achan’s violation, we are told that when Bnei Yisrael fought against the city of Ay, “The men of Ay killed thirty-six men of theirs and pursued them [from] in front of the

gate to the Shevarim, and they smote them on the mountain slope, and the people's resolve melted to water" (*pasuk* 5). When Yehoshua wanted to know, "What is this, and why has it happened" *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* responded, "Yisrael have sinned and have also breached My covenant that I commanded them and have also taken from the ban and have also stolen and have also denied and have also placed it in their vessels" (ibid. *pasuk* 11). Seeking to establish who the guilty party was, Yehoshua cast lots.

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 43b) tell us, "When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Yehoshua, 'Yisrael have sinned,' he said to Him, 'Ribbono Shel Olam, who has sinned?' *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him, 'Am I an informer?! Go and cast lots.' He went and cast lots, and the lot fell upon Achan."

This Gemara needs to be understood. Knowledge gained through casting lots also represents Heaven's finger pointing to the result, as it says, "The lot is performed in private, and its entire judgment is from Hashem" (*Mishlei* 16:33). Rashi explains:

"The lot is performed in private" — a person casts lots when he is alone;

"And its entire judgment is from Hashem" — selecting a portion for each and every one.

What difference does it make whether *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* reveals the identity of the ban's violator explicitly or obliquely through lots?

The *Chafetz Chaim* answers this question (*Hilchos Issurei Lashon Hara* 10:6), writing that although it is permitted to pass on *lashon hara* for a constructive purpose, this is only with the proviso that the beneficiary has no alternative access to this information that doesn't require explicit *lashon hara* being spoken. If he does have such access, it is forbidden to share the *lashon hara*. In *Be'er Mayim Chaim* (ad loc.), the *Chafetz Chaim* cites the above Gemara, where *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* refused to speak *lashon hara* and instead conveyed the information in an indirect manner, through a lottery, as the source of this ruling. The *Chafetz Chaim* writes:

It seems highly perplexing. Does the prohibition against speaking *lashon hara* apply to a man like Achan, who violated the ban, who was responsible for Jews falling in battle, who had relations with a betrothed woman and transgressed all five books of the Torah, as it says in *Sanhedrin* (44a)?

Certainly, then, it is as we have written, that in any situation that he can achieve the same purpose without having to speak [*lashon hara*] about the [other] person, halachah forbids doing so. There, it was possible to employ lots, which is why *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him, “Am I an informer? Go and cast lots.”

From here, we see that casting lots is one of the ways in which Heaven reveals events.

When lots are cast, the information is conveyed obliquely, not explicitly (as in the manner of prophecy). But casting lots is nevertheless a form of Divine revelation.

☞ What Haman's Lot Revealed

HAMAN CAST HIS lot in order to determine which day was most suited for destroying the Jewish nation. This was the first occasion that an attempt was made to destroy the Jewish nation in its entirety, leaving no remnant whatsoever. Haman's decree was extraordinarily severe, and he wanted to know whether there was a particularly auspicious time when there was a chance that he would succeed. In the realm of nature, nothing lasts forever; sooner or later, everything becomes depleted and decays and is replaced or regenerates. Nations and empires rise and eventually fade away. In the realm of nature, the Jewish nation is no exception, and it was possible that destruction could befall our nation. This was what the lot was supposed to reveal.

☞ An Additional, Parallel Lot to Haman's

HAMAN'S LOT WAS confined to the realm of nature. However, on that day, a major conflict took place between the natural way of the world and the way in which the spiritual world acts upon, guides,

and influences the physical world. The principles according to which the latter operates supersede those of the natural realm, and they determine that, in the *pasuk*'s words, "The Eternal One of Yisrael does not lie" (*Shmuel I* 15:29). This *pasuk* declares that the Jewish nation is eternal and that the world's continued existence is incompatible with the Jewish nation's disappearance.

It was precisely the extreme nature of Haman's decree that that was responsible for its outcome being overturned and superseded by the invocation of a parallel spiritual lot that invoked the Heavenly decree that the world cannot exist without the Jewish nation. Since the end of the world had not yet arrived, it would be impossible to realize the outcome of the natural lot that foretold the Jewish nation's demise, and a miraculous sequence of events to ensure their salvation had to be activated.

Thus, while Haman's lot expressed Hashem's plan as it unfolds within the operation of the natural world that He created, an additional lot was also in operation. This additional lot was not Haman's doing, but reflected Hashem's overarching spiritual plan that prevails over nature in a world which is subject to Divine providence.

This idea affords us insight into the wording of the poem *Asher Heini*, recited by the congregation upon the conclusion of the evening *megillah* reading: "Haman's *pur* (lot) was transformed into our *pur*." In other words, concurrent with Haman's lot, another spiritual lot was operating, determining that the world had no way of surviving were the Jewish nation to disappear. It was that parallel, spiritual *pur* that overthrew Haman's decree.

☛ Haman Was Unaware of the Outcome of the Second Lot

THE SPIRITUAL LOT was cast at the same as the natural lot, but Haman remained unaware of it.

He discovered that there was indeed a day when the Jewish nation's fate would be resolved, but he didn't know whether or not

the final outcome would be in their favor. The Sefas Emes explains Chazal's comment in the Midrash (*Esther Rabbah* 7:24) on the words, "to become law in every state... for [them] to be prepared for this day" (*Esther* 3:14) accordingly: "R. Levi said, 'Prophecies attained by the gentile nations are obscure, and they don't know whether they will end up being killed or killing others.'"

While the nations knew that on this day, the thirteenth of Adar, fates would be sealed, as it says, "to be prepared for this day," they had no knowledge or prophecy as to how the chips would fall.

By contrast, prophecies to Klal Yisrael are clear and explicit, as it says, "for the Jews to be prepared for this day to wreak vengeance upon their enemies" (ibid. 8:13). They were told clearly that on this day, they would triumph over their enemies and be saved from their decree.

☞ The Day's Essence

TWO LOTS WERE cast on Purim, one reflecting Hashem's word as it manifests in the physical realm of nature and the other expressing Hashem's overarching spiritual master plan. The latter triumphed over the former, because the world runs according to Hashem's ultimate will, with nature in a subservient role to the spiritual realm.

Since two lots were cast, it is clear why the day is known as Purim, in the plural.

It is now also clear how the lots capture the essence and meaning of the day, for the miracle revolved around the question of the Jewish nation's continued survival. On one hand, it is comparable to other nations and therefore subject to the lot that operates according to the rule that all flesh eventually reaches the end of its line and that every natural phenomenon expires. On the other hand, the Jewish nation is subject to a Divine decree of eternal survival, and the world cannot exist without it. The story of the *megillah* conveys the triumph of the spiritual lot over Hashem's directives that control the operation of the natural world. Clearly, then, the world is supervised

by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and fulfills His will. This is the crux of the Purim miracle and its overarching theme.

☞ The Need for Human Effort Alongside Divine Promise

THE SEFAS EMES explains further: lots cast to discover Hashem's will within the physical realm yield an outcome even though the process of its crystallization involves ordinary human intervention (such as the plot to annihilate the Jewish nation). Similarly, the parallel, spiritual lot, which also reveals the eventual outcome, depends on human spiritual effort in the form of Yisrael's prayer and crying out to Heaven, in order to merit Hashem's salvation and actualize the predestined outcome.

SUMMARY

On Purim, a struggle took place between two parallel systems: one that reflects G-d's will in nature, wherein everything that has a beginning also has an end, with nothing lasting forever; and the other an overarching spiritual program that assures the eternity of the Jewish nation, not allowing the world to continue in its absence. The struggle was won by the spiritual master plan, demonstrating that the world operates under Divine supervision and that even that which appears to us as a decree of fate and inevitable is nonetheless ultimately determined in the spiritual world.

Parshas Parah

Ash That Is Earth

☛ Incineration Corresponding to Incineration

THE *PARSHAH* OF the *parah adumah* (the red cow) discusses the impurity imparted by a dead body and its removal through the *parah's* ashes. The Torah states, “This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem has commanded, saying, ‘Speak to Bnei Yisrael that they should take on your behalf a perfectly (i.e., wholly) red cow that has no blemish on it and that has never had any burden on it. You shall give it to Elazar the *kohen*... then burn the cow” (*Bamidbar* 19:2–5). Rashi explains how each detail of the laws of taking the *parah adumah* and its subsequent treatment corresponds to some detail of the sin of the Golden Calf.

“**That they should take on your behalf**” — it should belong to them; just as they divested themselves of their golden nose rings for the [Golden] Calf, so shall they bring this as atonement from their own money.

“**A red cow**” — this is like a maidservant’s child who made a mess in the king’s palace. They said, “His mother should come and clean up the [child’s] excrement.” Similarly, this cow should come and atone for the Calf.

“**Red**” — this is in reference to the words, “If your sins shall be like scarlet wool, they shall become whitened like snow; if they shall be red like a worm, they shall be like [white] wool” (*Yeshayah* 1:18). This shows us that sin is referred to as red.

“**Perfect[ly]**” — for Yisrael were unblemished, and through it

(i.e., the Golden Calf), they became blemished; this [cow] should [therefore] come and atone for them so that they revert to their [former state of] perfection.

“Nor that has ever had any burden on it” — in the same way that they threw off the yoke of Heaven.

“To Elazar the *kohen*” — in the same way as they congregated around Aharon, who was a *kohen*, to make the Calf. And because Aharon made the Calf, this service [of the *parah adumah*] was not conducted by him, for “A prosecutor can not serve as a defender.”

“Shall burn the cow” — just as the Calf was burned.

This final parallel raises some difficulty. Burning the Golden Calf was not part of the sin; its worshippers actually danced around it. After Moshe descended from Har Sinai and interrupted its worship, he burned the Calf as part of the rectification of the sin.

The Torah tells us, “He took the Calf that they had made, smelted it in fire, and ground it until it was fine [powder]. He then scattered it over the water and made Bnei Yisrael drink the water” (*Shemos* 32:20). Why was it necessary to burn the *parah adumah* as rectification for the burning of the Golden Calf when the latter burning was itself an act that rectified the sin?

☞ The Waters of the Calf and the Waters of a *Sotah*

THE TORAH TELLS us that Moshe ground the incinerated gold of the Calf into a fine powder, which he then scattered over the water and made Bnei Yisrael drink. Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 44a) explain that in doing so, “his intention was to test them like *sotos*.” A woman who defies her husband’s warning that she refrain from secluding herself with a particular man is compelled to drink water into which the ink of a copy of the passage of *sotah* in the Torah has been dissolved, and if she is guilty of unfaithfulness, the waters cause her an unpleasant death. Similarly, anyone suspected of worshipping the Calf had to drink the water into which the ashes of the Calf were dissolved, and if he was guilty, he died a gruesome death. Chazal thus draw a parallel

between drinking the waters upon which the powdered gold of the Golden Calf was scattered and drinking the waters of the *sotah*.

There seems to be some discrepancy in this parallel, too. Whereas the *sotah* was made to imbibe water into which G-d's Name — which appears in the passage of *sotah* — had been erased, Bnei Yisrael were made to drink water into which the Calf itself had been dissolved.

How can scattering the ash resulting from an idol's incineration over water be equated with the erasure of Hashem's Name into water?

We understand at least that if the *sotah* is guilty, she cannot endure G-d's holy Name that is contained in the water she swallowed and that she therefore dies. But why should a sinner be unable to endure imbibing water that contains the residue of his sin, which is as distant from holiness as possible?

☞ Soil and Ash

THE TORAH COMMANDS that the blood of a slaughtered kosher wild animal or bird be covered: “And when any man of Bnei Yisrael or of the proselytes who live among them catches wild-animal game or a bird which may be eaten, he shall spill its blood (i.e., slaughter it) and cover it with dust” (*Vayikra* 17:13).

The Gemara (*Chullin* 88b) records a dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel whether only *afar* (soil) can be used to fulfill the mitzvah of covering blood or even *eifer* (ash, the product of a fire) can also be used. Beis Shammai maintain that only soil may be used, because this is what the Torah specifies, whereas Beis Hillel argue that “We find [that] ash [too is] referred to as ‘soil,’ as it says, ‘They shall take for the impure person some of the soil (i.e., ash) of the burning of the purifying [cow], (i.e., the *parah adumah*)’” (*Bamidbar* 19:17).

How are we to understand this reference to ash, which in the case of *parah adumah* is the product of a human act of incineration, as “soil,” which usually denotes something created that cannot be synthesized by man?

In *Chiddushei Agaddos* (*Chullin* ibid.), the Maharal explains Avraham Avinu's assertion while praying to Hashem on behalf of the city of Sodom, "*V'anochi afar va'eifer*, And I am dust and ash" (*Bereishis* 18:27). While both terms convey man's puniness and insignificance relative to his Creator, the first denotes his beginning, whereas the second denotes his end.

In the Maharal's words, "Earth and soil are ready to be given some form, whereas ash has lost its [original] form, and man reverts to ash."

In other words, earth represents the power of growth and propagation, the capacity for regeneration and the promise held by the future. Ash, on the other hand, symbolizes past life that has gone up in flames, leaving behind a lifeless residue.

☞ Agents of Regeneration

THIS EXPLAINS THE *pasuk* from which Beis Hillel derive that ash is also referred to as "soil." As Rashi notes, burning the *parah adumah* corresponds to the incineration of the Golden Calf that yielded ash as the residue of the elimination of this object of sin. Destroying sin and relegating it to the past is the first step on the road to a cleaner, purer future. The ash of the Golden Calf thus actually resembles soil, holding the promise of renewal and future growth.

By the same token, we understand why Moshe made Bnei Yisrael drink water with ash of the incinerated Calf as well as how this measure parallels the waters of the *sotah*. While there is obviously no more powerful agent of holiness, purity, and regeneration than G-d's Name, destroying sin can also serve as the foundation of a life of purity and can trigger man's regrowth and renewal. The person who still clings to sin cannot tolerate the waters that represent sin's destruction and elimination.

As to the parallel mentioned between burning the *parah adumah* and burning the Golden Calf, the intention is not that the *act* of incineration rectifies the sin. Rather, a comparison is being drawn between the *goal* in the two cases. Incinerating the object of the sin

of the Golden Calf paved the way for purification, and similarly, burning the *parah adumah* denotes the destruction of a former state and yields the agent for renewal and purification.

☛ Achieving Purity

QUOTING THE *CHIDDUSHEI HARIM*, the Sefas Emes notes accordingly:

The root of the impurity imparted by the dead is the disappearance of the [deceased's] inner core of spiritual vitality. The way to attain purity is by negating oneself like dirt and ash to the spiritual vitality bestowed by Hashem. This is alluded to by burning the *parah adumah* until it becomes ash and is annulled to its source (i.e., the soil from which all flesh comes). Through being annulled to his source, a person renews his vitality. This is why the reading of *parshas Parah* is followed by the reading of *parshas Hachodesh*, which symbolizes the renewal that comes about as a result.

In other words, contact with a dead body imparts impurity, a condition denoting the cessation of all creativity and growth. (See our detailed elucidation of this idea in the essay on *parshas Chukas*.)

Purity denotes resurrection of the dead, revival from a moribund state, and reconnection to the wellsprings of life.

Incinerating the past and annulling oneself to one's original life source enable the reestablishment of this connection, paving the way to attaining purity.

SUMMARY

The ability to transcend ingrained patterns of conduct extending back into the past and annul one's current persona so as to experience renewal engenders purity. Incinerating past sins

ushers in a new dawn, yielding the substrate for tomorrow's growth.

Man thus experiences a degree of resurrection upon his purification from the impurity conferred by contact with the dead. The resurrection of the dead transcends the natural order, whereby all life is subject to decay and death.

However, from the laws of purification from impurity, it is evident that Heaven decrees that the spiritual dimension shall overcome the constraints of the physical world and that the dead shall rise to live again.

In this context, how appropriate are the Rambam's remarks in his commentary to the Mishnah in *Parah* (3:2):

And there is no difference whatsoever between the person who has never contracted impurity through contact with the dead and the person who has spent all his life in a state of impurity but then immerses and undergoes sprinkling [with the waters mixed with the ash of the *parah adumah*] on the third and seventh days; moreover, there is extra virtue to the purity of the person who has been sprinkled upon, because Scripture (*Bamidbar* 19:12, 19) decrees explicitly that he is pure.

Parshas Hachodesh



“Create for Me a Pure Heart, G-d, and
Place within Me an Upright Spirit”

☞ Yisrael Count by the Moon,
Whereas the Nations Count by the Sun

YISRAEL WERE GIVEN their first mitzvah — the mitzvah of sanctifying the new month — even before leaving Egypt. The Torah writes, “This month shall be for you the first month; it shall be for you the first of months of the year” (*Shemos* 12:2).

Chazal note that while the gentile nations’ calendar follows the solar year, Yisrael’s yearly calendar is based on counting the lunar months. The Gemara states accordingly (*Sukkah* 29a), “A solar eclipse is a bad omen for the nations, whereas a lunar eclipse is a bad omen for Yisrael’s enemies (a euphemistic referral to Yisrael themselves), because Yisrael count [the passage of time] by the moon, and the gentile nations count by the sun.”

Chazal tell us similarly (*Shemos Rabbah* 15:27):

Hakadosh Baruch Hu therefore gave the secret (i.e., the profound knowledge of calculating the monthly cycle) of the moon to Yisrael to count thereby, while the gentile nations count by the sun, conveying that just as the sun is [visible] only by day, so do the nations have dominance only in this world; and just as the sun is made of fire, they will be judged thereby in the future, as it says, “For behold, the day approaches, burning like a furnace” (*Malachi* 3:19); and just as

the moon is visible by day and by night, so are Yisrael dominant in this world and the next; just as the moon consists of light, so shall Yisrael inherit light, as it says, “Light is sown for the righteous, and for the upright of heart, joy” (*Tehillim* 97:11); and it says, “Arise and shine [with joy, Yerushalayim], for [the time for] the light [of your salvation] has come” (*Yeshayah* 60:1); and it therefore says, “This month shall be for you,” for you resemble it.

Yisrael thus mark the passage of time according to the lunar cycle because the moon reflects their essence.

☛ The Moon Is Inferior to the Sun

CHAZAL’S EXPLANATION FOR the moon’s assignment to Yisrael and the sun’s to the nations as reflecting the essential differences between them raises some difficulty, for whereas Yisrael are superior to the nations, the moon is apparently inferior to the sun.

The sun is the earth’s source of light and energy. It constantly radiates a huge amount of light and heat that bring joy and life to the world. It rules the heavens by day. The moon merely reflects the sun’s light. Its luminescence is pale and weak compared to that of the sun. For part of the month, it is altogether invisible. It dominates the heavens during the night.

Since the sun seems to enjoy superiority over the moon in every way, why are Yisrael likened to the inferior of the two?

☛ Women’s Exemption from the Blessing Over the New Moon

INTERESTINGLY, WOMEN ARE excluded from this first mitzvah that Yisrael were given. This is the conclusion that emerges from the Gemara’s discussion (*Sanhedrin* 42a) of the wording of the blessing to be made over the new moon: “R. Acha said to R. Ashi, ‘In Eretz Yisrael, they make a short blessing saying, “*Baruch... mechadeish chodashim* (Who renews the months).”’

R. Ashi told R. Acha that this short blessing could be made by women as well, and the Gemara concludes that the blessing to be made is:

Baruch... who with His utterance created the heavens and with the breath of His mouth all their hosts; He imbued them with law[s] and time[s] so that they shouldn't veer from their [set] tasks. They rejoice and are glad to fulfill the will of their Owner; they are honest functionaries, whose work is honest, and He told the moon that it should be renewed [monthly] as a crown of glory for humans, who in the future will be likewise renewed, and to praise their Maker on account of the glory of His rule, *baruch...mechadeish chodashim*.

Although this Gemara seems to imply that women make the blessing over the new moon, the *Magen Avraham* (beginning of *Orach Chaim* 426) notes that this is not the case. The Gemara doesn't mean women specifically, but unlearned folk in general, i.e., R. Ashi rejects the short version of the blessing as too simplistic.

The *Magen Avraham* writes that the reason women should not make this blessing is because of their general exemption from positive time-bound mitzvos.

☞ Women Refrain from Making the Blessing over the New Moon

HOWEVER, EXPLAINS THE *Magen Avraham*, "Although they [customarily] fulfill all positive [time-bound] mitzvos such as *sukkah*, [despite being exempt,] they nonetheless do not fulfill this mitzvah, because it is they who caused the diminishing of the moon."

The source for this assertion is the *Shelah* (*Shaar Ha'osiyos, kuf* — *kedushah*, 39), who writes that "women refrain from fulfilling this mitzvah. Even though they fulfill many positive time-bound mitzvos such as *shofar* and *lulav*, we have never seen women fulfilling *kid-dush levanah*, even though they are scrupulous about saying all the prayers, because the moon's diminishment was caused by the first

woman, i.e., the sin of Chavah, so they refrain [from this mitzvah] out of embarrassment.”

These comments require further elucidation, for the Torah tells us that the heavenly bodies were made on the fourth day of creation, whereas Adam and Chavah were only made on the sixth day. The moon’s sin on account of which it was diminished (see Rashi, *Bereishis* 1:16) thus preceded Chavah’s creation, so how is it possible to attribute to her the situation that led to it?

☞ Rosh Chodesh — The Women’s Realm

WOMEN’S EXEMPTION FROM the mitzvah of sanctifying the new month raises an additional difficulty, for we find that women celebrate Rosh Chodesh as a festival to a greater extent than men. Since the women were not involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, they were given the mitzvah of resting from work on Rosh Chodesh.

The *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* (Chap. 44) mentions that when the women were asked to give their jewelry to their husbands to be used for making the Golden Calf, they refused, telling them, “‘You want to make a detestable abomination (i.e., an idol) that is powerless to save,’ and they did not listen to them. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* therefore gave the women their reward in both this world and the next, whereby they observe Rosh Chodesh.”

Given women’s special relationship with Rosh Chodesh, how it is possible that they are exempt from sanctifying the new month?

The *Shelah*’s response to this is, “Even though they (i.e., women) later found rectification [for Chavah’s sin] at the time of the Golden Calf, when they were rectified by not sinning and did not listen to the Original Serpent [that had enticed Chavah in Gan Eden] — which is [synonymous with] the Satan, which is the *yetzer hara* — and Rosh Chodesh was therefore given to women to observe to a greater degree than men, woman was nevertheless originally responsible for the Enticer’s (i.e., the serpent/*yetzer hara*) entry into the world, and the men later reinforced it at the time of the Golden Calf,

and we have still not become purified [from it], and it (i.e., our resistance to the *yetzer hara*) is sometimes lacking and sometimes full.”

What is the meaning of the *Shelah*'s explanation, and in what respect are men better off than women in regard to this mitzvah?

☞ Women Making a Blessing during Their Times of Impurity

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGADDOS* (*Sanhedrin* 42a), the Maharsha explains R. Ashi's objection to the short version of the blessing as being on account of the ease with which it could be made by women, who would then make it even during the times of their impurity, i.e., following childbirth and during menstruation, without mentioning Hashem's Name.

This raises a very difficult question indeed, for as a matter of practice, women do not refrain from mentioning Hashem's Name or making any other blessing while in a state of impurity (see *Beis Yosef* O.C. 88 and Y.D. 282). Women make the blessings on all mitzvos even during menstruation and following childbirth.

☞ R. Shlomo Kluger's Major Question

MOREOVER, THE *MAGEN Avraham*'s contention that making the blessing on the new moon is a time-bound mitzvah is astonishing, for rather than being time-bound, this mitzvah commemorates the creation of time with the beginning of the heavenly bodies' movement. It is actually not time-bound at all, being a blessing that praises G-d on account of the natural phenomenon of the moon's waning and waxing. The blessings made upon seeing lightning and hearing thunder are similarly not considered time-bound despite the seasonal nature of these phenomena, which usually take place only during certain times of the year.

We encounter a similar argument in the Ramban's remarks (*Kiddushin* 34a), where he writes that the mitzvah of counting the *omer* is not considered time-bound because it is not tied directly to a

certain time, but is contingent on the reaping of the *omer* offering, which itself has a specific time.

This question is asked by R. Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmas Shlomo, Orach Chaim* 426:1):

And in my opinion, this (i.e., the *Magen Avraham's* reference to women's exemption from time-bound mitzvos) is highly astonishing, for this rule applies only to a mitzvah where the actual mitzvah act can in theory be fulfilled in any situation and at any time, e.g. *matzah*, *sukkah*, and *lulav* etc., for such a mitzvah can potentially be performed in Cheshvan just as well as in Tishrei or in Iyar just as well as in Nissan, yet the Torah specifies that [only] at these [specific] times is he obligated, and afterwards, he is exempt. In such cases, the mitzvah is evidently time-bound, and women are thus exempt.

In the case of the moon, however, the limitation isn't due to any particular time, but to the actual mitzvah itself that isn't relevant at any other time [besides for when the moon is renewed each month]... Since the limitation isn't time-bound, but is due to the moon itself, the blessing being made [only] while it is being renewed but not while it is shrinking, which is not a function of time but of the moon itself, the moon's monthly reappearance being akin to certain fruits' annual growth, it is [thus] not a positive, time-bound precept. This seems, in my humble opinion, to be clear.

☞ Sanctifying the New Month — The Mitzvah of Renewal

THE NOVEL LIGHT in which the Sefas Emes views this topic seems to provide a key to understanding it. According to the Sefas Emes, the idea at the basis of the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon is the capacity for renewal.

The nations of the world mark the passage of time by the months of the solar year. While the sun provides intense illumination and radiates light uninterruptedly, it never experiences renewal.

Yisrael, by contrast, count according to the lunar months. The

moon regularly undergoes renewal and provides light amid the darkness of night. Bnei Yisrael's defining characteristic is their ability to locate the point of Divine light amid the darkness of this benighted world.

The mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon symbolizes the necessity of pinpointing Torah's illumination that supports the existence of the entire world, even amid the concealment abounding in a world that apparently operates according to unchanging natural laws and never experiences any renewal whatsoever.

This is the mission entrusted to the Jewish people. In the Sefas Emes's words, "to demonstrate how the illumination of holiness lies within every physical act" (as we discussed in detail in our essay on *parshas Bo*).

This is the implication of the Torah writing, "This month shall be **for you**," i.e., for all your requirements. The physical world is given to man, and he is allowed to use it to meet his needs. But in doing so, he is expected to find and draw into the open the point of Divine illumination lying within every physical object and constantly renewing its existence.

☞ "Their Heart Was Unhearing" — A Necessary Precondition for Discovering "This Month Shall Be for You"

THE SEFAS EMES sees a basis for renewal even while darkness holds sway and inner light is burning low. In fact, this is the essence of renewal: taking a degenerate situation and drawing out its innate holiness, thereby raising and elevating it.

This idea enables us to understand the Gemara's account (*Shabbos* 147b) of R. Elazar ben Arach's travel to a place where physical pleasures (bathhouses and fine wines) abounded. Having been drawn to indulge in these enjoyments, R. Elazar forgot his Torah learning. This reached the point where, upon his return to his home town, he erred while reading from the Torah. Instead of

reading, “*Hachodesh hazeh lachem* (this month shall be for you),” he misread several letters and instead read, “*Hacheireish hayah libam* (their heart was unhearing).” What is the significance of this mistake?

The Sefas Emes explains that R. Elazar’s subconscious caused him to misread the words in a way that yielded a relevant lesson. The precondition for renewal is that it be preceded by concealment. The condition whereby “their heart was unhearing” serves as a good substrate for renewal and regeneration, which lead to the stage where “this month is for you.”

In fact, the Jewish people received this first mitzvah of sanctifying the new month in Egypt, because the purpose of their descent there was to experience redemption amid the heavy darkness and suffering of their exile, thereby heralding their renewal.

☞ Distinguishing between Holiness and Purity

CHAZAL (*ZOHAR*, VOL. III, 180B) elucidate the *pasuk*, “A pure man shall gather the ash of the cow and put it outside the encampment in a pure place” (*Bamidbar* 19:9), noting the stipulation that both the “man” and the “place” should be “pure” rather than “holy.” Pure refers to something that was formerly impure. Holiness can thus be differentiated from purity as follows:

- Holiness implies never having become impure. This is a sublime, spiritual state to which impurity is utterly alien.
- Purity implies having become purified from an earlier state of impurity. There is thus nothing passive about purity, which denotes engaging in an active process of purification and breaking the hold of impurity. *Tohar*, meaning purity, is related to *tzohar*, meaning an aperture that is exposed to light, created due to a process of disentanglement from murky darkness and the depths of impurity.

The Sefas Emes explains that the process of purification involves

differentiating between good and evil: “And that is the difference between ‘pure’ and ‘holy,’ as it says, ‘Who can bring forth purity from impurity?’ (*Iyov* 14:4), for by creating purity from a former state of impurity, further renewal is achieved.” It is therefore written in *Tehillim* (51:12), “Create for me a pure heart, G-d, and place within me an upright spirit.” Purification sets in motion a process of renewal that breaks forth from the darkness with the radiation of Divine illumination from the obscurity of the physical world. This is the deeper implication of our nation’s departure from Egypt.

☛ Renewal and Purification — A Monthly Cycle Common to Women and the Moon

WOMEN’S REWARD FOR refraining from participating in the sin of the Golden Calf is that they refrain from work monthly with the moon’s renewal every Rosh Chodesh. How appropriate this is, for they too represent monthly renewal and purification. In *Ben Yehoyada* (*Sanhedrin* 44a), the *Ben Ish Chai* notes that the initial letters of the opening words of the first Mishnah in *Kesuvos*, “*Besulah niseis layom harevii* (a maiden gets married on the fourth day of the week)” are *beis*, *nun*, *lamed*, and *hei*, which spell *levanah*, the moon. The heavenly bodies were created on the fourth day of creation, and woman is likened to the moon, for during part of the month, she is “eclipsed” like the moon and forbidden to her husband. A woman possesses unparalleled capacity for renewal. The *Toras Chaim* (*Sanhedrin* ad loc.) explains that this is why women’s reward is a mitzvah that recurs every Rosh Chodesh, a day whose essence is renewal.

However, a woman’s renewal doesn’t necessarily coincide with the moon’s renewal at the beginning of each month; the new moon may well be sanctified during her “eclipse.” While she is impure, how can she make the blessing over a mitzvah whose essence is purification and renewal?

This idea enables us to perfectly understand the Maharsha’s observation that it is inappropriate for women to make the blessing on

the new moon while they are impure, a blessing whose entire focus is purity and renewal.

Therefore, even if this mitzvah does not fit the classic definition of a time-bound mitzvah, it is nonetheless clear why women refrain from it.

SUMMARY

The mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon symbolizes the process of purification and renewal, with life-giving, spiritual light radiating from the obscurity of the physical world.

Purity, as distinct from holiness, is the consequence of the banishment of a former state of impurity.

Parshas Hachodesh follows *parshas Parah* (which contains the laws of purification through the *parah adumah*) because purification is followed by renewal.

The nations of the world mark time according to the solar year, whereas the Jewish nation counts according to the lunar months, because the moon's light is pale and during part of the month is entirely obscured. Though the moon has dominion in darkness, it experiences constant renewal.

The moon is able to send out a beam of light into the vast expanse of darkness. Similarly, the Jewish nation's task is to spiritually illuminate the darkness of the physical world, thereby bringing about its purification.

Shabbos Hagadol

“Greatness Is Yours, Hashem”

☞ What Does the Great Miracle Have to Do with Shabbos?

THE SHABBOS BEFORE Pesach is known as Shabbos Hagadol, “the Great Shabbos.” The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 430) explains the reason for this name: “A great miracle was performed on that day, for [the lamb offered as the] Pesach [sacrifice] in Egypt was to be purchased on the tenth [day of Nissan], as it says, ‘Speak to the entire community of Yisrael saying, “On the tenth of this month, they should take for themselves, each man, a lamb for each extended family, a lamb for each household”’ (*Shemos* 12:3). The day that Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, which was the first day of Pesach, was a Thursday [as mentioned in *Seder Olam* 1:2], which means that the tenth of Nissan was Shabbos. [On that day,] each person took a lamb for his Pesach offering and tied it to the leg of his bed. The Egyptians asked them, ‘What are you doing?’ They told them, ‘It is in order to slaughter it as a Pesach sacrifice, as Hashem has commanded us.’ This set their (i.e., the Egyptians’) teeth on edge, because Yisrael were slaughtering their deity, but they were unable to say anything to them. It is called Shabbos Hagadol in commemoration of this miracle.”

This is a very surprising explanation, for the miracle’s significance lies in its having taken place on that particular date — the tenth of Nissan — not on that particular day of the week. That year, the fifteenth of Nissan was a Thursday, so the tenth was Shabbos, but the miracle had no connection to it being Shabbos. In any year when

Pesach falls on a different day of the week, the tenth of Nissan is not on Shabbos. Why should this miracle be particularly associated with the Shabbos prior to Pesach to the point where this Shabbos receives the special title of “Shabbos Hagadol”?

☞ The Key to the Meaning of the Term *Gadol*

QUOTING HIS GRANDFATHER, the *Chiddushei HaRim*, the Sefas Emes notes that this Shabbos receives its name for the same reason advanced by the Gemara (*Yoma* 69b) to explain why the *Sanhedrin* that functioned at the beginning of the second Beis Hamikdash was known to posterity as the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*, the Men of the Great Assembly. The Gemara states that they were known by this moniker because “they restored the crown to its former state.” What does this mean?

☞ What Did the Men of the Great Assembly Accomplish?

THE GEMARA (IBID.) records, “R. Yehoshua ben Levi said, ‘Why are they referred to as the Men of the Great Assembly? — Because they restored the crown to its former state.’”

Moshe referred to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* with three titles: “the great, mighty, and awesome G-d” (*Devarim* 10:17).

Yirmeyahu omitted the appellation “awesome” (see *Yirmeyahu* 32:18), because he witnessed Nebuchadnezzar’s nobles entering the *heichal* and shouting to their hearts’ content. He said, “Gentiles are crowing in His chamber — where is His awesomeness?”

Daniel omitted the title “mighty” (see *Daniel* 9:4), for he witnessed idolaters enslaving His sons for seventy years. He said, “Gentiles are enslaving His sons — where is His might?”

The Men of the Great Assembly restored the titles “mighty” and “awesome,” including them in the opening words of the first blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, which they composed. They said, “On the contrary, herein lies His might — that He overcomes His inclination

and displays patience towards evildoers. And herein lies His awesomeness — for were it not out of fear of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, how could a single nation survive among the nations?” Rashi explains, “For all the nations gather in order to destroy Yisrael, yet they continue to endure.”

In light of this Gemara, it seems inexplicable why the Men of the Great Assembly should have received that title on account of having restored *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s title as “great.” *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* was still being referred to as “great” before the Men of the Great Assembly reinstated His former praises, for nobody had refrained from referring to Him as such. Only the titles “mighty” and “awesome” had been omitted by Yirmeyahu and Daniel and were now restored by the Men of the Great Assembly. Why should they be referred to by the single title that they didn’t need to restore?

☞ New Insight into the Meaning of Greatness — Incorporating Might

THE SEFAS EMES explains that through the restoration of the titles “mighty” and “awesome,” it became apparent that the functioning of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s might and awesomeness are also attributable to the greatness and expanse of His mercies.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s attributes operate sequentially, each one descending from the previous one, from the higher heavenly levels all the way to the lower levels of this world. These attributes are known as the *Sefiros*: *Chessed* (kindness), *Gevurah* (might), *Tiferes* (splendor), *Netzach* (triumph), *Hod* (grandeur), *Yesod* (foundation), and *Malchus* (kingship). They are listed in the *pasuk*, “Yours, Hashem, are greatness, might, splendor, triumph, and grandeur, for [Yours is] all [that exists] in heaven and on earth; Yours, Hashem, is kingship, and [to You is attributable] whoever rises to any prominence...” (*Divrei Hayamim I* 29:11).

This *pasuk* mentions all the seven *Sefiros* through which Hashem runs His world. The first *Sefirah* mentioned, which is the most basic, is referred to as *gedulah*, greatness, which denotes the attribute of kindness, the attribute through which the act of the world’s creation

took place. The question is how to understand the second *Sefirah*, might, being the outcome and consequence of kindness when the two are apparently contradictory — kindness denotes unlimited bestowal, while might indicates the manifestation of Heaven’s power through setting boundaries and limits.

The Men of the Great Assembly introduced the awareness that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s greatness and tremendous kindness also find expression in His might and in awesomeness, for the ultimate purpose of whatever he does is the benefit of His creations. Although the effects of His might and strength conceal the Divine kindness contained therein, eventually, when events are viewed from a broader perspective, it becomes clear that His judgment, too, is kindness. Its purpose is to rectify and cleanse, to banish evil and bestow good.

Chazal tell us that at the time of the future redemption, we will bless Hashem as being “*hatov v’hameitiv* (He Who is good and bestows good)” even over events that apparently warrant the blessing “*Dayan ha’emes* (the true Judge).” Hashem’s might is merely one aspect of His greatness and kindness.

The prophets who witnessed bad times, when Heaven’s judgment held sway, and believed that under such circumstances, it was inappropriate to refer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* as “mighty” and “awesome” were thus actually detracting from His greatness and from the genuine kindness contained therein. The Men of the Great Assembly indeed restored the crown of Hashem’s praise to its former state. Not only did they reinstate His praise as “the mighty” and “the awesome,” but they also revealed a new dimension to the praise “the great” as incorporating Heaven’s might. Heaven’s greatness thus conveys the inner dimension of any event that appears to manifest solely as might and judgment.

☞ A New Dimension of “Greatness”:

Encompassing Nature as Well

THE SEFAS EMES explains further that these ideas can be used to understand the Gemara’s comment (*Berachos* 58a) that the *pasuk*’s

words, “Yours, Hashem, are greatness...” refer to the world’s creation.

Creation operates according to the principles and workings of the physical world, which can give the impression of opposing Heaven’s rule, because to human eyes, the world seems to run constantly according to its own set of laws and doesn’t appear to be subject to Heaven’s supervision. The laws according to which the world seems to operate are those of cause and effect rather than the Heavenly reckoning of reward and punishment, with every act yielding an inevitable, natural consequence. In actuality, though, Hashem’s greatness is also manifest in the workings of creation, for His word created the world and continues to sustain it moment by moment. The operation of Heaven’s supervision and providence are clear corollaries of nature serving as a mere front or camouflage for the spiritual vitality that Hashem bestows uninterruptedly.

Hashem’s greatness thus expresses the inner essence of events and the tremendous effect they exert upon every realm of existence, including that which appears to us as “nature.”

☞ Heaven’s Greatness Is Infinite

THE TORAH TELLS us that “Avraham made *mishteh gadol*, a great feast” (*Bereishis* 21:8) and Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 53:10) infer from the word “great” that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, “the world’s Great Being,” was present at this feast.

In elucidating this Midrash, R. Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (*Pri Tzaddik, Lech Lecha* 4), explains that the Torah employs terms in their absolute sense, not in a relative sense. For example, when we describe something as large relative to something else, that doesn’t necessarily mean that it is truly, objectively large, because it is still smaller than another item that is larger still. However, when the Torah describes something as large, this is a statement of absolute truth — it has no end or limit. The only being whose greatness is unconditional, absolute, and infinite is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Therefore, explains R. Tzadok, when the Torah tells us that the feast was “great,” it must

be explained as meaning that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* — of whom it is written, “His greatness has no limit” (*Tehillim* 145:3) — was present.

We therefore see that the term “great” denotes infinity and that it encompasses absolutely everything.

☞ Shabbos Hagadol — The Day Bnei Yisrael

Attested to the Creator’s Greatness

HAVING ELUCIDATED THE meaning of the concept of greatness, we are now in a position to understand why the Shabbos preceding Pesach is known as Shabbos Hagadol. The Sefas Emes’s line of thought is as follows:

As we have explained, the term “great” encompasses the Divine input into nature by supporting and sustaining all existence moment by moment.

Shabbos attests to the Divine providence that created the world, as we find in Tosafos (*Chagigah* 3b s.v. *umi kamcha Yisrael*), who quote Chazal as saying:

Three testify about each other: Yisrael, Shabbos, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*:

Yisrael and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* testify about Shabbos;
Yisrael and Shabbos testify about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*;
Hakadosh Baruch Hu and Shabbos testify about Yisrael.

The Jewish nation’s purpose is to teach and to publicize *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s greatness.

In *Moreh Nevuchim* (Vol. III, Chap. 51), the Rambam writes that the goal for which the *avos* strived was the formation of a nation that would recognize *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and serve Him. It is therefore written of Avraham Avinu, “For I have known him [closely], because he directs his sons and his household after him that they [should] keep the way of Hashem by practicing righteousness and justice...” (*Bereishis* 18:19). All their efforts were intended to bring about recognition of Hashem’s unity throughout the world and lead people to love Him.

Hashem promised Avraham, “And I shall make you into a **great** nation” (ibid. 12:2), meaning that there would issue from him an entire nation that believed in Hashem. This is the meaning of the promise that the nation to emerge from him would be “great,” for this “greatness” denotes the fulfillment of the purpose of creation: to attest to Hashem’s presence in the world.

On Shabbos Hagadol, while still in Egypt, Bnei Yisrael fulfilled their first mitzvah collectively as one nation, thereby testifying through their deeds to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s presence in the world.

How fitting, therefore, that this Shabbos is known as Shabbos Hagadol.

SUMMARY

“Greatness” denotes the fundamental attribute of Heaven’s providence, encompassing limitless infinity. Heaven’s attribute of greatness encompasses kindness and might simultaneously, as well as nature, concealed miracles, and open miracles.

With their departure from Egypt amid tremendous miracles, the Jewish nation attested to the Creator’s infinite greatness.

Shabbos, too, attests to the fact that creation surpasses nature and that in fact, all natural forces are rooted in Hashem’s will. On the Shabbos in Egypt preceding their redemption, amid the country’s impurity and a dark and hostile environment, Yisrael as a nation gave expression to Hashem’s greatness. Since this Shabbos was the first when they gave expression to Hashem’s absolute and infinite greatness, it is known to posterity as Shabbos Hagadol.

Pesach

The Role of the Individual in Recounting the Departure from Egypt

☛ Leaving Egypt in a Generation That Was Never in Egypt

IN THE HAGGADAH we say:

In every generation, a person is obligated to consider himself as having gone out of Egypt, as it says, “You shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘For the sake of this, Hashem did [thus] for *me* when *I* left Egypt’” (*Shemos* 13:8). Not only our forefathers *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* redeemed, but us as well He redeemed along with them, as it says, ‘And He took *us* out of there, in order to bring *us* to give us the land that He swore to [give] our forefathers’ (*Devarim* 6:23).”

It is evident from these statements that a person is expected to believe that our nation’s departure from Egypt is renewed each and every year. How are we to understand this? How can there be a departure from Egypt in subsequent generations that never set foot in Egypt and were never enslaved to the Egyptians?

☛ Klal Yisrael’s Redemption and Its Consequence for Every Generation

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 61), the Maharal deals with this problem by distinguishing between the actual redemption and its ongoing ramifications.

The actual redemption was a momentous, all-encompassing event

of national significance that was experienced by the nation as a whole. From the standpoint of the Redeemer, too, the redemption related to Klal Yisrael as a national collective. "On *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s part," writes the Maharal, "the act of redemption took everything out together; this means that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* redeemed Yisrael as a whole."

This explains the second statement quoted above: "Not only our forefathers *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* redeemed, but us as well He redeemed along with them." In other words, the redemption was not confined to a particular generation or specific individuals. Rather, it was a collective redemption experienced by the national entity of Klal Yisrael. Since Klal Yisrael is an eternal entity that exists continuously, every subsequent generation identifies with the redemption.

In the Maharal's words: "Had *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to redeem [solely] the generation that left Egypt, the redemption would have been confined to that generation alone. However, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to redeem Yisrael as a whole, and the title Yisrael applies equally to all of Yisrael (i.e., to all subsequent generations as well, not just to one specific generation)." Thus, by virtue of being part of Klal Yisrael, we too were included in the redemption from Egypt.

The ramifications of the redemption are relevant to every subsequent generation. Therefore, on the individual level, each and every Jew is under obligation to regard those past events as having benefitted his own generation and been directed at him personally.

When an event is directed at us personally, our experience is particularly intense. The more individualized our experience, the more powerful is the event's impact upon us. A collective tragedy is thus not as intensely distressing to the individual as a personal tragedy, and by the same token, neither will he find a collective celebration or salvation as intensely joyous as a personal celebration or deliverance. Although in general, it is difficult for contemporary generations to identify on a personal level with events that befell past generations, our nation's departure from Egypt ought to serve as an exception to this, for each generation is supposed to experience it on the individual level.

“The members of every subsequent generation must regard themselves as though they were the ones who went out,” writes the Maharal. “And a particular generation should not regard that generation (i.e., those who actually lived at that time) as *also* having gone out, but should regard *itself* as having gone out, without regarding others as having gone out as well, for each and every generation stands on its own and should therefore consider *itself* as having been the generation that went out, without looking at others.”

This is the meaning of the words quoted in the first statement above: “Hashem did [thus] for *me* when *I* left Egypt.”

☞ How Does a Collective Miracle

Translate into an Individual Experience?

HOWEVER, THE MAHARAL’S explanation doesn’t seem to solve the main difficulty. How can we be expected to personally experience the miracle of leaving Egypt when we have asserted that it was a collective event?

Although the Maharal explains that the miracle was experienced by our nation’s collective entity rather than by a specific generation, and that is why it is not identified with the generation that physically left Egypt any more than with our own generation, this still seems to fall short of explaining why this renders it a personal miracle rather than a collective one.

Moreover, the Maharal’s contention that the miracle was performed for Klal Yisrael and that it should not be identified with any particular generation seems to render it even more general. How can an individual experience it?

☞ The *Zohar*’s Astonishing

Question on the Pesach Haggadah

IN THE *RAYA MEHEIMNA* — the portion of the *Zohar* that elucidates the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos — at the end of *parshas Bo*

(Vol. II, 41a), a cryptic question is raised regarding the mitzvah to recount our departure from Egypt.

The *Zohar* asks, “Should you ask, why is this an obligation? Since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* knows everything — everything that has happened and that will happen afterwards — what is the purpose of making this known before Him, regarding that which He does, when He already knows [about it]?”

At first glance, this question seems inexplicable. When we pray and request our needs or confess our sins, we are indeed addressing *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and the question of why we need to relay information to Him that He already knows is justified. But how can this difficulty be raised about recounting our departure from Egypt? When reciting the Haggadah, we are repeating the story to our families, not to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as the Torah commands, “You shall tell your son on that day” (*Shemos* 13:8). The purpose of the recounting is to transmit awareness of the great miracles of our departure from Egypt to subsequent generations, instilling in them faith in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and gratitude towards Him. Why does the *Zohar* wonder at the need for us to relate this story to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*?!

☞ “You Shall Tell Your Son” —

In Earshot of the Heavenly Retinue

THE *ZOHAR* PROVIDES a wondrous answer to its question. The Haggadah is addressed to one party with the intention that it be heard by another. As the *Zohar* puts it, this is like a mother speaking to her daughter while intending her message for her daughter-in-law. The leader of the Seder addresses his family, but his words are intended for the Heavenly Retinue. While reading the Haggadah, a person is indeed in Hashem’s presence and wants his words to be heard by His entourage. In the *Zohar*’s words: “Rather, a person must certainly publicize the miracle and speak before Him about all that He did, because those words ascend upward, and the entire

Heavenly Entourage gathers, and they see them and thank *Kudsha Berich Hu*, and His glory over them is heightened both above and below.”

The mitzvah of recounting our departure from Egypt is thus an act whereby a person intensifies his faith through praising his Creator in conversation with his family. This imparts power and strength to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as it were, in all the worlds, upper and lower. Reciting the Haggadah is thus an act of publicizing the miracle and acknowledging *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s rule “both above and below.”

Here is the *Zohar*’s description of the occasion:

A person rejoices in his Master, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* rejoices in that recounting. In those moments, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gathers His entire entourage and says to them, “Go and listen to the tale of My praise that My children are telling while rejoicing in My redemption.” They all then gather and join with Yisrael and hear the tale of praise while rejoicing in the joy of their Master’s redemption. His power and might above are then increased, and through this recounting, Yisrael impart power to their Master, like a king who increases his power and might when his might is praised and acknowledged, and all are afraid of Him, and His glory is heightened over them all. One should therefore offer praise and speak about this tale, as it says.

☞ The Haggadah — Retold in Hashem’s Presence

THE *ZOHAR* THEN likens the Pesach narrative to a person talking about and confessing his sins.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu obviously doesn’t require a person’s confession as a means of obtaining information, for even without the sinner’s admission of guilt, the Master of all worlds is well aware of his deeds. A sinner’s confession corresponds to the process of judgment implemented by the King of kings in the upper worlds, whereby “the prosecutor stands before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* constantly in order to demand [accounting] for people’s sins and seek judgment for the

sinner. When a person anticipates this and details his sins, he leaves no argument over for the prosecutor, who can no longer seek that he be brought to judgment.”

Interestingly, the Haggadah contains statements of Chazal that elucidate many *pesukim* from the *parshah* dealing with the mitzvah of *bikkurim*, where it is written, “An Aramean tried to destroy my ancestor” (*Devarim* 26:5). When it says regarding *bikkurim*, “You shall respond and say before Hashem, your G-d” (*ibid.*), this expresses the essence of the Haggadah as an occasion when a person stands “before Hashem.” A person’s conversation with his family members about having left Egypt is heard by the Heavenly Entourage. A person reclines on Seder night in the company of his family and in conversation with them, while Hashem, his G-d, and the entire Heavenly Entourage stand over him.

☞ A Halachic Ramification

THIS APPRECIATION OF the Haggadah taking place in Heaven’s presence may well have a practical halachic ramification. The *Bei’ur Halachah* (588 s.v. *shama*) asserts that although G-d’s Name may not be uttered in surroundings that are unclean, such as in the presence of human or animal waste matter or by a person who is physically unclean, mitzvos may be fulfilled even in such conditions.

As the *Bei’ur Halachah* writes, “Prayer, *birkas hamazon*, *hallel*, and the *megillah* may not be uttered in unclean places, and it is similarly forbidden to speak words of Torah there. However, this is not the case with blowing the *shofar*, which is simply a mitzvah act. Where have we found that it is forbidden to fulfill a mitzvah when one is physically unclean or in a place that isn’t clean? Shall a person be forbidden to wear a four-cornered *tallis* [with *tzitzis*] when he is physically unclean or is in a place that isn’t clean? Nowhere have we encountered that it is so, though further study is required.”

It seems that given the *Zohar*’s classification of the Haggadah reading as taking place in Heaven’s presence, even if no actual

pesukim will be read, it will still be forbidden if the reader is physically unclean or in an unclean place. Whereas the mitzvah of *tzitzis* can be fulfilled anywhere, prayer, confession of sins, and reading the Haggadah may not, for reading the Haggadah, like prayer and confession, is uttered in Hashem's presence.

☞ While Speaking between Ourselves in This World, We Exert an Effect on the Sublime Upper Worlds

THE *ZOHAR*'S APPROACH also enables us to understand the Gemara's statement (*Pesachim* 116a): "If a scholar's son is wise, he should ask him [the Four Questions], and if he is not wise, his wife should ask him, and if not, he should ask himself."

How are we to understand the idea of a person teaching himself and occupying the role of both teacher and student? What purpose is served by a person recounting the story to himself?

The explanation is that a person conducting the Seder on his own and addressing himself isn't teaching anyone. The words he utters in this world are heard in the upper worlds by the Heavenly Entourage. There may be no novelty whatsoever in his recounting; the scholar already knows the story, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* certainly knows it. However, the purpose of his retelling is to elevate rather than to innovate. Expressing our gratitude and instilling our pure faith in our Creator into every facet of our personalities, from our most sublime to our basest traits, amounts to proclaiming *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s rule and exerts an effect in the highest and most sublime spheres.

☞ The Individual Redemption Experienced by Every Believer in Our Nation's Departure from Egypt

THE ABOVE IDEAS from the Maharal and the *Zohar* serve as the foundation for thoroughly understanding the Sefas Emes's novel teaching that while occupied with the topic of our departure from

Egypt, a person actually undergoes his own personal redemption. At the Seder, he experiences an individualized redemption, described by the Sefas Emes as “a renewed experience of departing from Egypt.”

To explain: The Maharal explains that our departure from Egypt was a deliverance of Klal Yisrael in its entirety, representing our collective national entity as opposed to a collection of individuals. Klal Yisrael's uniqueness lies in being “a unified nation in the land” that proclaims *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* rule and affirms that “You are One and Your Name is One.” In light of the *Zohar's* comments, we understand that through recounting the story of our departure from Egypt, we are renewing and reestablishing *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* rule in the present moment in all the lower and upper worlds. By thus fulfilling our nation's mission, every individual expands the concept of Klal Yisrael, including himself within the collective national entity.

The term *haggadah*, besides meaning “telling” or “recounting,” also denotes continuation and the extension of a general concept so that it relates to all its constituent parts. We find the word understood this way in the *Zohar* (Vol. I, 6b), where *haggadah* is explained according to its use in the *pasuk* in *Daniel* (7:10): “A river of fire *nagad*, flowed, and went out.”

Thus, through each individual reaffirming his faith while recounting the story of our departure from Egypt, he draws the special qualities of our national collective upon himself as an individual.

Deep within each and every individual Jew is a core of searing, pure faith in G-d that binds him with a deep soul-connection to the concept of “Klal Yisrael.” From this inner core, life flows outward to every individual Jew.

The faith experienced by every Jew with every fiber of his being while recounting the story of our departure from Egypt and the momentous nature of being in the presence of Hashem, Who listens to our spoken words along with the Heavenly Entourage, firmly binds every individual Jew to “Klal Yisrael.”

The redemption experienced by “Klal Yisrael” is thus personally experienced by every individual as well.

☛ Two-Way Traffic

THE SEFAS EMES reveals a further level of depth, explaining that this reinforcement of the individual’s bond to “Klal Yisrael” brings about the intensification of the illumination of his inner faith. Without having bound his soul to “Klal Yisrael” and consequently regarding himself as having left Egypt — as a single individual component of “Klal Yisrael” that reflects all the qualities of the collective — he would not have merited this extra illumination. Recounting the story of our departure from Egypt is neither a matter of transmitting information nor of acquiring information. It is a process of inculcating faith and of each individual bonding with the entity “Klal Yisrael” that was redeemed from Egypt and that proclaims *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s rule over His world.

We now understand the Haggadah’s well-known statement that “even if we were all scholars, intelligent, elders, and knew the Torah, the mitzvah is [nevertheless] incumbent on us to discuss our departure from Egypt, and whoever’s recounting is more extensive is more praiseworthy.”

SUMMARY

The Haggadah and recounting the story of our departure from Egypt thus represent a three-stage process:

1. Instilling faith in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that is experienced by all the members of the family and that reaches to every level of the personality.
2. Publicizing the miracle and affirming *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* as King in earshot of the Heavenly Entourage.

3. Each individual bonding with “Klal Yisrael” and with our nation’s collective faith, which lies at the root of his soul and represents its foundation. This bond imbues him with Klal Yisrael’s faith and enables him to experience its redemption personally.

Thus, to the degree that a person believes that it is “as though he has gone out of Egypt,” he merits becoming part of Klal Yisrael and experiences their faith and redemption as his own, thereby meriting to leave behind the straits and bondage of his own private suffering.

Shevii Shel Peasch



Splitting the Heart's *Yam Suf*

☛ Two Stages of Faith and Redemption

OUR NATION'S DEPARTURE from Egypt comprised two stages. The first stage was the miracle of our departure from Egypt on the first day of Pesach, corresponding to the festival of Pesach. The second stage was the miracle of the splitting of the *Yam Suf* which took place seven days later, corresponding to which we celebrate the festival of Shevii Shel Pesach.

In regard to the miracle of the splitting of the *Yam Suf*, the Torah writes, “**On that day** Hashem saved Yisrael from Egypt’s power. Yisrael saw [the] Egypt[ians] dead on the seashore. Yisrael saw the strong Hand that Hashem had brought to bear against Egypt, and the people feared Hashem, **and they believed in Hashem** and in Moshe, His servant” (*Shemos* 14:30–31).

It is evident from this *pasuk* that the climax of our salvation took place with the second stage of our redemption, the splitting of the *Yam Suf*. It is also clear from the *pasuk* that our belief in Hashem reached new heights with this second stage. What led to the intensification of our belief at this second stage? What was added to the experience of the smiting of the firstborn and our actual departure from Egypt?

☛ A Difference of Opinion between

R. Akiva Eiger and the Chasam Sofer

THE *MAGEN AVRAHAM* (commenting on *Orach Chaim* 67) writes that the mitzvah to mention our departure from Egypt daily can

be fulfilled by saying *Shiras Hayam*, the song that Moshe and Bnei Yisrael sang following their deliverance from the Egyptians at the *Yam Suf*. To prove this, the *Magen Avraham* cites the Gemara (*Berachos* 13b) that even mentioning a halachah in which *yetzias Mitzrayim* is mentioned suffices to discharge this obligation, and thus, “all the more so if he said *Shiras Hayam*.”

On the other hand, R. Akiva Eiger cites the view of his son-in-law, the *Chasam Sofer* (in a responsum that appears in *Yam Ha-Talmud*), that in connection with this mitzvah, the Torah makes a point of writing, “In order that you remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt all the days of your life” (*Devarim* 16:3). “The day you left Egypt” refers to our actual departure, not to the splitting of the *Yam Suf*. The *Chasam Sofer* therefore takes the view that to fulfill this mitzvah, mention must be made of our actual departure from Egypt, and mentioning the splitting of the sea, which was a separate miracle, does not suffice. R. Akiva Eiger himself supports the view of the *Magen Avraham*.

How are we to understand the *Chasam Sofer*'s contention that the splitting of the sea was an independent miracle? Doesn't the position taken by the *Magen Avraham* and R. Akiva Eiger that the second miracle represents the culmination and the climax of the first seem logical?

What distinction did the splitting of the *Yam Suf* have that our actual departure from Egypt lacked?

☞ Two Types of Redemption

THE SEFAS EMES explains that there are two types of redemption:

1. Redemption that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* brings about through His attribute of mercy, unconnected to the merits of the beneficiary.
2. Redemption that people justifiably merit through their deeds.

Yisrael's redemption from Egypt was of the first type. It happened due to Hashem's promise to the *avos* rather than through

Bnei Yisrael's own merits. It sufficed that Bnei Yisrael had kept their names, the language they spoke, and their distinctive apparel so that they were recognizable as the descendants of their forebears and thus able to serve as the means of the promise's fulfillment. The heavenly representative of the Egyptians charged that "Both these (the Egyptians) and those (Bnei Yisrael) worship idols." Bnei Yisrael wallowed in the forty-ninth level of the impurity that was rampant in Egypt, and their redemption came about purely through Hashem's kindness and due to His promise to the *avos* that stood them in good stead. This kind of redemption is referred to as *isarusa d'l'eila*, an awakening originating Above, i.e., an outpouring of kindness initiated by Heaven.

Our deliverance at the *Yam Suf* was of the second type. It came about in the merit of Bnei Yisrael's utter and complete faith in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that inspired them to make their way into the churning waters of the *Yam Suf*. Their deliverance came about through an *isarusa d'l'sata*, an awakening originating below, i.e., an outpouring of bounty initiated by human action.

☞ Two Levels of Faith

BNEI YISRAEL CERTAINLY believed in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* when they left Egypt, as it says, "The people believed and heard that Hashem had remembered them and that He had seen their suffering, and they bowed and prostrated themselves" (*Shemos* 4:31). However, they attained that level through the kindness of Hashem, Who readied their hearts accordingly. Their faith at that time was a fragile thing; they had indeed scaled heights, but they were liable to come tumbling down.

After leaving Egypt and traveling a circuitous route, they were commanded to go back and encamp "before Pi Hachiros" (*ibid.* 14:2). This name can be understood as meaning "the gateway to freedom," i.e., they were still at the beginning of their journey to acquire the faith that had accompanied them as they left Egypt. They were

still liable to lose their faith, and indeed, there were groups among them that wanted to drop everything and return to Egypt.

With the splitting of the sea, however, their faith became firm and staunch such that it would endure for all future generations. This is because something experienced externally leaves only a fleeting impression, whereas an experience that penetrates deeply and sets off an inner process makes a lasting impression.

☞ “Draw Me after You, Let Us Run”

THIS SEEMS TO be the key to understanding the difference of opinion between R. Akiva Eiger and the *Chasam Sofer*. According to R. Akiva Eiger, these two miraculous events represent a single continuum that began with faith inspired by Heaven’s deliverance and concluded with faith that brought about Heaven’s salvation. This is alluded to in the *pasuk*, “Draw me after You, let us run” (*Shir Hashirim* 1:4) — through the miracle that Hashem performed for them on the first day of Pesach, Bnei Yisrael learned how to render themselves deserving of further miracles.

The *Chasam Sofer*, however, takes the view that at the *Yam Suf*, they jumped to an entirely different level of faith that then took root within and remained with them.

What was the further virtue of this faith? How was it different from the faith that preceded it?

☞ Faith within Nature and Faith despite Nature

THE SEFAS EMES distinguishes between two types of faith:

1. Natural faith is when a person believes in what he sees. An ordinary person believes in and relies upon the laws of nature and the natural processes that he sees operating around him. A prophet, who is known as a seer, or an ordinary person who witnesses a miracle, believes in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* because he perceives Him. This is the type of faith to which Hashem brings a person without altering the usual human tendency to

believe only in that which one sees. Whereas this person originally perceived only what was revealed, he now perceives that which is hidden as well. But even now, his belief is founded upon his perception.

2. Faith that defies the natural order, though, is when a person is prepared to abandon his nature to believe only in that which he sees. This is a completely different class of faith whereby a person goes against human nature and believes not only in that which he cannot see, but even in that which contradicts what he sees.

☞ “This Is My G-d, and I Shall Glorify Him”

IN *SHIRAS HAYAM*, Bnei Yisrael declared, “*This* is my G-d, and I shall glorify Him” (ibid. 15:3). They perceived Heaven’s workings and were able to point their fingers and say, “*This*...”

Chazal (*Mechilta* ad loc.) comment on this:

A maidservant at the sea saw that which [the prophets] Yeshayah and Yechezkel did not see, as it says, “And in the hand of the prophets, I adopt likenesses” (*Hoshea* 12:11); and it is written, “The heavens opened, and I saw Divine visions” (*Yechezkel* 1:1). This can be compared to a mortal king who enters a province surrounded on all sides by an army of warriors, and all the people ask, “Which one of them is the king?” because he looks just like them. But when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* was revealed at the sea, none of them needed to ask, “Which is the king?” for as soon as they saw Him, they recognized Him.

How are we to understand this Midrash? The prophet Yechezkel perceived the vision of the *Maaseh Merkavah*, the Divine Chariot. He truly perceived Divine likenesses — what sublime visions could a maidservant at the sea have perceived that he didn’t perceive?

The answer is that Yechezkel saw that which was revealed to him — and these were truly sublime sights. Nonetheless, he perceived that which can be perceived. By contrast, at the splitting of the sea, Bnei Yisrael experienced faith in that which cannot be seen.

In front of them, they saw the churning waters, yet they headed straight into the water spurred by their burning faith in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Even the maidservants were on this sublime level of faith whereby a person breaks human nature, which is to believe solely in that which can be perceived. This level surpasses that of the prophets. At the *Yam Suf*, Bnei Yisrael's belief was strong enough to shatter their nature, and they therefore merited the suspension of the natural laws, which gave way before them.

☞ The Person Who Breaks His Nature Merits Nature Giving Way before Him

THE SEA SYMBOLIZES the entire range of powerful natural phenomena. It is human nature to feel fear upon witnessing the suspension of the familiar laws of cause and effect. Ordinarily, people only believe what they can see, and mighty natural phenomena inspire deathly fear.

The miracle of the splitting of the sea happened due to Bnei Yisrael getting the better of their nature and believing that the laws of nature are invested with no inherent power whatsoever, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, “Who hides behind a concealing veil,” is the Force behind all natural laws, and His power surpasses theirs. When Bnei Yisrael broke this limitation of their nature, the natural laws and phenomena gave way before them, and the sea split for them.

Indeed, when man — who is referred to by the *sefarim* as “a microcosm of the world” — undergoes his own inner splitting of the sea, the external world around him reflects this, and the huge, broad sea splits before him.

☞ Self-Sacrifice as a Precondition for Meriting Supernatural Salvation

IT IS WRITTEN, “Bnei Yisrael entered the sea on dry land” (*Shemos* 14:22), about which Chazal (*Shemos Rabbah* 21:10), wonder, “If they

were in the sea, why [is it written that] they were on dry land, and if they were on dry land, why [is it written that] they were in the sea?" In other words, "sea" by definition denotes a large body of water, as it is written, "And He called the gathering of water 'seas'" (*Bereishis* 1:10). Therefore, while the location of the sea, the seabed, can be transformed into dry land by removing the water, it is oxymoronic to speak of the sea's waters as being dry land.

Chazal resolve this issue by interpreting the *pasuk* as telling us that "the sea did not split for them until they entered it up to their noses, and then it became dry land for them." In other words, they initially entered the water, and only then did it become dry land. Why did they have to go up to their necks into the water before the miracle took place? The Sefas Emes explains that "this was the principal element of their salvation: negating all intervention in favor of following G-d's word." In other words, their salvation and the suspension of the laws of nature happened due to them attaining a level of faith that extended beyond nature and their readiness to translate that faith into actual self-sacrifice.

☞ "The Sea Saw and Fled"

IN REFERENCE TO the splitting of the *Yam Suf*, the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (114:3) says, "The sea saw and fled." What was it that the sea saw that made it flee?

The Sefas Emes explains that the sea saw Bnei Yisrael rushing into its waters amid complete self-sacrifice, inspired by and reliant upon Hashem, Who had told Moshe that Bnei Yisrael should move forward and would enter the sea on dry land (*Shemos* 14:15–16). Upon witnessing this, the sea reasoned that it should certainly act contrary to its nature and flee.

Now, self-sacrifice and rising above human nature need not necessarily involve such drastic measures as jumping into the sea and endangering one's life. It is possible to go about one's daily life amid self-sacrifice, which is often more difficult.

In this context, the Sefas Emes cites Chazal's comments in the *Midrash Tehillim* on this *pasuk* that what prompted the sea's flight was that it saw the casket containing Yosef's bones entering the water. It is written that when Potiphar's wife tried to entice Yosef to sin, "he fled and went outside" (*Bereishis* 39:12). In consequence, says the Midrash, "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, 'Let the sea *flee* before the individual who *fled* from sin.'"

The Sefas Emes explains that Yosef broke his nature and overcame his impulses. It is human nature that when assailed by desire, a person is rendered oblivious to any moral considerations. Yosef succeeded in escaping this compulsion, utterly negating his personal desire.

Even when a sea of desire churned within him, Yosef succeeded in splitting it, repulsing its power that threatened to engulf him, "sacrificing his nature" and perceiving his Creator in front of him. Even the mighty sea cannot stay in its place when confronted by an individual who has overcome his nature and split asunder the sea of desire that churns within him.

Therefore, maintains the Sefas Emes, "The splitting of the sea did not happen solely to the actual sea, but also within each and every Jew."

The *Yam Suf* split when Yisrael scaled the heights of faith — but of a different sort of faith, an inner conviction that empowers a person to overcome his inherent nature and make sacrifices.

The splitting of the *Yam Suf* was thus at once both a consequence and an impetus. It symbolized Bnei Yisrael's attainment of the ultimate in sublime faith while at the same time instilling as an inbred trait within all future generations of the Jewish People the ability to sacrifice for the sake of Heaven.

Even today, the Jewish nation can ask the sea to split in consideration of its complete and utter faith. When we say the *pasuk* in *Hallel*, "What happened to you, sea, that made you flee?" (*Tehillim* 114:5), we awaken our complete faith in Hashem and seek our salvation.

SUMMARY

A person usually believes in that which he sees, whether it is open and evident or a miracle, Divine visions, or even *Maaseh Merkavah*. All this still represents faith within nature.

There is, however, a kind of faith that rises above nature whereby a person believes in that which cannot be seen and even that which contradicts what he sees. This type of faith empowers a person to make sacrifices and overcome his essential nature to the point of sacrificing his life or desires. Either one involves him breaking his nature, and when he does so, nature no longer obstructs him. The splitting of the *Yam Suf* exemplified this type of faith and demonstrated that even a maid-servant can attain this level. This miracle instilled this level of faith in all future generations.

The path to salvation thus lies in an individual breaking his nature, for the way to achieve supernatural salvation lies in having complete faith, sacrificing, and overcoming his desires and nature.

Lag B'Omer

Fear of Heaven — Glory within Glory

☛ Fear of Heaven Instills Purity

KOHANIM ARE COMMANDED to avoid all contact with the impurity of a dead body. The Midrash asserts that the *kohen's* holiness that confers purity upon him is a consequence of fear of Heaven.

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 26:6) states:

“Say to the *kohanim*” (*Vayikra* 21:1) [i.e., the command to avoid impurity] — this is [the meaning of] the *pasuk*, “Fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever” (*Tehillim* 19:10).

R. Levi said, “On account Aharon’s awe of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, he merited a section [of Torah] being given to him that shall never depart from him, his sons, or future descendants until the end of generations. Which section is this? It is the section of impurity of the dead, as it says, ‘Say to the *kohanim*, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them that a *kohen* must not become impure through a dead person among his people.’”

Why does fear of Heaven engender purity?

☛ Closeness to G-d and Its Consequences

BY WAY OF explanation, the Sefas Emes charts the following breathtaking course:

Awe encompasses two distinct sensations:

1. Fright, concern, and fear of a Supreme Power that wields complete control over all life;
2. Retreat in the presence of sublimity — not out of fear, but out of respect. When confronted by lofty sublimity, man senses his own insignificance. His instinctive response is to bow his head and humbly withdraw within himself.

In the realm of interpersonal relations, the more one person gets to know another, the less awed he feels, and the lower the esteem in which he holds him, because weaknesses and deficiencies are revealed from up close.

Since these concepts are irrelevant to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the more a person is exposed and the closer he draws to Him, the more he comes to appreciate His tremendous sublimity and the greater his awe grows. This can be compared to a person getting closer and closer to a very high mountain — the nearer he gets to its lower slopes, the more he is in awe of its towering height and sublime majesty.

In this vein, Chazal (*Mechilta, Masechta D'shirah* 8) observe that “a flesh and blood ruler is more feared by those who are distant from him than by those who are close, but with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, it is not so. Those who are close are in greater awe of Him than those who are distant, as it says, ‘Those in His proximity are extremely agitated’ (*Tehillim* 50:3).”

The place that instills the greatest fear of Heaven is the Beis Hamikdash, where unlimited closeness to G-d can be attained. This is evident from the *pasuk*, “Three times a year, all your males shall appear” (*Shemos* 23:17), on which Chazal observe that the letters of the word *yeira'eh* (appear) can also be read *yirah* (awe), for Bnei Yisrael who ascend to the Beis Hamikdash thrice yearly heighten their fear of Heaven. Therefore, directly following our prayer “that the Beis Hamikdash should be built speedily, in our days” comes our request “and *there*, we shall serve You in awe.”

The *kohen*, who conducts the service in the Beis Hamikdash, is

constantly exposed to Hashem's holiness. His fear of Heaven is of the second type, the awe that is experienced by the person who is exposed to sublime holiness and is drawn close to Hashem. The *kohen's* awe of Heaven is similar to that of a *malach*. It is thus written regarding Aharon, "I gave life and peace to him on account of his fear of Me, and he indeed feared Me" (*Malachi* 2:5).

The place where a person feels the greatest awe is thus the place that is closest to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is the source of all life, blessing, and abundance. Complete and utter awe is thus experienced in intimate closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Who, as mentioned, is the Source of all abundance. The person who fears and is in awe of Heaven merits infinite abundance, as well as wholeness and perfection.

Indeed, Chazal (*Zohar*, Vol. II, 79a) say that fear and perfection go hand in hand, as it says, "Hashem's holy ones fear Him, for those who fear Him lack nothing" (*Tehillim* 34:10).

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 31a) interprets the *pasuk*, "The trust of your [future] times and the resilience of [your] salvations [shall lie in cultivating] wisdom and understanding; fear of Hashem is his store [upon which to rely in hard times]" (*Yeshayah* 33:6) in the following manner:

- "Trust" refers to *Zera'im*;
- "your times" refers to *Mo'eid*;
- "resilience" refers to *Nashim*;
- "salvations" refers to *Nezikin*;
- "wisdom" refers to *Kodashim*;
- "understanding" refers to *Taharos*.

Nonetheless, "Fear of Hashem is his store" — fear of Heaven is the surest way to secure the bestowal of abundance. This virtue renders a person a true receptacle worthy of receiving every possible spiritual and material treasure.

The extent of a person's fear of Heaven is a measure of the entire man, as the Gemara (*Shabbos* 31a) continues, "When a person is brought in for judgment [when his life is over], they say to him, 'Did you conduct business in good faith? Did you designate fixed times

for Torah study? Were you involved in begetting offspring? Did you anticipate salvation? Did you engage in debating [Torah] wisdom? Did you deduce new knowledge from existing knowledge?' However, even if he is able to answer all these questions in the affirmative, only if "fear of Heaven is his store," i.e., he was G-d-fearing, will his verdict be meritorious.

The Gemara likens this to a person who acquires a large quantity of wheat and stores it in an attic. Only if he mixes into the grain a small amount of *chomtin* (a type of mineral-rich soil which preserves produce and prevents spoilage) will he enjoy the fruits of his efforts. Otherwise, he would have been better off not having brought the grain to the attic, for it will spoil.

Chazal (*Shemos Rabbah* 30:14) interpret the *pasuk*, "Fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever" in a similar manner. If a person learns the entire Torah but lacks fear of Heaven, he will remain empty-handed. Fear of Heaven is the vessel that holds the blessing that results from one's Torah attainments. Without it, he is like a person who purchases merchandise but lacks a receptacle to hold it. "If you possess fear of Heaven, everything is yours, but if not, you end up with nothing. So it is with a person who learns Torah. If he possesses fear of Heaven, everything is his, as it says, 'And the trust of your times... fear of Hashem is his store.'"

Closeness to Hashem instills fear of Heaven, and the person who is close to Him merits the bestowal of His abundance, for He is the source of fullness and peace.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is referred to as "making peace on high" (*Iyov* 25:2), and the word *shalom* (peace) is one of His names. *Shalom* denotes a state of completion and perfection, for when there is peace, a wide range of varied individuals and factors, some of which are ordinarily antagonistic to one another, are able to coexist harmoniously.

Since the *kohen* attains closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in the Beis Hamikdash, which instills fear of Heaven in him, he also attains peace.

Shalom is indeed the salient characteristic of Aharon Hakohen,

as is evident from the Mishnah (*Avos* 1:12), "Hillel would say, 'Be one of the disciples of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people, and drawing them close to Torah.'"

The city where the *Shechinah* rests and closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* can be attained is called Yerushalayim, incorporating the words *yirah* and *shalom*.

In the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 56:10), we find: "Avraham called the site of the [future] Beis Hamikdash "Yirah," as it says, 'Avraham named that place *Hashem yireh*' (*Bereishis* 22:14), whereas Shem named it "Shalem," as it says, "And Malkitzedek (whom Chazal identify as Shem), king of Shalem" (ibid. 14:18). *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, 'I shall call it Yerushalayim, as they both called it: Yirah-Shalem — Yerushalayim.'"

Shabbos is a time of special closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and thus on Shabbos, too, a person can attain fear of Heaven in extra measure. The *Yerushalmi* (*Demai* 4:1) states accordingly that "even an *am ha'aretz* is in awe of Shabbos." Since closeness to Hashem engenders fullness and peace, the conclusion of the *Hashkiveinu* blessing of Friday night Maariv contains the words, "Who spreads a covering of peace upon us," and on Shabbos, we greet one another with the greeting "*Shabbat shalom*."

We even find it written in the *Zohar* (Vol. II, 88b) that "all faith is concentrated in Shabbos, [and therefore,] a person receives an additional soul, a sublime soul, a soul encompassing every perfection, akin to the World to Come. [The day] is therefore known as Shabbos. What is Shabbos? It is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s name of Shabbos, a name that is perfect and complete in its every aspect."

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the source of life. The *kohen*, who is close to Him, must therefore distance himself from the dead and is commanded, "He shall not become impure for a dead body."

By virtue of his fear of Heaven and closeness to Hashem, the *kohen* merits purity. He not only maintains his own purity, but channels it to the entire Jewish nation, for all their purification is placed by the Torah under the *kohen*'s jurisdiction.

☞ Aharon Symbolizes the Trait of Grandeur

THE SEVEN-WEEK PERIOD of counting the *omer* is given to Yisrael for the purpose of refining and purifying their souls' seven elemental traits as they make the annual spiritual journey from departing Egypt (on Pesach) to the giving of the Torah (on Shavuot).

Part of the prayer that is said each night after counting the *omer* reads:

Master of the world, You have commanded us through Your servant Moshe to count the *omer* in order to purify us from our outer husks and our impurities, as You have written in Your Torah, "From the day after the rest day [of Pesach], from the day you bring the *omer* that is waved, you shall count for yourselves seven complete weeks. You shall count up to the day after the seventh week, fifty days..." (*Vayikra* 23:15–16) — so that the souls of Your people, Yisrael, should be purified from their foulness.

When these elemental soul traits are assigned numbers, the fifth is *hod*, grandeur, corresponding to Aharon Hakohen.

During the first week, which corresponds to Avraham, the trait of kindness — with which he is identified, as it says, "Kindness to Avraham" (*Michah* 7:20) — is rectified; the second week corresponds to Yitzchak, whose trait is spiritual strength or might; the third week corresponds to Yaakov, whose trait is splendor; the fourth week corresponds to Moshe, whose trait is eternity (e.g., the Torah's eternity); the fifth week corresponds to Aharon, whose trait is grandeur.

In light of all the above, this is readily understandable, for Aharon draws his trait from his closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in the Beis Hamikdash and from the fear of Heaven that he attains due to his exposure to Heaven's sublime exaltedness, which bespeaks *hadar* (beauty) and *hod* (grandeur).

☞ *Hod She'b'hod*, the Grandeur of Grandeur

EACH OF THESE seven traits itself comprises seven parts, representing the same seven traits of kindness (*chesed*), strength (*gevurah*),

splendor (*tiferes*), eternity (*netzach*), grandeur (*hod*), foundation (*yesod*), and royalty (*malchus*). The *omer* period is therefore not only divided into seven weeks, each of which corresponds to one trait, but each week is subdivided between these seven traits, one day for each of them. Each day is devoted to rectifying another trait, so that, for example, on the third day (*tiferes*) of the second week (*gevurah*) we say, “May it be Your will that what I have damaged in the *sefirah* of *tiferes she'b'gevurah*, splendor of strength, be repaired.”

Following this pattern, on the fifth day of every week, grandeur is repaired, and the fifth day of the fifth week is the *sefirah* of *hod she'b'hod*, the grandeur of grandeur.

This day is thus the ultimate combination of Aharon Hakohen's trait and of all the associated virtues; this day symbolizes complete and utter closeness to Hashem, purity, perfection, and fear of Heaven.

☞ Lag B'omer, the Thirty-Third Day of the Omer

THE FIFTH DAY of the fifth week of the *omer* period is thus the thirty third day — Lag B'omer (the word *lag* simply comprising the letters *lamed* and *gimel*, whose *gematria* is thirty-three).

The trait of *hod she'b'hod*, the ultimate in grandeur, representing utter and complete closeness to Hashem, is thus always associated with Lag B'omer. On this day, Aharon's salient characteristic reaches its fullest expression: complete closeness to Hashem and the ability to enter into the holiest chamber, dwelling in the Beis Hamikdash and basking in Divine exaltedness and the fear of Heaven that results.

This enables us to understand a remark that the Sefas Emes quotes from his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim* that on Lag B'omer, it is possible to attain fear of Heaven. The Sefas Emes comments on this, “This is possibly for the above reason, because Aharon Hakohen assists in attaining ‘fear of Heaven [which] is pure.’”

SUMMARY

On Lag B'omer, the level of *hod she'b'hod*, ultimate grandeur, representing man's ability to experience Heaven's exaltedness and to draw from it pure fear of Heaven, can be attained.

This ultimate degree of closeness to Hashem is a wellspring of purity, peace, perfection, and fear of Heaven, which is the source of all blessing and the only vessel capable of containing the bounties of spiritual and material blessing that man can merit.

This is a very great and holy day — indeed, *hod she'b'hod*.

Shavuos

Bikkurim, Shavuos, and Torah's Life-Giving Power

☞ What Is the Connection between *Bikkurim* and the Giving of the Torah?

THE FESTIVAL OF the giving of the Torah is referred to in the Torah by two names: Shavuos and *Yom Habikkurim*. The Torah writes, “And on the day of *bikkurim*, when you bring a new meal offering to Hashem, on your [festival of] weeks, you shall have a designated [day of] holiness, and you must not do any work for livelihood” (*Bamidbar* 28:26).

We find similarly in *parshas Emor*, when the Torah lists all the festivals of the year:

From the first day after the [first] rest day of Pesach, from the day you bring the *omer* that is waved, you shall count for yourselves seven complete weeks. You shall count up to the day after the seventh week, fifty days, and then offer a new meal offering before Hashem. From [the land] where you live, you shall bring bread to be waved, two [loaves made of] two tenths [of an *eflah*] of fine-quality wheat flour baked as leavened bread as *bikkurim* to Hashem. (*Vayikra* 23:15–17)

What is the connection between the giving of the Torah and *bikkurim*? And how are the counting of the seven weeks of the *omer* or the *bikkurim* relevant to the day's character and the festival's essence?

☛ The Giving of the Torah Represents the Uncovering of the World's Starting Point

TO EXPLAIN THE connection of the festival's identity as the day of *bik-kurim* with the giving of the Torah, the Sefas Emes charts the following line of thought: *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world with ten utterances, recorded in the opening *pesukim* of *parshas Bereishis*, and also with the *Aseres Hadibros*. Each creature thus traces its fundamental origin to the Torah, which is the root from whence it ultimately derives life. This explains Chazal's comment in the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1): "The Torah said, '*Bereishis bara Elokim* (In the beginning, G-d created),' for *reishis* (beginning) refers to Torah, as it says, 'Hashem acquired me at the beginning of His path' (*Mishlei* 8:22)." In other words, creation took place through *reishis*, which refers to Torah.

This Divine power that is the foundation of creation renews and sustains creation on an ongoing basis (as we have explained in our essay on *parshas Yisro*).

The basis of each creature's constant renewal and continued existence is also rooted in the Torah. Creation's inner life force springs from the Torah. On the words of the *Yotzer* blessing of Shacharis, "Who renews the work of creation every day, constantly, in His goodness," Chazal explain that "in His goodness" refers to Torah, through which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* absolute and utter good is discernible.

Although Torah preceded the world and is the means by which the world was created, this aspect of creation remained hidden until the giving of the Torah. The very word *olam* (world), which is related to *ne'elam* (hidden), expresses this idea.

The world was created through ten utterances. The word *maamar* (utterance) denotes something hidden. We thus find in the *Zohar* (Vol. I, 234b) that *amirah*, saying or uttering, denotes something said in private, as in the *pasuk*, "You will say in your heart" (*Yeshayah* 49:21). The *Zohar* explains similarly that the difference between *amirah* (saying softly) and *dibbur* (speaking up) is that the former doesn't require raising one's voice, whereas the latter calls for speaking up and declaring

something in a manner that all will hear. *Dibbur* thus represents openness and revelation, in which sense it is used in the *pesukim*, “*Devar melech shilton*, The king’s word is rule” (*Koheles* 8:4) and “*Yadbeir amim tachteinu*, He will place nations under our control” (*Tehillim* 47:4).

With the giving of the Torah, the ten utterances of creation became (i.e., were repeated as) the *Aseres Hadibros*, the ten declarations, which were now apparent and revealed.

When the Torah was given, this took place openly, revealed before all of Yisrael. In fact, as the Sefas Emes says, “The principal feature of our acceptance of Torah was Torah’s revelation,” about which it is written, “Hashem spoke to you face to face” (*Devarim* 5:4).

Onkelos renders the *pasuk*’s words, “Hashem descended upon Har Sinai” (*Shemos* 19:20) as, “Hashem was revealed,” for the entire world now became filled with Hashem’s glory, which had been hidden until the giving of the Torah, whereupon it became apparent.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself became revealed to His people along with the Torah. It suddenly became clear to them that Torah sustains and renews everything in the world. With the giving of the Torah, it became clear that nature has no separate existence or power outside the power it derives from Torah, which represents Hashem’s word giving life to and ruling over everything.

Thus, on the day the Torah was given, the world’s *reishis*, its point of origin which sustains it, became apparent.

It is now self-evident why this great day is referred to as the day of *bikkurim* — *bikkurim* being related to *bechor* (firstborn) or referring to *bikkurim* proper (first fruits) — for this is the day of the *bikkur* (whose root is *beis-kaf-reish*), the birth or inception of all creation and its subsequent endurance.

☞ The Seven Weeks of the Omer

Mark a Process of Deepening Faith

THE DAY OF the giving of the Torah marks the culmination of the seven-week process — from leaving Egypt until receiving the Torah — of

inner preparation that Bnei Yisrael undergo each year. By the end of this refining process, a person attains the awareness of every creature's subjection to direct Heavenly supervision. This recognition is the inevitable climax of three stages of ever-deepening faith that:

1. Every single thing, from the beginning of creation until its conclusion, was created *ex nihilo* through Hashem's utterance.
2. Without this Divine utterance that continues to reverberate, thereby sustaining all matter, everything would return instantly to its former state. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* therefore not only created it all to begin with, but also sustains everything in His world every moment anew; without His input, it would all revert to nothingness. Therefore, "there is none besides Him" (*Devarim* 4:35) — even the *yetzer hara* cannot endure without Hashem's utterance that supports and sustains it.
3. Since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sustains each and every thing in each and every moment, it is self-evident that He also supervises whatever happens to every thing, for better or worse.

This is the source of our belief in individualized Providence.

The Two Loaves

THE SPECIAL SACRIFICE offered on Shavuot centers upon the two loaves that are waved before Hashem. These two loaves symbolize the existence of two types of food: there is bread that descends from heaven, like the *mann* which descended while Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, and there is bread that man brings forth from the ground. The *Chiddushei HaRim* explains further that the first type of bread is bestowed by Heaven through Hashem's kindness, independently of man's deeds, whereas "bread from the ground" depends on man's deeds — receiving it is wholly dependent on the quality of his deeds. The Torah requires that both of these loaves be waved together as an indication that even that which man appears to bring forth from

the ground results from the Divine providence that supports and sustains him at every moment.

☛ Explaining the Festival's

Dual Name and Its Central Message

THE FESTIVAL OF the giving of the Torah thus marks the revelation of Hashem's providence in the world, making it clear that the giving of the Torah revealed the starting point of all existence. As we have explained, this accounts for the festival's name of the day of *bikkurim*.

The Sefas Emes explains further that the name "Shavuot" is also aligned with this very reason, for besides meaning "weeks," it alludes to the word *shavuah*, an oath, every Jew being "bound by an oath [to keep the Torah] since Har Sinai."

Each individual's obligation to observe the Torah has the status of an oath. This is clear from the Gemara (*Nedarim* 8a), which notes that a person is allowed to take an oath to fulfill mitzvos, for it is written, "I have sworn and shall follow through [on that oath] to observe the laws of Your righteousness" (*Tehillim* 119:106). However, the Gemara questions what extra obligation such an oath imposes, since a person is already "bound by an oath since Har Sinai" to keep the Torah. Its response is that while such an oath indeed doesn't add anything to his existing obligations to fulfill the mitzvos, it has the effect of further spurring him to fulfill them.

What is the nature of this oath that "binds us since Har Sinai"?

☛ The Nature of the Oath

THE SEFAS EMES elucidates the nature of this oath as follows: The Jewish people draw their vitality from the Torah. But this is not merely because Hashem sustains everything in creation through His word, which is Torah; for the Jewish nation, there is an additional, even more compelling reason. The Torah contains a special quality that obligates Yisrael to observe it, because the root of their very

existence depends on doing so. This is a consequence of something that happened at the time they received the Torah.

Chazal tell us that due to the sublime nature of the occasion and the Divine revelations that they witnessed upon receiving the Torah, the people's souls departed from their bodies. The Divine revelation was too "intense" for them to perceive while remaining alive. Accordingly, the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 29:4) tells us:

When they came to Sinai and He [*Hakadosh Baruch Hu*] was revealed to them, their souls flew out of their bodies when He spoke to them, as it says, "My soul departed when He spoke" (*Shir Hashirim* 5:6). However, the Torah requested from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that He have mercy on them, saying: "Is there [such a thing as] a king who marries off his daughter but kills his family? [How can it be that] the entire world is rejoicing [because the Torah was given], but Your children are dying?" Their souls immediately returned, as it says, "Hashem's Torah is perfect, restorative for the soul" (*Tehillim* 19:8).

Yisrael thus live in merit of the Torah's intervention on their behalf. In the plainest sense, they owe their very lives to the Torah, for had the Torah not asked that their souls be restored to them, they would no longer exist.

A person who takes an oath stakes his life on the truth of his oath. By taking an oath to do something, he focuses all his energies and vitality on the object of his oath.

Since Torah is the basis of the Jewish people's entire existence, it follows that observing it assumes the character of an oath that is already binding upon us.

☞ "Hashem's Torah Is Perfect, Restorative for the Soul"

THE SEFAS EMES explains that since even man's physical life — not just his spiritual life — is dependent upon the Torah, and without Torah, there is no basis for his existence, his physical aspect is thus also imbued with holiness. This is how he understands the *pasuk*, "Hashem's Torah is perfect, restorative for the soul." Perfection is a

function of a thing being complete and whole. Torah's perfection is evident from the fact that it relates to man's entirety, including his physical aspect, since man owes his life to it. Torah is thus able to restore the souls of Yisrael to their source, for even their physical aspect, which is distant from spirituality, draws its vitality from the holy Torah.

This affords us insight into Chazal's statement (*Kiddushin* 30b), "I created the *yetzer hara*; I created Torah as its antidote." Torah exerts an effect on a person's physical aspect as well, which also exists solely in the Torah's merit. Indeed, as the Sefas Emes writes, "Torah is invested with the power to restore and bring back a person's soul and [realign his] desire [with holiness], even if he is already drawn to the words of the *yetzer hara*. This is the meaning of the *pasuk*'s words, 'restorative for the soul.'"

☞ Upon Receiving the Torah, "For Hashem" and "For You" Became One and the Same

THE GEMARA (*PESACHIM* 68b) records a discussion regarding the manner in which the festivals should be celebrated:

One *pasuk* says, "On the seventh day [of Pesach, there] shall be *atzeres*, a day of restriction, [dedicated to] Hashem, your G-d" (*Devarim* 16:8), while another *pasuk* says, "The eighth day shall be *atzeres*, a day of restriction, for you" (*Bamidbar* 29:35). R. Eliezer's opinion is that [the festivals are to be] either wholly for Hashem (i.e., devoted to spiritual pursuits) or wholly for you (i.e., engaged in physical enjoyment). In R. Yehoshua's opinion, on the other hand, each festival day should be split: half for Hashem, and half for you. The Gemara later says, "All agree that on *Atzeres* (i.e., Shavuot), there must also be 'for you,' for it is the day on which the Torah was given."

How are we to understand this statement? Why is it that of all the festivals, precisely regarding the day upon which we received a

spiritual and holy Torah, all are in agreement that it must be partially devoted to physical celebration through food and drink?

According to the Sefas Emes, this is perfectly logical. Torah exerts an effect upon man's physical aspect as well, for he lives and endures in its merit.

In the words of the Sefas Emes, "[Every year] on *Atzeres*, [the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, which openly revealed that all of creation is rooted and sourced in the Torah,] every creature and all of nature are annulled (i.e., their separateness from Torah recedes and fades), and they are drawn to the source of their vitality."

The holiness that imbued us when we received the Torah is complete and perfect, reaching both our aspect that is devoted to Hashem and that aspect of us that is "for you" — both are suffused with Torah's holiness.

SUMMARY

The day the Torah was given was the day when Hashem's guidance of His world became apparent, with the constant renewal and sustaining of everything in it through Torah. It was the day when the world's Divine beginning was revealed, and it is therefore referred to as the festival of *bikkurim*. It is also referred to as Shavuos in reference to the oath that binds us to keep the Torah ever since we stood at Har Sinai. Indeed, we live in Torah's merit, and it is Torah that sustains both our spiritual and physical aspects. With the giving of the Torah, we received new life in every sense, both spiritual and physical. Torah thus has the power to imbue holiness even into a person's physical life, restoring him to his ultimate root and uniting the part of him that is concerned with his own mundane needs with that part of him that is devoted wholly to Hashem.

Other Works by the Author

(Hebrew and English)

- גניבה וגזלה – פרקי יסוד, הוצאת מוסד הרב קוק, תשס"ב.
- עליו הראיה, פלדהיים, תשפ"ה.
- נהגה – שערים בלמדנות בדרכי הגרב"מ אזרחי זצ"ל, פלדהיים, תשפ"ה
- מאמרי אברהם – פרקים בנושאים למדניים, תשמ"ג.
- אב בדעת – מאמרים במגוון נושאים תורניים, הוצאת שו"ב, תשע"ג.
- רז-יה – סוגיות מודרניות בהלכה, הוצאת שו"ב, תשע"ז.
- פמיניזם ויהדות הוצאת ידיעות אחרונות, תשס"א.
- ספיריטואליזם ויהדות, סדרת אוניברסיטה משודרת, הוצאת משרד הביטחון, תשנ"ו.
- שיקול דעת ביחסי הלכה ומדע, הוצאת מחשבות, תשנ"ב.
- ביטחון והשתדלות, פלדהיים, תשס"ז. זכה בפרס ירושלים לספרות והגות לשנת תשס"ח.
- החיים בהלכה – עקרונות יסוד ומקרי גבול, פלדהיים, תש"ע. זכה בפרס ר"ג לשנת תשע"ד.
- עיוני תפילה, פלדהיים, תשע"ד.
- עשות משפט, פלדהיים, תשע"ז.
- Faith in G-d versus Human Effort, פלדהיים, תשע"ג.
- Insights into Tefilah – The Essence of Prayer, פלדהיים, תשע"ט
- By the Light of the Maharal, פלדהיים, תשפ"ג.

מן האור הגדול

- לאור המהר"ל, פלדהיים, מהדורה שניה מורחבת, תש"פ.
- לאור קדושת לוי, פלדהיים, תשע"ט. מהדורה שניה מורחבת, תש"פ.
- לאור רבי צדוק הכהן, פלדהיים, תשפ"א.
- לאור החיים, פלדהיים, תשפ"א.
- לאור שפת אמת, פלדהיים, תשפ"ב.
- לאור שם משמאל, פלדהיים, תשפ"ג.
- לאור תפארת שלמה, פלדהיים, תשפ"ג.
- לאור ימים נוראים, פלדהיים, תשפ"ג.
- לאור נעם אלימלך, פלדהיים, תשפ"ד.
- לאור בת עין, פלדהיים, תשפ"ה.
- לאור המגיד ממזריץ', פלדהיים, תשפ"ה.

ספרים משפטיים

- מיסוי מוסדות ללא כוונת רווח (מס הכנסה ומע"מ), תשנ"ב.
- חברות ממשלתיות – תחולת המשפט המנהלי, הוצאת בורסי, תשנ"ה.
- ריבית הסכמית, הוצאת שו"ב, תשנ"ח.
- דיני הלוואות – הגנה על הלווה, בשיתוף עם פרופ' ברק מדינה, הוצאת בורסי, תש"ס.
- התייגות שירות בשירות על ידי תאגיד בנקאי, עם בועז אדלשטיין, הוצאת שו"ב, תשס"א.
- ערבות בנקאית, הוצאת שו"ב, מהדורה שניה מורחבת, תשע"א.
- דיני קניין – פרקי יסוד, הוצאת לשכת עורכי הדין, תשע"ז; דיני קניין – פרקי יסוד מהדורה שניה, הוצאת נבו, תשפ"א; דיני קניין – פרקי יסוד מהדורה שלישית, הוצאת נבו, תשפ"ד.

מדיה אונליין

- לצפייה ועיון בספרי המחבר: <http://aviweinrothbooks.com>
- פודקאסט "לאורם" על גדולי החסידות וההגות <https://open.spotify.com/show/4fkxoN08sumiyBaAikr9ju>
- לשמיעת שיעורים מחכמתו של הגרב"מ אזרחי זצ"ל <https://www2.kolhalashon.com/#/regularSite/ravs/914100?urlFilters=25:403409%7C&orderBy=9>