

**DIVREY YA'AKOV**  
**PIRKEY MACHSHAVA**

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## CLOSENESS TO HASHEM

### CHAPTER 1

#### THE STRONG DESIRE WITHIN EVERY JEW TO SERVE HASHEM

1. There exists within every Jew a deep inner desire to come close to Hashem. There are those who feel this very often and there are those who feel this less, yet the inner source for this resides within every Jew.
2. The medrash writes, "When the Holy Temple was being destroyed, the conquering gentiles wanted the first person to enter the Temple and plunder it be a Jew (seemingly to denigrate them even more). A Jew by the name of Yosef Meshisa took the task upon himself, entered the Holy Temple and brought out the menorah. The gentiles then asked him to re-enter and bring out another item. However this time he refused and said, "Is it not sufficient that I angered my Creator once, that I should anger him again". The gentiles tried to convince him with substantial sums of money and high positions; and then threatened him with punishments and death, but he would not give in. In the end they gave him a terrible death with an axe. While they were killing him he was shouting, but not because of the terrible pain, rather he cried out, 'Woe is to me that I angered my Creator, woe is to me that I angered my Creator.'"
3. We ask the question, where did this Jew find the strength to make such a turnaround in one short instant? Just one moment earlier he had agreed to enter the Holy Temple and plunder it, a

terrible action in itself, and especially at such a difficult time for the Jewish nation. The temple was being destroyed, so many people killed, captured, wounded, starving and suffering; and at such a time to be so treacherous and enter the holiest place of the nation and plunder it! Still, one moment later he changed himself, reaching the lofty level of being killed for the sake of the glorification of Hashem's name. And even more, at the time of his death he didn't cry out due to the pain, but because he had angered his Creator!

4. The answer is that within every Jew lies a holy soul which wants only to do the will of Hashem with all its might. But, there are many coverings on the soul, which sometimes have their own desires, affecting the actions of a person. This is especially true if these urges are influenced by an environment which does not follow the way of Hashem. Therefore even this Jew, who stooped so low as to enter the Holy Temple and plunder it, could in one moment affect a complete turn around. Deep within him he had a holy soul whose desire was only to serve Hashem - at any cost.

5. The work of every Jew is to work on himself so that the sacred part within him affect his actions and behavior in order that he always go in the ways of Hashem.

6. There are a few ways that a person can activate this. We will bring two of the main ways here. The first is that a person must know the greatness of the goodness hidden within him, and also of his great inner ability to reach high levels in serving Hashem. The second way is that a person must know the profound results of his every action, word, intention, thought or desire for good.

7. There is no doubt that if every Jew were to recognize these two strengths within him, in their entirety, this knowledge alone would bring him enormous strength. He would withstand all tests and serve his Creator with all his might, day and night. It could also be that he would manage to avoid the spiritual pitfalls of this world. However it is usually not within our power to fully recognize our resources. Still it follows that the more a person knows about his abilities, and tries to strengthen them, his desire to serve his Creator will intensify and increase.

CHAPTER TWO

**“HASHEM, TORAH AND THE JEWISH NATION ARE ALL ONE.”**

**THE MAKE UP OF THE JEWISH SOUL**

1. The RamChal in his book ‘Adir Bamorom’ and also in the ‘Nefesh Hachaim’ (4:11), and many other books bring the quote from the ‘Zohar’; “The Holy One Blessed Be He, Torah and Yisrael are all one, since Hashem, the Torah and the Jewish nation are the same thing”. [This expression has not been found in the Zohar - it seems that they intended to explain a similar expression written in the Zohar.]
2. These words require explanation. How can it be possible to say this? Hashem has neither body nor body form; He fills and rotates all the worlds. The Torah is the holy Torah scroll and Yisrael are human beings. How is it therefore possible to say that they are all the same thing?
3. A preface is essential here to explain this matter. Man is comprised of body and soul. Everyone knows and feels what the body is. Similarly everyone knows intuitively that the soul exists within the body, since the difference between a live and a dead person is quite obvious, still it is extremely difficult to ultimately define what the soul is. We can explain the little that we know about the soul with a parable of sun rays extending from the sun, their whole existence sourced in the sun. Were a person to place a board in the middle of the sun beam, isolating it from its source, the sun, it would cease to shine beyond the

board (at least those parts which cannot travel through the board, meaning all those which are visible to the eye). This is true also of a Jewish soul. The soul extends from Hashem (obviously the parable and it's moral are completely different, since the actual distance between the soul and The Creator is immeasurable and totally incomparable to the much smaller distance between the sun and it's rays. The purpose of the parable is simply to illustrate that the ray's entire existence is drawn from this source.) In truth, everything in the world receives its existence from Hashem and although this is not the place to speak lengthily about this, the soul of a Jew is more directly sourced in Hashem and can feel its connection more.

4. Let us return to our topic, to explain the aforementioned saying, that Hashem, the Torah and the Jewish nation are all one thing. It means that the souls of the Jewish nation are a bounty of spiritual light. (In Kabbalistic books, spiritual bounty is always referred to with expressions of shining or light, one of the reasons being that in the physical world, the most spiritual thing is light and it is also something completely good. There are of course many other deeper reasons for the use of this expression which shortage of space does not permit us to bring here.) This goodness extends from Hashem himself, who is the Source of the light. This explains how Hashem and the Jewish nation can be one thing - one is the source and the other is the result.

5. To understand how the Torah is one with Hashem and the Jewish nation we need to know a basic principle brought in many places in Chazal. The gemarah in Sanhedrin 99 explains on the verse; "A soul labors, the labor is for him" [to clarify the double expression of labor in the verse] 'He works in this area

and the Torah works for him in another area'. Rashi explains that when a person labors over Torah, the Torah requests that Hashem help him understand Torah. Clearly Torah is not just a physical scroll that we have here in this world, but the Torah exists spiritually in the higher worlds and is able to request things of Hashem (a well known comparison to this is the spiritual existence of angels).

6. According to this, we can now understand how the Torah is also one with Hashem and Yisrael. Hashem structured the world in a way that the bounty coming from Him to the Jewish soul, is carried via the spiritual existence of Torah, as the bounty is created within it. The formation of the souls of Yisrael is brought about and carried via the beam of the holy Torah which is also a type of extension of Hashem (as explained in the words of the Ramchal in his book, 'Adir Bamorom', described here in a general way, without full detail).

7. There is an additional point here. There is a strong inner longing within the soul of every human being is to have a greater connection with its source, and receive more goodness and strength for the soul. The way to merit this, according to the aforementioned saying, is to increase one's commitment to Torah, including all areas of the service of Hashem detailed in the Torah. These includes keeping mitzvot, distancing oneself from sin between man and Hashem and between man and his fellow man, and also strengthening oneself in prayer. This will increase one's spiritual bounty and as a result, the higher bounty will be stimulated to shine on him through the light of Torah.

8. When a person thinks properly about these things, they will awaken a great desire in his heart to study Torah and fulfill the will of Hashem in all areas. Through this his soul becomes connected to its source and receives additional light similar to the light his soul already has. This is really what the soul longs for, more than all other desires of this world. We see this in Mesillat Yesharim (chapter 1), “The soul is way above all, its true enjoyment is only to bask in the light of Hashem’s face.”

**CHAPTER THREE**

**HOW HASHEM CONSTANTLY PERPETUATES THE  
WHOLE WORLD AND INTEGRATING THIS KNOWLEDGE  
INTO ONE'S SERVICE OF HASHEM**

1. "In the beginning the Lord created the heavens and the earth". There are many fundamental differences between Hashem creating the world and a person forming an item. One of these differences is that Hashem created the entire world from absolutely nothing, whereas a person can only produce an item from something that already exists, by cutting and joining things together. Another difference is that when a person produces an item, the moment that the production process is completed, the item stands independent of its producer. In contrast, Hashem recreates the whole world at every moment, just as He did when He originally created the world. If He were to choose to destroy the world, He would not need to use something to destroy it; rather it would be enough to simply cease recreating the world. The Nefesh Hachaim deals with this at length (shaar 1 and 3).

2. He writes (shaar 1: chapter 2) that the way of Hashem is different to the ways of man. A person who builds a building from wood does not create and generate the wood from his energy, rather he simply takes the pre-existing wood and puts them in a specific building order. When everything is organized the way he wants it to be, he can forget about the building and still it will not cease to exist. However, Hashem does as he did at the creation of the world. He created and produced everything

from absolutely nothing with His infinite strength and abundant light. Were Hashem to deny the world His energy and bounty for even one moment, it would instantly return to nothingness and emptiness. In shaar 3: chapter 11, the Nefesh Hachaim writes that this is one of the basic principles of belief in Hashem; every Jew must fix in his heart that Hashem is the true and only power, that He is the soul, the life provider and source of every person and creation, and all forces and worlds.

3. In shaar 3: chapter 11, he elaborates further that the whole world was formed by the command of Hashem, as recorded in parshat Bereishit. For each thing Hashem said that it would be, and so it was. The word of Hashem is a real spiritual entity with power to generate the entire existence of the world. He explains further that the spiritual reality of Hashem's word is eternal and does not end with the days of creation. These continuously existing commands sustain and support everything in the world, like the living soul of all existence.

4. He also writes on the verse in Yeshayahu (40:5), "And all flesh together will see that the mouth of Hashem has spoken". "The verse refers to the future time when Hashem's supervision will be so clear, until we merit literally seeing with our physical eyes, how the word of Hashem is spread out over every thing sustaining it" - see the text inside for his full essay.

5. He adds that there was already a sample glimpse of this concept at Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Torah. This is referred to in the verse in Parshat Yitro (20:18), "And all the people saw the sounds" [The simple meaning here is the sounds which occurred uniquely at the Mt. Sinai event. But there are many

ways and perceptions of the Torah, as is clear from Chazal, and there are many understandings to every verse given at Sinai. There are the simple meanings, and the meanings which are hinted to within the words, that which can be expounded from it, and the hidden secrets of it]. Here the sounds refer to the sounds of the word of Hashem at the time of the creation of the world, meaning that they merited seeing how this voice is the soul of the creation, sustaining it in its entirety. See how this is explained later in the chapter of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

6. This knowledge greatly enables a person to feel how he is constantly close to Hashem. Through thinking and contemplating about this, a person can come to see the hand of Hashem and its influences at every moment and in every area. He should not however feel that it is sufficient to study this concept just once, rather the more he repeats it to himself and regulates his thoughts towards it, so too will the results increase and he will come to feel closeness to Hashem.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF TORAH STUDY AND MITZVOT IN THE UPPER WORLDS, THE BENEFITS FOR THE JEWISH NATION AND HOW A PERSON MUST AWAKEN HIMSELF TO SERVE HASHEM, THEREBY HELPING THE JEWISH PEOPLE

1. It is clear from the holy Zohar and other Kabbalistic books that apart from our world, Hashem created many countless multitudes of worlds and higher spiritual energies. Through the mitzvot and good deeds of the Jewish nation, these worlds are built up and established, resulting in a great pouring of spiritual and physical goodness to the entire Jewish nation. On the other hand, by not learning Torah and through other transgressions, the opposite of this is achieved.
2. The fact that there are higher worlds is a basic principle of Torat HaKabbalah. The state of our world and the state of the upper worlds are interdependent. As mentioned earlier, the state of the upper worlds is determined by our deeds in this world. So too the condition of the upper worlds determines the state of this world.
3. In the Nefesh Hachaim (shaar 1: chapter 4) we see that the destruction of the Holy Temple followed this pattern too. Through the bad deeds of the Jewish nation, the Holy Temple of the higher spiritual worlds was destroyed, and since the higher Holy Temple was destroyed due to our transgressions, the gentiles were able to wield their power over the Holy Temple on temple mount and destroy it.

4. The same is true of the exile of the nation from their homeland, with the land of Israel left in the hands of gentiles. It was the sinning of Yisrael which blemished the upper spheres corresponding to the holiness of the land of Israel. The land was then easily delivered into the hands of the gentiles.

5. The Nefesh Hachaim continues (shaar 1: chapter 4) and says; “This is the power of the Torah. A Jewish person should never say, ‘What am I? What strength do I have to achieve anything with my lowly actions?’ Rather he should know, understand and implant in his mind and heart, that every detail of his actions, words and thoughts at every moment are never destroyed. As much as he multiplies his actions and increases and elevates them, so too each one will rise towards its roots, fulfilling its purpose in the upper higher realms, honing the lofty lights.” We see that a person must give thought to fully preserving his strengths for learning Torah and keeping mitzvot, since every mitzvah that he does achieves incredible things for the good of all the worlds.

6. On the other hand, “... in truth, when a wise person pays attention to his deeds which are not so good, and he understands this reality, his heart will quiver inside him with a great trembling, when he sees how easily a slight transgression, Hashem forbid, can corrupt and destroy.”

7. I once heard a parable for this. A person sitting in a missile control room can press a button and shoot a missile injuring and killing the enemy, thereby saving his whole country. Alternatively, he could mistakenly press an incorrect button and kill some of his own countrymen. When people come to either

praise him for his heroic deeds or to accuse him for his unscrupulous actions, he reasons, "What have I done? I simply pressed a button!" His mistake is that he doesn't realize that it is no ordinary button; rather it is fully installed and programmed in a way that through a tiny action one can produce terrible results.

8. Accordingly, when a person is busy with Torah he helps the entire Jewish nation; he secures the upper worlds causing an increase in the outpouring of blessing and success for all of Yisrael. Sometimes a person learns for an hour and when he finishes he feels that he didn't really do enough in this hour. The truth is who knows what salvation he succeeded in bringing to the Jews with this hour of learning? It is even possible that he saved many Jews from death, or perhaps many ill people were healed in his merit. This is not necessarily just from studying of Torah, it is the same with every mitzvah that a person does. However the power of Torah study is especially great, as Chazal say in the mishna in massechet Peah, "... and the study of Torah is equal to all of them." Apart from learning Torah and performing mitzvot, there is also abstaining from transgressions. A person thus helps the entire Jewish nation. [See the Nefesh Hachaim, shaar four from chapter eleven until the end of the shaar where he explains extensively about this topic as he does in the earlier chapters of the book.]

9. It says in massechet Yevamot that compassion and loving kindness are special attributes of the Jewish nation. Within every Jew lie feelings of great compassion for those who are suffering, and also a great desire to help them. Therefore, when a person stands uncertain whether to use the next hour for the study of

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Torah or to waste it doing something else, even if he does not merit to have the conviction to decide to learn because of the obligation to learn Torah, he can still try to decide in favor Torah study due to his desire to help his suffering brethren. His learning can aid them. Even though he cannot know who he has helped and which type of deliverance he brought about, still the words of Chazal are absolutely true. He has definitely benefited the Jewish nation.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**THE GIVING OF TORAH AT MT. SINAI.**

**THE RESULTS OF EVERY HOUR A JEW LEARNS THE  
HOLY TORAH, AND FEELINGS OF CLOSENESS TO  
HASHEM RESULTING FROM TORAH STUDY  
[INCLUDING SOME ASPECTS OF BELIEF IN HASHEM]**

1. The giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai is described at length in the Torah in parshat Yitro - see the text inside for full detail. It is impossible to elaborate here about this; however we will, with Hashem's help, explain one point of the Mt. Sinai event focused upon in many of our holy books. We will also bring what there is to learn from it regarding the study of Torah, and in general in the service of Hashem
2. The purpose of this book is not to bring proofs about belief in Hashem, rather to explicate ways of coming close to serving Hashem. Still the topic of this chapter is about the Mt. Sinai event, so we will elucidate here a little of what there is to say on this happening, together with some points of belief in Hashem. There is a fundamental difference between the Jewish religion and other religions. They are based on revelations experienced by one man or a group of individuals. This being the case, each religion is dependant upon the agreement to believe those people that they are not lying. Whoever is familiar with the details of the stories of these religions, knows that ordinary logic cannot accept their report. It is difficult to elaborate here and bring their mistakes and show the awesome incongruity within them. We can however bring how the Jewish religion and

the incredible revelation at Sinai are reported clearly in the Torah. It happened in front of millions of people! It is written that it was before about six hundred thousand males over the age of twenty, which together with their wives is approximately one million two hundred thousand people, and together with those under the age of twenty this comes to more than two million, plus the mixed multitude who joined the Jews when they left Egypt. One simply cannot fabricate such a story. If one were to come and say that he had witnessed a creature which has never been seen or heard of before, whoever wants to believe him can and whoever doesn't want to believe him doesn't. On the other hand was this individual to claim that he saw this creature together with millions of other people who also saw it, the listener will then ask where these millions of people are hiding! If it is true and millions say that they did see this creature then it proves that they all saw correctly, since why would millions of people lie? And especially about something as obligating as the yoke of Torah and mitzvot.

3. This is the reason why the biggest religions all based themselves on the Mt. Sinai event and on Judaism. They just changed later events to produce a new religion, using intelligence insulting lies. It is surprising why they chose to use the Jewish religion to build upon. It is something which creates the most questions about their religions, since if they agree that at the beginning Judaism was the true religion, how can a change be justified with their illogical reasoning? [This also explains the great hatred that they have for the Jewish nation. The very existence of a Jewish nation invalidates their religion. The intellect cannot accept such a huge adjustment.] They built

upon Judaism rationalizing that at least the first stage of their religion should be based on something that logic obligates one to accept. The Torah of Israel, where the Sinai revelation was in front of millions of people, is irrefutable and therefore the only way to start off with something absolutely true.

4. One cannot therefore question why there are so many amongst the scholars of the wisdom of the world who don't hold of Torah. It's not really a problem since we see with our own eyes that there are learned people who nowadays try to disprove the holocaust, even though the denials stand against all logic. Whenever someone has a personal agenda about something he can speak completely irrational things, all in the name of science. His agenda causes him speak differently to what he really knows to be true. Sometimes his personal desires will even change the way he thinks. A person can have many different types of agenda. In our case it could be that it is hard for him to change his behavior. There are many other reasons too; lack of place does not permit elaboration here. We can however note the verse, "Bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and makes crooked the words of the righteous." The following questions are brought in the name of the Goan; 1) What is the double expression here - 'it blinds the eyes of the wise' and 'makes crooked the words of the righteous'?, 2) How can we understand the change in expression here? The first speaks about 'blinding eyes' and the second about 'making words crooked' and 3) Why is it that the first time the verse refers to 'the wise' and the second to 'righteous'? He explains that when there is a judgment, the success of the judges to decide the matter properly is dependant on two things. The first is to

thoroughly understand the reality of what happened. The second is to clarify the halachic ruling in such a situation. The verse says that bribes change both of these things; how one perceives the entire reality of an occurrence. This explains the use of the expression, 'blinding of eyes', and also the expression of 'wise' since it is not relevant what his level in Torah is. Bribery also changes one's understanding of the halachic rulings for the pertinent situation. This explains the use of the expression, 'making crooked'; it refers to the words and tongues of righteous people whose knowledge of Torah is their righteousness. This is so true in our case. A private agenda can transform logic, even having actually seen an event. When it comes to understanding the final outcome one must take from the strength of the reality.

5. In general it is worthwhile to know that in every field of worldly wisdom there are two types of wisdom; theoretic science, which includes all the philosophical topics etc., and practical science which includes physical topics e.g. physics etc. In one university it is possible to find many different professors teaching practical sciences. One professor teaches according to one belief, and one professor teaches according to another. One teaches atheism in one way and another teaches it in another way. When one thinks carefully about this, it turns out that even without knowing as we do that only Judaism is true, that all their words are meaningless. We see it from their very own words! It must be that no more than one of them can be correct and all the others are completely mistaken. If so how can it be that all of them are professors? It must be that a high position in theoretical sciences is not dependant on the degree of

correctness of a person's words, rather on the way that he can present his opinion. Rather he is judged whether he gives over the subject in an interesting way and in a way that the students will be able to repeat over his words. [There are topics in science that are compiled partly of theoretical science and partly of practical science, meaning that the first part of the proof to their opinion is based on experiments and part is based on their own reasoning. Much of what they say about nature is of this type. Therefore regarding faith, their words have no more strength than theoretical science. No factory owner will agree to invest money in an expensive but risky production, since it is not normal to invest in something that is doubtful, only something certain. A person would only agree to invest if he was presented with proofs which are from start to finish based on experiments.

6. There is much more to prove and clarify in various aspects of belief, for which there is no place here to elaborate. Perhaps with the help of Hashem I will be able to write about this in greater length in another place. Here we have deviated to this only in order to illustrate some of what there is to learn from the Mt. Sinai event to help in the service of Hashem.

## **For the Service of Hashem**

### **Part two**

1. Let us return to our topic, what there is to take from knowing of the details of the occurrences at Mt. Sinai (apart from all the revelations enumerated in the verses in parshat Yitro) to aid one's service of Hashem and learning Torah. The

Holy One Blessed Be He showed the Jews something amazing. They actually felt how everything that in the world is all rooted in Hashem and a continuation of Him. There is nothing apart from Hashem that has it's own existence. In fact at every moment everything in the world is maintained by the Creator and nourished from Him. This point is brought also in the Nefesh Hachaim in shaar 3: chapter 11. [Some of which is brought here in chapter 3.] See what is written there in the Nefesh Hachaim, hinting to this from the words of the verse - this is not the place to elaborate on it.

2. We can explain with a parable. Reuven came and claimed to Shimon that their friend Levi is not a person at all, rather he is a robot activated by spies from another country. Shimon will bring hundreds of proofs why this just doesn't make sense etc. etc. However were Reuven to come and speak to Shimon himself about Shimon, that Reuven has found out about him that he is not a person, rather a robot, Shimon need not bring any proofs that this is not true, since Shimon knows who and what he is. He knows that he is a person with a soul etc. etc. So too with the Mt. Sinai event. Every person felt completely, with his own feelings, knowledge and perception, how his entire existence and being is something coming from Hashem, in a most undeniable way.

3. In truth even without being at Mt. Sinai, if a person were to merit really knowing his own soul, he would automatically know with an absolute knowledge that he is created by the Creator of the world, and drawn entirely from Him. He would see clearly that the whole entity of his soul is something nurtured from the

Creator Himself and is a continuation from Him. [This refers to everything, not just the soul, but with the soul it is more direct.]

4. There are many people who have this feeling, or at any rate something of it in a small measure. Fortunate is the one who merits to this. This feeling can bring a person to have a great attachment to Hashem. It is still true that someone who does not merit this feeling can still attain incredible levels of being attached to Hashem. [In truth, even those who claim to have not experienced this feeling, most of them have in some measure had it. It just was not the strength that they wanted, so they missed out on the feeling.] In short, not everyone feels this reality in a strong and definite way, and this is part of the concealment of the soul by the body in this world.

5. One who has not previously merited to this feeling can merit it via various methods. One of these ways is thorough the study of the holy Torah. There are many reasons why studying Torah brings this. One is [the following is partly based on the book of R' Shmuel Rossovsky Zatzal, on Massechet Makot at the end of the new edition] that the intensity of this feeling in its fullness was experienced by the whole Jewish nation at Mt. Sinai. The Nefesh Hachaim writes in Shaar 4: chapter 14 on the topic of learning Torah (slightly adapted) that every moment one is busy with and bonded to Torah as he should, the words rejoice as they did when they were given at Sinai. It says in the Zohar at the beginning of parshat Chukat [in the Targum] that whoever puts effort into Torah it is as if he stands every day at Mt. Sinai, ready to accept the Torah. [Note that the expression is 'whoever puts effort into Torah' - perhaps it is hinting that even if the learning was not as successful as he wanted, he still was busy with Torah and tried to study it]. Just as at the time of that holy

event they were joined, to the word of Hashem, so to speak, so too at this moment. Every single time a person is busy with Torah and toils over it; he connects to the word of Hashem. It is all from the mouth of Hashem. The entirety of what he told Moshe at Sinai came out of His mouth. Even what a small pupil would in the future ask his teacher was said at Sinai. Now when a person is busy with the words of Torah, each word leaps from the mouth of Hashem becoming a flame of fire, so to speak. [This does not mean physical fire, rather a holy spiritual reality. So when it writes 'the mouth of Hashem' it is obviously an illustrative expression]. It is considered as though these words are received at this very moment from Sinai, from Hashem Himself. Therefore Chazal say many times, "And the words will bring joy like when they were given at Mt. Sinai and then the rays of blessing will spread over all the worlds from their lofty source. The earth will also be illuminated with its light and will be blessed with its glory. It will bring many good things and outpourings of bounty to the world." The essence of the words of the Nefesh Hachaim is that the inspiration that there was at the time of the giving of the Torah is repeated every time that a Jew busies himself with the study of Torah. As is understood, this is to a much lesser degree than at the time of the giving of the Torah, but it is of the same type. Therefore, through studying Torah, a person can merit in some way to the aforementioned inner feeling, where the soul feels its absolute connection to the Creator of the universe.

6. Here are some points of what has been discussed so far:

- I) There is a level of closeness to Hashem that the soul can feel with an inner intuition. It can feel its true existence; how it is a spiritual offshoot from Hashem, a spark of Hashem

Himself. This is the way the soul feels a real connection with the Creator of the world.\*

**II)** At the time of the giving of the Torah, the entire Jewish nation merited this level in its totality.

**III)** Even after the giving of the Torah, many merit to this. The intensity and duration of the feeling depends on each individual's abilities.

**IV)** Even someone who has never experienced this feeling [it is possible that he in actual fact has done, but in such a smaller measure than he would like] there are ways to merit it. The first way is to invest maximum efforts to be involved with Torah.

**V)** Even without this inner feeling it is possible to believe in Hashem with complete faith and to serve Him fervently and faithfully. The way each person serves Hashem must be according to his individual task in life, assigned to him by the Creator of the world.

**VI)** Know that when many holy writings speak about the topic of 'simple faith', they are referring to this very feeling. One cannot ask if it is possible that the soul feel its existence, that it is actually drawn from Hashem. Rather one should ask how the soul can feel the verity of the Torah of Israel from its very existence, and how the Torah is linked with one's identity. This is not a problem, as explained in chapter 2, since the soul of every Jew is drawn from the Creator Himself via the lights of the Torah. The soul will therefore have the strength this.

**CHAPTER SIX**

**THE ENTIRE EXISTENCE OF THE WORLD IS FROM THE  
POWER OF TORAH**

1. Chazal, in the gemarah in massechet Shabbat 88a, learn from pesukim that the Holy One Blessed Be He made a condition with the works of creation, "If Yisrael accept the Torah you will have permanence, and if not, you will return to be emptiness and void." - see there for the full detail of this conversation.
2. The Nefesh Hachaim explains this at length in shaar 4: chapter 11. The main point of what he says is that apart from the Torah scroll that we have in this world, there is a very holy spiritual existence in the higher worlds which is also called Torah. This is the root of the Torah that we have here in this world [see chapter 2 what is explained about this]. From the creation of the world until the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the whole existence of this world and all the worlds was because of this spiritual existence of Torah in the higher worlds. This was the way that Hashem established the order of the creation. He made it that all bounty can only reach all the worlds through the rays of the Torah.
3. So from the time of the giving of the Torah there was not sufficient light from the Torah existing in the higher worlds to keep the world going. It therefore became necessary that the Jewish nation learn Torah. Through the Torah study of the Jewish people here in this world, the upper lights of the Torah in the higher worlds are strengthened. Only with this reinforcement could there be enough bounty to suffice the

period after the giving of the Torah. Through Torah study the world was able to continue.

4. The Nefesh Hachaim writes, “The truth is, without a doubt, that if the world were to be, from one end to the other be for even one moment, empty from our study and meditation of the Torah; all the worlds would be destroyed and become nothing and emptiness - Hashem forbid.

5. Hashem has merited us so far and this vacancy has never happened and the worlds have not been destroyed, as there are always people busy with Torah. Still, the increase and decrease of bounty depends on the measure and the amount of our busyness with Torah. If we hold onto the Torah with all our might, as we should, we acquire eternal life and extra sanctity and blessing and great light in all the worlds, spreading out from its source hidden high above all the worlds. It also greatly corrects and builds up anything that was previously destroyed.

6. He brings there from Chazal that Torah scholars are the pillars of the world, as the verse says, “If not for my covenant of day and night, I would not have established the statutes of heaven and earth.” They comment further on the verse, “The wisdom of the woman built her home.” that Hashem said, “If a person merits to study Torah and wisdom, it is as considered before me as though he created the heavens, and as if he established the whole world.” They continue, “Hashem said to Yisrael, ‘My children, busy yourselves with Torah day and night and I will credit you as if you support the whole world’.” See the Nefesh Hachaim itself for many more sources in Chazal for

incredible things about how majorly dependent the world's existence is on the Jewish nation's learning of Torah.

7. Every person must take these things to heart and review them well, [review of the Nefesh Hachaim shaar 4: chapters 11-34 are recommended]. In that way a person will value every moment of Torah study, and realize how it is something so much more important and productive than any worldly business, which appear to be such great things. The Torah is therefore described in the pasuk; "It is more precious than pearls and all your acquisitions cannot equal it."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### REWARD IN GAN EDEN AND PUNISHMENT IN GEHINNOM

1. The mishna in Avos says, "One hour of life in the world to come is more beautiful than an entire life in this world." This can be explained as follows; if one were to join all the worldly pleasures that have ever been and ever will be experienced by man, from the time of creation of the world until the end of time, it can still not outweigh even one moment of the pleasure that the soul has in the next world.
2. On the other hand, it is clear from our holy books that even seventy years of afflictions like those of Iyov in this world, does not outweigh the suffering the soul feels in one moment in Gehinnom.
3. The explanation of this is that the pleasures and the pains of the world to come are much more intense than those of this world. A part explanation of this is [based partly on the words of the Ramban in his work, 'Torat Ha'adam' in the sha'ar hagemul] that one needs to clarify every area of enjoyment and suffering in this world, whether it is of the body or the soul. It cannot be true that they are only of the body, since the body of a dead person experiences neither pleasures nor suffering in such ways. It certainly cannot be true that they are purely of the soul, since pleasures and pains like eating and injuries are of the body. The answer must therefore be that enjoyment and suffering are mainly of the soul but since the soul is clothed in a

body, automatically it's pleasures and pains will be clothed in physical actions.

4. In the world to come the type of enjoyments are very different. They are more direct pleasures to the soul, without the garment of the body. It goes the other way too, and the suffering is therefore a type which hurts the soul in a much more direct way. It follows therefore that whatever goes more directly is much much greater.

5. This can be compared to a person who disobeys a human king, and the king decrees a punishment of receiving lashes from the king himself. The king gave the sinner two choices, either five lashes with a stick on his bare back, or fifty lashes with the stick whilst wearing such a thick covering that he basically cannot feel the beating. Obviously he prefers the fifty lashes with the covering rather than five without it. The same is true in our discussion here.

6. See the Ramban in 'Torat Ha'adam' in the sha'ar hagemul [see p.386, 387 for the whole discussion, this here is just a short extract] where he writes that just as in this world fire burns the body, so too in the world to come there is a spiritual reality called fire, which is the root of fire in this world, and has the ability to burn the soul [obviously the fire in Gehinnom is not the same type of fire as in this world].

7. Apart from what we have said about the quantity of the reward in the world to come compared to the pleasures of this world, there is a further point here; the reward in Gan Eden is eternal. The Ramchal writes that reward in the next world is not like a payment that a person pays his friend in this world, in

exchange for an item that he purchased, and when the price is paid he is exempt from any further imbursement. However in the world to come, even though a person receives reward according to his performance of mitzvot, he still continuously receives the reward because it is eternal, forever and ever and unceasing. More than this, the reward grows and increases since the reward is spiritual and holy and therefore purifies the person more and more until he becomes worthy of even more reward.

8. The essence of a high level in serving Hashem is when a person performs mitzvot, and guards himself from aveirot out of love for Hashem and awe of His greatness, and not out of fear of punishment. Of course every person must fear punishment and know of the great reward of mitzvot; these are great tools to save oneself from the persuasions of the evil inclination. What we have mentioned above is a noteworthy in regards to this area. But a person should know that he does not gain a thing by refraining from doing a mitzvah or by going ahead with an aveirah, because any profit in this world is worth absolutely nothing, zero, compared to the smallest amount of reward in the world to come.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE NOT ENTIRELY ERRONEOUS DESPAIR OF DEVOTING ONESELF TO TORAH STUDY, DUE TO THE WORRY OF FAILURE DUE TO LACK OF TALENT OR STAMINA. THEY STILL CAN SUCCEED IN TORAH.

1. There are many who in the truth of the matter very much want to devote themselves to study the holy Torah. But they hold themselves back, thinking that they have no hope succeeding greatly in amassing knowledge and understanding in Torah. This brings a person to despair from investing great effort into Torah study since the dividends do not seem to be in proportion to the investment.
2. There are also many who seemingly want to dedicate themselves to the study of Torah but are afraid that they will be unable to maintain the commitment. This fear holds them back from dedicating themselves to learning, since they think that it is worthless to be committed for a short period.
3. In truth this approach is mistaken for a number of reasons. We see the first in the gemarah Sanhedrin 99, which comments on the verse, “The soul which toils, it will toil for him”. It explains that a person who toils in Torah, Torah will labor for him in another area [it seems that the explanation here is based on the double expression of ‘toiling’ in the verse]. Rashi explains, “The Torah goes to Hashem and beseeches that He reveal to him the reasons in the Torah” [this topic is discussed in chapter 2 above]. It is clear that the success requested by the Torah for the person concerned, is a supernatural success, since success within

the limitations of nature do not require prayer. [It is logical to deduce from here that just as the Torah requests for Torah understanding on his behalf, it also requests that he have the ability to maintain his study of Torah since they are both dependant on the illumination of the Torah joining with the light of his soul]. If he despairs of learning Torah, reasoning that it seems as if he is unable to succeed, he errs. He may be able to succeed naturally in some measure, but if he labors in Torah he will merit supernatural success which he even measure.

4. There is another reason why a low self evaluation of one's abilities is mistaken. This is from the Zohar, explained at length in the writings of the Arizal and clarified in the Nefesh Hachaim - sha'ar 4. It is a very great fundament that there are different types of soul. There are souls which are more outstanding and those which are less so and there are many different ways to explain this, but there is no place here for that. Many of the types of outstanding soul will cause an incredibly strong desire to learn Torah, so one can have great success in Torah study. It is clear in the Zohar and in the writings of the Arizal and the Nefesh Hachaim, that through studying the holy Torah, a person can merit to extend the soul that he already has, adding another very holy soul, taken from an extremely high place. With this extension, he is able to change his entire spiritual condition for the good, literally from one extreme to the other. If so, any bad self evaluation of one's future strengths is erroneous since his assessment is based on the soul that he has already, without calculating that he could acquire more for his soul, which would change his entire situation.

5. The Maharchav elaborates on this in the name of the Arizal. He speaks about how forgetfulness weakens the Torah learning that one has already worked on. One forgets one's learning and therefore doesn't feel that he has gained anything by the learning. The Maharchav writes in the name of the Arizal, "This is incorrect because, in the future a person will remember everything that he ever learnt. Included in these words are two types of arguments against the excuse to lessen one's learning because of the likelihood to forget it. (1) Even if he will forget, it is only temporarily forgotten, and he will benefit from this learning forever, since he will remember it in the world to come. (2) The point of remembering it in the world to come isn't simply as a reward or a gift for his hard work, rather it is because the moment a person learns Torah, the radiance of that piece of Torah joins with the light in his own soul, and become eternally united. This already causes a person to remember his studies forever, just there are layers which cover this light, and withhold the memory from him. In the world to come these layers fall away." It comes out from this that although a person may not remember what he has learnt in this world, it still has great significance. From the moment that he learnt the Torah, there are more lofty spiritual lights attached to his soul, greatly raising his spiritual level.

6. The fact that success in Torah study comes to a person beyond all limited measure is something that has proven itself throughout the generations. Many of those who became world giants were not suited for Torah study right from the start. Some had little talent and some seemingly had opposing character traits to those of diligence. Even so many

strengthened themselves and succeeded in becoming leaders of Torah Jewry. Of course one who has great talent or inclination towards diligence, and all the more so with a combination of the two, will likely to have abundant success in Torah, Hashem forbid that we minimize the value of these things. However even someone who does not have these attributes can accomplish a great deal. We see this in Massechet Avot, "Whoever learns Torah in poverty will in the end study it in wealth." It is said in the name of the Maharal Diskin that this applies not only to monetary poverty but also to deficiency in talent, where despite all a person strengthens himself to learn Torah. He will merit a wealth of abilities. [Far be it from us to belittle talents. Of course a person blessed with prodigious talents must take care to utilize them for Torah, as we see with the Maharil Diskin himself who from a young age, although blessed with great genius worked and toiled with incredible diligence in Torah, indeed quite incomprehensibly, and as is well known merited to levels in genius which were beyond all laws of nature.]

CHAPTER NINE

THE WORDS OF THE BACH (OHR HACHAIM 47) ON THE  
MITZVAH OF TORAH STUDY

1. In Massechet Nedarim, R' Yehuda and R' Mai say, "Who is the man who is wise and will understand this? And (with whom will) the word of Hashem will speak to him and tell him why the land was destroyed? This matter was asked of the wise men and the prophets and of the heavenly angels yet they could not explain it, until Hashem Himself explained it, as it says, 'and Hashem said, "For deserting My Torah which I put before them and they didn't hearken to My voice and they didn't follow it"'. What does it mean "...they didn't hearken to My voice and they didn't follow it"? R' Yehuda and Rav said, "Because they didn't bless the Torah first".

2. The Bach in Ohr Hachaim (47) writes about this (slightly adapted). There is a great difficulty here. Why did He punish them so terribly severely for not blessing first, which seems to be a minor aveirah?

3. He explains that Hashem's intention seems to be that we busy ourselves with Torah in order to reinforce our souls with strength, spirituality and the sanctity of the source of Torah. Hashem therefore gave His Torah of Truth to Yisrael as a gift, so that it not be forgotten from us, and so that our souls and our bodies with two hundred and forty eight limbs and our three hundred and sixty five sinews cling to the two hundred and forty eight positive mitzvot and the three hundred and sixty five negative mitzvot in the Torah. Had they had this intention

whilst being busy with Torah, they themselves would have been the carriage and the palace of the presence of Hashem. The presence would have literally been within them. They themselves would have been the palaces of Hashem, Hashem's presence would have fixed its place of residence within them, and the land would have been illuminated with His glory. Through this the heavenly and earthly abodes would have been joined and become one single dwelling place.

4. Now the judgment was passed. They had busied themselves only with the physical words of Torah. They had learnt Torah only so that the judges be able to use them in business matters, and used for the wise men to teach, neither intending to strengthen themselves nor to cling to the sanctity and spirituality of the Torah, nor to perpetuate the presence of Hashem here on Earth, nor so that their souls rise up to a high level after their death. With this they brought about the separation and departure of Hashem's presence from the land, and it rose up to heaven. The land was then left merely physical, devoid of holiness. This then caused its destruction and desolation.

5. This is what Chazal meant, "Who is the person who is wise etc. for what reason was the land destroyed etc. and Hashem said, 'Because they abandoned my Torah which I have placed before them...' and He said, 'My Torah is a Torah of truth which I gave as a present. They shouldn't learn it and then forget it. I explained to them the reasons for everything and their explanations, and this is what I put before them like a laid table...', which explains the verse, "And these are the laws which you should put before them." This means that they should

connect to the essence of the sanctity of the Torah, the Torah of truth and in that way Hashem's presence would reside amongst them. But they abandoned Torah and did not follow it. A journey in Torah spirituality, trying to move from level to level, is in order that the soul joins to the essence of the sanctity of the Torah. The generation at time of the destruction of the first temple did not follow it, meaning that when the time came to study Torah and to bless Hashem and praise Him for giving the Torah to His Jewish people, they didn't do it entirely for the sake of heaven, in order that their holiness join with His presence. This means that they didn't concentrate sufficiently on the blessing, "Who has chosen us from amongst all the nations", to think how Hashem brought us to Mt. Sinai and gave us His holy Torah, His beloved plaything with which He plays every day, so that our souls join with the holy essence of the Torah and it's spirituality and to bring down Hashem's presence amongst us. They didn't follow it in order to be busy with Torah for its own sake, and were therefore punished. The manifestation of Hashem moved away from them and the land was destroyed and left like a desert with no wayfarers passing by. This shows just how it was completely ruined and left as a piece of physicality. The holiness of Hashem's presence didn't pass by there any more because Hashem's presence had completely left the country and risen up heavenward. (Bach)

6. To understand well the words of the Bach it is worthwhile to look at what is spoken about in chapter 2 on the saying, "The Holy One Blessed Be He and the Torah and Yisrael are all one". With that we can explain the words of the Bach on the topic of Torah study. Through Torah study, the lights of the soul couple

with the lights of the holy Torah. As a result of this an outpouring of illumination from Hashem Himself pours into the soul.

7. The Bach does not intend to add anything here to the basic explanation of Torah study, rather he comes to explain that this is the fundamental principle of the mitzvah of Torah study, and that through it a person connects with Hashem and brings light from Hashem Himself to his soul. As the Bach says, this is the main reason for the giving of the Torah to Yisrael. Therefore when this was missing, automatically the land was destroyed and the nation exiled from it.

8. It is extremely important that a person become used to this idea and to engrave it in his soul. In that way, every time he comes to busy himself with Torah, he will be connecting with the Creator Himself, linking up with Him, thereby receiving the powerful and holy outpouring of spiritual bounty from the Creator of the world.

**CHAPTER TEN**

**ANY TORAH STUDY AND MITZVAH PERFORMANCE  
JOINS THE SOUL WITH HIS CREATOR AND BRINGS A  
SPIRITUAL AND HOLY BOUNTY FROM HASHEM**

**AN ANSWER FOR THOSE WHO CLAIM THEY DON'T  
FEEL THIS**

1. It is written in numerous places in this work how for bit of Torah that a person learns, and through every mitzvah that a person performs, a spiritual bounty is created and pours from Hashem to the person's soul, sanctifying it and linking it to the Creator Himself. [The opposite is brought about, Hashem forbid, with an aveirah.]
2. There are those who claim that they don't feel this at all, or at least not keenly enough, especially when referring to a short amount of study etc.
3. The truth is however, that with every small amount of study or mitzvah performance, there is a powerful outpouring of bounty. Hashem however created the world in a way that in this world the body is like a screen which blocks the soul from feeling any changes in it. [Not everyone is equal in respect to this screen, for some the barrier is greater and for some it is less, no place here for further elaboration]. The reason for this is so that the world be a world of challenges as the Mesillat Yesharim details in the first chapter. Were we to significantly feel the influence of mitzvot and aveirot on the soul, the existence of a test or challenge would be almost impossible.

4. Only after a hundred and twenty years, when there is no longer the obstruction of the soul by the body, then a person will see the reality of how every moment of Torah study and every part of mitzvah performance brought intense light to his soul. This light does not just appear at the time when he sees it in heaven; rather it is then that he sees how the light had already come at the actual time of the learning and the mitzvah performance. Indeed the strength of these very lights enabled and assisted him to achieve many things in this world. It was just the screen that prevented him from seeing reality. Many times one can actually feel the good resulting from this strength but doesn't realize to connect it to the Torah that he learned or the mitzvah that he did.

5. This can be compared to a person undergoing an operation under the effects of general anesthesia, and the surgeon asks him at the end of the operation if he can cut a further few more cm deeper than necessary. If the patient is a fool he will agree since he anyway can't feel anything now due to the strength of the general anesthetic. However if he is a clever person he will refuse this since even though now he cannot feel anything, he knows that when he awakens from the anesthesia every extra cm cut will hurt tremendously. Were they to cut him when he was anaesthetized, then when he comes around he will see that the incision was made at the time when they cut him and not when he woke up. It is exactly the same with aveirot and mitzvot. Of course many times a person merits this elevated feeling from mitzvot already in this world. [This is non comparable to the natural feeling of satisfaction that comes when a person does something that he thinks to be correct - see 'Chayei Olam' from the Kehilot Yaacov.]

**CHAPTER ELEVEN**

**MITZVOT BETWEEN MAN AND HIS FELLOW**

1. Mitzvot between man and his fellow are of the basics of Judaism. This means to endeavor to benefit another, and to take care not to cause suffering to one's fellow, as it says in the gemarah in Massechet Yevamot that mercifulness and loving kindnesses are the purpose of Yisreal - see inside for further detail.
2. Although it is obvious that every Jew wants to benefit his fellow, and not cause him any harm, there are two errors often made in this area, causing many to stumble. The first is that many times when a person tries to do something good for his friend but doesn't succeed, he thinks that it was a waste of time and he is discouraged from continuing to do similar acts in the future.
3. This is a terrible mistake, proven by Avraham Avinu who put himself out so much to feed the angels, as is detailed in parshat Vayiera, and it is clear from the gemarah in Bava Metziah - chapter 7 - that in this merit when his children, the Yisraelites were in the desert for forty years, manna fell down for them, as well as many other things. This means that he received tremendous reward for his deeds; millions of people were fed miraculously with food from heaven every day for forty years! [This wasn't even the entire reward - there was even more than this.] Yet when Avraham gave the angels to eat, in the simplest way to understand it, he wasn't really benefiting them, since angels don't need to eat. But he didn't know that they were

angels and therefore fed them. Through this test of giving to another he received such a huge reward.

4. The explanation why there is such a great reward for trying to help another person, even if he didn't succeed in benefiting him in the end, could be because he has the good will, and acts as a result of his desire to do good. The Chafetz Chaim says however, that there is an even greater additional point here, as we explained above, that the way the world runs is that whatever happens in the higher worlds is according to our behavior in this world, and according to what happens in the higher worlds there are results in this world. The Chafetz Chaim explains that whenever a Jew tries to do an act of kindness in this world, whether he succeeds in the matter or not, he awakens the attributes of kindness in the higher worlds, thereby bringing great goodness to the entire Jewish nation. It therefore follows that it is not possible that a person tries to do kindness but didn't achieve anything; rather, whenever a person tries to perform loving kindnesses, he always brings kindnesses to other areas through awakening the attributes of kindness in the higher worlds.

5. At any rate, as the Chafetz Chaim brings from Chazal, that when a person does perform the kindness and does benefit another, the mitzvah and the reward is much much greater.

6. The second oft mistaken point in the area of the will to help and to hold back from hurting others, is that people think it refers only to big things and not small ones, for example there are people who are very careful not to hurt others in a big way, but aren't so careful not to hurt others in a small way, whereas in

truth one needs to take care not to hurt others even in a very small way. The Chazon Ish writes in his collection of letters, that to hurt someone with words, even slightly and even for a short amount of time, is a Torah prohibition. This is something very difficult to take care in, but it is really a great obligation upon every person to try hard to do. Praiseworthy is the one who manages to be entirely vigilant in this area.

7. As a result of this, when it comes to helping others, it need not be just in big matters. It is a mitzvah to do so in small matters too.

8. A further important principle in this area is how very careful a person always has to be. Often when one is in a desperate, yet oft occurring situation, it is not always noticed by the world around him, but within his heart this person is broken to pieces. Someone who insults such a person, even very slightly, can greatly pain him, because it joins with the terrible pain already within him. The same is true of the opposite. One who merits gladdening such a person, even in a small way, can really transform the way he feels.

9. On a similar vein, there is a story of a person who came to ask the Chazon Ish advice about some every day issues, some very petty matters. It was simply hard for this person to make decisions by himself, and all his doubts weighed heavily upon him. The Chazon Ish answered every single question. When the person apologized to the Chazon Ish for taking his time from important things for such insignificant matters, the Chazon Ish replied that even people who come to ask him about important worldly things, like purchasing a home etc. what he does for

them is not the decision that he makes for them, rather the main help is that he puts their minds at rest through his advice. If so, then there really is no difference between them and this person who to calm his mind needed help deciding petty matters. From here we learn a fundamental principle. The mitzvah to help others and to refrain from hurting them applies even to small things. Even more than this, often small things are not small things at all, but really big matters, since in that particular area they can bring great pain or great happiness.

10. The area of mitzvot between man and his fellow also applies to matters of spirituality. It is a tremendous mitzvah to help someone who is spiritually needy. When someone knows that his friend doesn't understand a part of the gemarah well and requires help, it is a great mitzvah to help him. It is clear from Chazal that through this the helper himself will also merit great success in his studies.

11. Furthermore there is the point explained earlier, that every time that a Jew learns Torah or performs a mitzvah, he helps the entire Jewish nation. Through his Torah study or mitzvah performance the upper worlds are established and bounties of goodness and spiritual and physical blessings come down to the Jewish nation. This is especially when a person for some reason finds it hard to learn, and he could choose to stop learning, yet he takes hold of himself and continues further because he has mercy on those suffering and wants to help them with his learning. This is definitely considered a very great mitzvah between man and his fellow. [Obviously every mitzvah between man and his fellow is also between man and Hashem too, since Hashem commanded that he do it.]

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE GREATNESS ACQUIRED THROUGH TORAH STUDY

**Part 1: A major feature of Torah study is that every word one studies, one fulfils a positive mitzvah and merits awesome reward.**

1. In the book 'Shenot Eliyahu' of the Vilna Gaon [which is an explanation to the mishnayot, printed in at the back of some editions] on Massechet Peah (81:41) Chazal write, "A person must love the Torah very much, since every word that he learns is a mitzvah on its own. If so then after learning one page, for example, he fulfils many hundreds of mitzvot." The Chafetz Chaim brings these words in his book 'Shem Olam', sha'ar Hachzkat HaTorah chapter 9 (11:4).

2. The Chafetz Chaim writes further, following along the same lines, that with every word that a person learns, an angel is created who advocates on his behalf.

3. In the Yerushalmi (4a) there we find, "Rebi Berachia, Rebi Chiya of C'far Dechumin [Rebi Chiya was from a place called C'far Dechumin], (were sitting) one said, "Even the entire world cannot be compared to one word of Torah." We see that if one were offered all the silver and gold and precious things and high positions in the world, or to give all that up in order to learn just one word of Torah, it is more worthwhile for him to choose the one word of Torah, since by learning one word of Torah he earns himself world to come, more enjoyable and worth

thousands and thousands of times more than anything in this world. [Someone on a higher spiritual level will feel that performing Hashem's will and the resulting closeness to Hashem that comes with Torah study is worth more to him than anything in this world.] In addition, the Yerushalmi refer to one word of Torah study, how much more so when a person regularly busies himself with Torah, each time learning many words of Torah.

4. Here we see many things to awaken us to study Torah. The first is that when a person decides how to settle his future, he should be aware of the huge profit he could gain were he to secure Torah study in his future. Secondly, even a person who is constantly engaged in Torah, or in the opposite extreme, someone whose life situation excludes the possibility that Torah study be the main activity, and he has a small amount of free time, he should muster all his strength to use this time for Torah. If one uses even his shortest spare moments in this way, he will earn multitudes of mitzvot, each one huge and powerful, as we know is the magnitude of the mitzvah performance of Torah study.

## **Part 2: How the Torah study of the Jewish nation is the purpose of creating the world.**

1. The Chafetz Chaim writes in his book 'Shem Olam', sha'ar Hachzokat HaTorah, chapter 9, [slightly adapted], "Behold it is well known that the study of Torah is a positive Torah mitzvah,

as the verse says, 'And you should teach them and keep them do to them.'" The creation of man was principally in order that he toil in Torah, as the gemarah Sanhedrin writes in chapter Chelek (99) "A person was created to toil, as the verse says, 'A person was born to labour' ; this is the labour of Torah, as the verse says, "This Torah scroll must never move from your mouths."."

2. See further in the Nefesh Hachaim, sha'ar 4, chapter 13 for a lengthier discussion on the subject.

3. The true desire of every Jew is to bring pleasure to his Creator. The more a person acknowledges that the main reason for creating the world is for the study of Torah, it is then implicit that out of the desire to bring pleasure to his Creator, he will increase his Torah study.

4. Since the main reason why the world was created was for the study of Torah, it is clear that this is the great bringer of closeness to Hashem. A person has a great desire to be close to Hashem and to receive reward in the Gan Eden. When one fulfils Hashem's will in order to come close to Hashem, this is the great reward bringer in the world to come.

5. Although it is now understood that Torah learning is the main reason for creating the world, one must learn and also try to keep the Torah. One cannot Hashem forbid, cast off the yoke of performance, saying that if Torah study is the main reason for the creation of the world he will do just that and not do mitzvot. Such learning will not justify creating the world. See the book 'Ana Avda' which brings, in the name of the Chazon Ish, that the main purpose of a person in this world is to live in holiness, in areas of the attribute of Yesod. The way to come to

this is through Torah study. There is no contradiction here; it is all the same point. Should a person Hashem forbid find himself in a spiraling spiritual descent, it should not prevent him from studying Torah, quite the opposite, he should strengthen himself with all his might in Torah study, and this will help him to get out of this difficulty and to speedily return and be close to Hashem.

### **Part 3: How Torah study changes a person's essence.**

1. In the introduction to the Zohar (p.12) and also in the Nefesh Hachaim (sha'ar 4, chapter 15) [in the translated version] we find that, "It is a mitzvah to be engaged in the study of Torah and to try hard every day in the study of Torah, since a person who learns Torah, his soul acquires another holy soul and becomes like a holy angel." This is a tremendous encouragement for a person to muster all his strength in the area of Torah study, since every Jew wants to climb higher and become close to Hashem, to be more spiritual and more pure, to change his very being for one more holy. Were one to discover a way that was guaranteed to achieve this one would be prepared to invest huge amounts for this; in which case the gates are open wide for such a person, as brought here at the beginning of this topic. There is in fact a guaranteed way to get there, and that is to increase one's study of the holy Torah. Torah study will purify his soul and he will rise and climb in levels of closeness to Hashem. That is the true purity and the true elevation.

2. There are people who find it hard to awaken themselves to this since the change in the person brought about by Torah study is not recognizable. It appears that he is in a period where he is only investing in Torah, like the period beforehand.

3. A person must therefore get himself used to seeing his situation according to the spiritual truth and not by what it physically appears to be. It is written in the book of the Chazon Ish 'Emunah and Bitachon' that a person can be on a level close to that of an angel and yet still mix with others, who don't notice any difference between him and themselves. The truth is only according to what lies inside the person. This is brought clearly from all the Rishonim when they speak about prophecy. This is such an awesomely high level we cannot even describe it. And yet we see in the book of Melachim when the Shunamit spoke to Elisha, she said, "Behold I know that a man...holiness passes over us". The gemarah asks how she knew this. They explain that she saw that there were never any flies near to his table, meaning that without this proof it would have been impossible to know that he was a holy person even though he was on an incredibly high level!

4. The point of this here is not to tell a person that he is obligated to hide his actions in a way that nothing of his high level be seen outside, although this is correct behaviour as the verse says, "Walk with modesty...", it is indeed a very great thing. It is brought in the Chovat Halvavot that there is a great danger when a person behaves in the same way as everybody else in order to secret his own spiritual level. In reality this will cause him to greatly minimize his service of Hashem, for example he will pray more shortly than how he would really like

to pray, without swallowing the words, and the same will happen in many other areas too. The Chovot Halvavot writes that as a result of this a person can fall from all his high levels. A person must therefore be very careful not to hide himself. In any case the intention of the words here is to say that many times a person will behave in an elevated manner for a time and yet when contemplating whether to continue with it, or to move on to higher levels, he decides against it since he reasons that it is not worth the effort it takes to grow, since one anyway does not see a great difference from the growth. The words written above come to rebuff this mistake, as the truth is that it is very likely that through this elevation his spiritual level rose thousands more times than what it was previously, even though it is not recognizable to the outside world.

5. There is however a greater problem than that mentioned above. Many times the barrier to awaken oneself to study Torah is not just that the change is not recognizable, but that one cannot feel the change at all within himself.

6. However it is important to know the truth. Whoever dedicates himself to learn Torah, his inner self automatically changes to become holier and purer. If he doesn't feel this it is only because there is a screen on the body preventing him from feeling this - as explained at length above in chapter 10.

### **Part 4: Further changes to the inner person due to Torah study.**

- 1. The Chafetz Chaim writes that if a person were to take the skin of an animal, which is a regular item, not containing any holiness at all, and tans it with the intention that it be used for a Torah scroll, and writes a Torah scroll on it, this skin becomes holy with an awesome holiness, a Torah scroll greatness that is well known. How much more so when a person takes his brain and tells it words of Torah! It is certain that his brain contents will be sanctified with tremendous holiness. In a Torah scroll it is merely written on top of the parchment whereas in the brain the Torah enters inside the brain. The difference between a person before he has learnt Torah and after he has learnt Torah is like the difference between the regular piece of skin and the Torah scroll which is sacred and with tremendous sanctity.**
- 2. In truth every Jew, even without having learnt Torah still has a great amount of holiness within him just because he is a Jew. The Chafetz Chaim adds here the difference between the sanctity of a Jew before he learns Torah and the sanctity of a Jew after he has learnt Torah, the difference is enormous, like that of the regular skin and the very holy Torah scroll.**
- 3. Accordingly, even a person who has already learnt much Torah, still, when he learns for an additional amount of time, his essence is exchanged for an even holier one, just like the ordinary skin becomes the holy Torah scroll.**

**Part 5: One who is busy with Torah merits special supernatural heavenly help.**

1. The Nefesh Hachaim (sha'ar 4: chapter 18) writes that one who accepts the yoke of the holy Torah upon himself, honestly and for its own sake, he is raised above everything in this world and Hashem attends to him with individual attention, way above all the natural forces. This is because he is joined to the Torah and therefore to The Holy One Blessed Be He, so to speak. He is sanctified with the lofty sanctity of the holy Torah, which is more valuable than anything of value in any of the worlds. It is the Torah which gives vitality and permanence to all the worlds and all the forces of nature. It follows therefore that a person who busies himself with Torah brings life and stability to everything and is superior to everything. How can it then be that such a person's attendance from Hashem be via natural powers?!

2. This means that one who busies himself with Torah for its own sake merits heavenly assistance in his affairs, way above what is natural. It is even possible that those around him don't sense this. Supernatural things can still come in a hidden way; the viewer can still err and think that it is all natural. However the reality that he receives is unbelievable; the very individual care from heaven. Fortunate is he who merits this.

3. Although this is written about one who learns Torah for its own sake and not about anyone who learns Torah, it need not weaken a person's inspiration to learn Torah. The Nefesh Hachaim writes clearly about this, as explained earlier, exactly what 'for its own sake' means. He writes (sha'ar 4: chapter 3) that 'Torah for its own sake' does not mean incredible closeness to

Hashem and great levels of spirituality which many find hard to acquire, rather it means to learn in order to understand the holy Torah and not for any other physical, worldly objectives, for example to receive honor or to enjoy a quarrel etc. Many merit achieving learning with the simple intention to get to know Torah and understand it. This is Torah for its own sake. One may not always manage this, but at least a large part of one's studies can certainly be with the simple intention to know the Torah and understand it.

4. Even though the Nefesh Hachaim has already explained what is considered as Torah for its own sake, still it is definitely true that it is a higher level when a person concentrates in his learning to bring pleasure to his Creator, more and more, resulting in his learning being with more of a feeling of closeness to Hashem. In addition, the actual learning that he did is also reckoned on a higher level. Although the Nefesh Hachaim (sha'ar 3) writes that closeness to Torah is automatically closeness to Hashem since the Torah is the word of Hashem, there are nevertheless many levels to this. The Nefesh Hachaim hints to this (sha'ar 3) after having lengthily explained all the different types of service of Hashem and closeness to Him. He writes there (chapter 14) that the highest of all types of closeness to Hashem is when one achieves really fearing Hashem, to be fulfilled at least during prayer, or at least for some time during prayer. He writes there (chapter 14, towards the end of the brackets) that at the time of engaging in Torah it is very great to have intention to have this fear. At any rate, it is clear from the Nefesh Hachaim high levels of spirituality are not required in order to merit all that one can merit through

learning Torah for its own sake, i.e. receiving supernatural divine assistance. The basic level of 'Torah for its own sake' is that one's objective not be for worldly things, rather his aim should be to know and to comprehend Torah.

5. It will certainly not be detrimental if one adds some thoughts of holiness to the basic level of 'for its own sake'. In fact quite the opposite; it is a bonus. An example of these thoughts could be to intend to bring pleasure to Hashem, or to increase the merits of the Jewish nation and bring salvation to the Jewish nation, or in order to teach it to others, (his intention to teach others should be for their good and not to be haughty), or he thinks that he wants to know how to perform the mitzvot better. Good intentions certainly add and not detract as we see in the mishna in masechet Avot, "He who learns in order to teach or to do is preferable than one who just learns."

**CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

**SACRIFICE FOR TORAH STUDY AND SURRENDER OF  
THINGS WHICH PREVENTS VIGILANCE IN TORAH  
STUDY**

1. The gemarah in Massechet Brachot (71b) says, "Once the wicked ruling kingdom decreed that Yisrael may not involve themselves with Torah. Rebi Akiva came, gathered groups of people and publicly taught them Torah... it was but a few days later that they caught Rebi Akiva and imprisoned him. When they brought out Rebi Akiva to kill him it was the time for the reading of the Shema. As they were combing his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting the yoke of heaven upon himself. His disciples said to him, 'Our teacher, even now?' he replied, 'All my life I was troubled by the verse in Shema, "(Love Hashem) with all your life, which means even if they take your life", I always asked myself, "When will the opportunity come my way to fulfil this?" Now that it has come my way should I not fulfil it? ...' (See text inside for the entire happening)."

2. The gemarah in Massechet Sanhedrin (13b and 14a) says, "Reb Yehuda and Rav Baram said, 'Remember that man for good; his name is Rebi Yehuda Ben Baba, if not for him the laws of fines would have been forgotten and annulled from Yisrael. [to pass judgement on fines one needs a Rav with Semicha and the gentiles had decreed against giving Semicha - see further.] Once the wicked kingdom decreed against Yisrael that anyone who gives Semicha would be killed and whoever would receive Semicha would be killed ... what did Rebi Yehuda Ben Baba

do?... he gave semicha ...to five elders; Rebi Meir, Rebi Yehuda [Bar Iloy], Rebi Shimon [Bar Yochai], Rebi Yosi [Bar Chalafta] and Rebi Elozor Ben Shamua. Rav Avyah also added Reb Nechemia. When their enemies came to know about these. He said to them, [Rebi Yehuda Ben Baba to his disciples] 'My children, run!'. They said to him, 'Rebi what will become of you?' He replied, 'Behold I am cast before them like a stone which will not be overturned.' They said to him, [the gentiles] 'Move from there! Until they stabbed him with three hundred iron spears and made him like a sieve. [Meaning that they gave him a terrible death]."

3. The gemarah in massechet Avodah Zarah (18:1) explains that at the time when the gentiles decreed forbidding Torah study, Rebi Chanina Ben Tradyon was still busy learning Torah and gathering groups in public to learn Torah whilst holding a Torah scroll against his chest. The gentiles came along and burned him.

4. Even though generally to save a persons life takes priority over most other things, however at a time of a decree against performing mitzvot the law is different. Look carefully at Yoreh Deah (127) for details on this topic, when saving a life takes precedence and when not, there is no place to elaborate further.

5. In any case, we see from all these extracts that our teachers, the Tanaim gave up their lives for the mitzvah of teaching Torah to the congregation. We see from this the magnitude of the importance of Torah study, and how a person is commanded to give up on so many things if they are at the expense of his Torah study. If world leaders gave up their very lives in order to teach

Torah, surely there are many things that we can surrender order to study Torah.

6. In Massechet Shabbat (83b) we see, “Rabbi Liskai said, ‘The words of Torah find permanence only in one who kills himself over them, as the verse says, “This is the law when a person dies in a tent”. It is obvious here that the intention here is not that a person kill himself in order to learn Torah, since if he would be dead, how could he learn?! More than that, the mitzvah of preserving a human life is more important. [The examples brought above were at a time of decree, as mentioned there.] Instead the intention of the Gemara with these stories is to show that there are very many things which are precious to a person, like for example if a person has a very strong leaning to a certain profession, or a very great desire to become monetarily wealthy, and he feels in his heart that it is so hard for him to give up on his desires, as if he were nearly to die because of it. This is exactly what the Gemara speaks about here, that the true way to acquire Torah is to forgo these desires in order to learn Torah. This is the way to attain Torah. The above examples of desires are of things which touch very much on the future of a person. The same also applies to smaller things. If someone is in doubt how to spend the next few hours, whether to spend the time learning Torah or to go and converse about an incident that happened which very much interests him, or any other thing which will waste his time from learning, he may feel that it is very hard for him to give up this thing. Here lays the mitzvah mentioned in the Gemara, that by breaking this desire and going to learn, against his own strong will, he suffers a partial

aspect of death, he kills that desire. This is one of the acquisitions of Torah.

7. The gemarah implies more here. In reality Torah study necessitates a person to forgo even his most basic necessities. We see this in massechet Avot, "That is the way of the Torah, you eat bread and salt and you drink a set measure of water, you sleep on the floor and you labor in Torah. If you do so, you are fortunate and it is good for you. You are fortunate in this world and it will be good for you in the next world." The reality is however that it is not generally necessary to sacrifice one's absolute bare necessities in order to learn Torah. We therefore brought present day examples which are more widespread nowadays. These are also included in the intention of the gemarah. Still a person still has to know that if Hashem forbid, things turn around, and a test comes, in order to learn Torah he may have to forgo even basic necessities. He may even have to live in the very restricted way, described in the mishna in massechet Avot. He should strengthen himself to stand as firm as a flint stone and as an iron pillar and not to abandon Torah, as Chazal say, "One (thing achieved) with difficulty is better than a hundred without difficulty."

8. The gemarah Shabbat (83b) says further, "R' Yonatan would say, 'A person should never hold himself back from going to the Bet Midrash or from learning words of Torah, even at the time of one's death, as the verse says, "This is the law of a person who dies in a tent", even at the time of death one should be busy with Torah." In general, a person's challenge in Torah study is not at the time of his death, rather whilst he is still alive. Of course from the words of the gemarah regarding death one must

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take a lesson for the many hours which could be used for Torah study. Sometimes it is difficult for a person to imagine using his free time for Torah, and it can be a very remote idea to spend spare hours in the Bet Midrash, either because of his personal situation, or because of the individual details of that particular time. Nevertheless from the words of the gemarah we see that one is still obligated to learn; since if even at the time of death a person should not hold himself back from going to the Bet Midrash and from busying himself with Torah, how much more so all the times when a person has minor hindrances from learning, they are obviously of a much lesser degree.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### PRAYER

**Part one: Awakening to the importance of prayer and it's details.**

1. In the gemarah in Brachot (6b) it says, "One of the Rabbis said to R' Bayvo Bar Abaye, and some say that it was R' Bayvo to R' Nachman Bar Yitzchok, 'What thing is very elevated and yet degraded by people?' [Meaning that it says this in Tehillim (12) and they asked how to understand the verse]. He told them, 'The thing which stands at the pinnacle of the world and people degrade it.'" Rashi explains, "Things that stand at the top of the world mean prayer which rises upwards." The evaluation that many give prayer is usually much less than it's actual worth. Accordingly, it is fitting that a person to make the effort to elevate his personal evaluation of prayer, to bring it somewhat closer to its true worth. One of the ways to achieve this is to learn about the essence of prayer. We will bring here - please Hashem - a sampling of what there is to understand on this.

2. In truth, there is much to say about the commandment of prayer. Prayer is divided into praises, requests and thanks. As we see in the gemarah in Brachot 34b about the shemone esreh prayer, "R' Chanina said, 'The first ones [meaning the first brachot of the shemone esreh] are compared to a servant who offers praises before his master, the middle ones are compared to a servant who requests a reward from his master, and the last

ones are compared to a servant who just received a reward from his master, thanks him and leaves and goes away.”

3. There is another definition of prayer in the context of it being a service of the heart. There is the sensation of closeness to Hashem and there is the begging of one's Creator to do him a personal favor and give him the good things that he requests. Prayers which are requests are extremely powerful. The actual asking creates the correct feelings in a person's mind, that all that he has comes only from Hashem Himself and there is no other means to get what he needs from Him. [I have not explained at depth whether there are further areas in prayer, I have written in a generalized manner.]

### **Part 2: The clinging of one's thoughts to Hashem, during prayer and at all other times.**

1. We will explain a little about the joining of thoughts with Hashem. Joining one's thoughts to Hashem is a very great mitzvah. This is clear from the Rishonim and Acharonim, the main mitzvah not being especially during prayer. On a high level, a person would have his thoughts joined to Hashem at every moment. Many Rishonim and Acharonim explain this, see the Nefesh Hachaim (sha'ar 3: chapters 13 and 14) where he writes about the holy Avot and about Moshe Rabbeinu who, without a moments break, had their thoughts united with their Creator, throughout their lives - see the Nefesh Hachaim for many more details on this.

2. Of course, even someone who cannot manage this high level should still try what he can. For most people, the most successful time to do this is during prayers. If he cannot always manage this he should at least try partially. How much one can achieve this is very much dependant on the soul roots of a person and on the individual details of his personal situation. In any case, even one who cannot manage this should still not despair, for even without this he can merit to high levels in service of Hashem. What is almost certain is that even if he cannot do this at present, there will be other times when he will be able to achieve this. The principle here is that every situation which is sent to a person from heaven, even though it seems to him that it is a very difficult situation in which to serve Hashem, he can strengthen himself with all his might to serve Hashem with great and awesome servitude.

3. When it comes to being close to Hashem there are those who err and think that it is just a sensation of the heart and nothing more. This is not true. Even though it is expressed as a feeling of being close to Hashem in one's heart, in truth there is much more to it than this. This is explained in Rishonim and Acharonim [see the book 'Sha'arei Kedushah' of our teacher, Harav Chaim Vital (3:5)] that through a person joining his thoughts to his Creator, he is actually adding in a very real way to his connection with the Creator of the world, strengthening his soul's link with Him. Additional outpourings from the radiance of Hashem's face descend to one who attaches himself to his Creator.

4. It is difficult to extend here with a detailed explanation on exactly how this works, since it is connected to so many

Kabbalistic ideas. Still the general idea remains from that which is explained in Rishonim and Acharonim. Just as it is possible to join two physical items together in this world through certain actions e.g. two boards by hammering and nailing them together, it is also possible to join the soul in a certain way to The Creator Himself. The particular action which brings about this join is the one which links a person's thoughts with his Creator. Although we have no grasp at all of the essence of Hashem, we can still explain that through this connection, Hashem will bring a holy spiritual outpouring to the soul of the one who joins his thoughts to his Creator. It follows, that the joining of thoughts to Hashem and the firing of one's thoughts to the causes of Hashem is not just intellectual or just emotional; it is a reality. When a person thinks about Hashem this he really changes to be more connected to the Creator of the world with a very real spiritual connection.

5. Even though this connection is spiritual and a very real existence. It can be compared to angels who are spiritual but cannot be touched, still they most definitely exist.

6. It is obviously that even without this closeness, the soul of every Jew is very much joined to his Creator and benefits from the radiance of His face. All that is written here that it this closeness is produced by a person thinking of his Creator, means that it strengthens the connection and adds to it.

7. In truth, every mitzvah and every Torah learning improves the bond of the soul with it's Creator, as explained above. At times when a person doesn't feel this [the lack of this feeling is explained at length in chapter 10], then the joining of thoughts

discussed here is a certain type of linking with Hashem which definitely brings this feeling and has a unique spiritual advantage over connections which one does not feel. This is not necessarily more important; every area and for every mitzvah in the service of Hashem has it's own special advantages.

### **Part 3: More on the unification of one's thoughts with Hashem**

1. It is important to know that many find it very difficult to hear big demands in their search for closeness to Hashem. It is necessary simply to pray and to try to concentrate on the meaning of the words. The closeness will then come by itself. In any case it is important to know the greatness of the attribute of being close to Hashem, in order that a person concentrates more on the meaning of the words of prayer. This will help him to achieve closeness to Hashem. In addition, one who merits this closeness to Hashem should try as hard as possible not to lose it.
2. The Ramchal writes in his book Adir Bamarom, that this unity of thoughts with Hashem atones for sins, meaning that the joining of the soul to the Creator cleans the soul from the dirt of sin. He does not mean to exempt the mitzvah of repentance, or to make light of doing sins for one who regularly experiences closeness to Hashem. However, even when we are careful not to sin and do repent, still to our regret there is always much to correct. There is no place here to elaborate on this. One can however help himself by being close to Hashem.

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3. A person should know that the mitzvah of closeness to Hashem is very precious. Even if one merits to this just once a month or even less frequently, he should seize hold of what he can merit, with all his strength. Those who find it easier to achieve this closeness to Hashem, perhaps even experiencing it a few times a day, either during the prayer times or outside of prayer, should try all the more so in this area.

4. The Nefesh Hachaim explains at length in sha'ar 4 how the unifying of one's thoughts with Hashem at the time of studying Torah is not necessary. This is because he is joined with the Torah study and is therefore automatically considered as being joined to Hashem, since Torah is the word of Hashem. See the text inside for further discussion on the matter. In any case, even though he agrees that there is no obligation in this area, still there is a higher level if a person can add thoughts of his Creator to his Torah learning - note well his words in sha'ar 3: chapter 14 near the end in brackets, and what is written above about this in chapter 12: part 5: point 4, there is no place to elaborate further here. In truth, there are those who find that the best way for them to achieve closeness to Hashem is through the study of the holy Torah. This raises their souls to link up with the Creator.

5. See further what is written above in part 2: point 2 about this area for those who find it very hard to reach unifying their thoughts with Hashem.

#### **Part 4: Requests in prayer and personal requests**

1. One of the fundamental principles in prayer is the knowledge that The Holy One Blessed Be He is merciful. He does favors, listens to the requests of those who beseech Him and helps them. It is clear in our holy writings that there is no prayer that returns empty-handed. Indeed every Jew's appeal to Hashem activates salvations. Sometimes Hashem uses a persons request to produce a different salvation which is better suited to this person. Still it is an obligation to know and to believe that many times the salvation requested is indeed initiated.

2. Every person must familiarize himself with the belief that everything that he wants and asks for is dependant only on The Holy One Blessed Be He. It is written that this is actually part of the mitzvah of requests in prayer which teaches that the matter is dependant only on Hashem. This is great service of Hashem and apart from this such a prayer will be accepted and delivered.

3. It is very important that a person regularly asks for the things pertinent to him in a pleading manner. The more imploring the prayer, the more it is accepted [especially if one merits to beseech with tears as it says in the gemarah, "The gates of tears were never locked". We find in the anthology of letters of the Chazon Ish how he advises to approach prayer for success in Torah with tears, through contemplating with deep pain how little merits one has in Torah, until from the pain he comes to cry tears over it - see the letter itself - I don't have the book to hand at present].

4. There are those who find it easier to appeal with emotion if he can word the request in his own way. This is permissible and correct according to halacha. One may add a request at the end of the Shemone Esreh before the last yiheyu lerotzon. A person may also ask Hashem for his needs, with whichever words he wants even not during prayer. [A person must take care not to request bad for another person even if he causes him pain. This is a very severe transgression, one should only pray for good things].

5. Chazal speak in many places how the circumstances of the Jewish nation were very often changed for the better, all in the merit of the prayers of individuals. The power of prayer is immense. In the anthology of letters of the Chazon Ish there is an expression saying, "Prayer is like a mighty stick in the hands of man to hugely improve his circumstances, through pleading about them to his Creator. His prayer will be accepted and his situation will greatly improve."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE GREAT OBLIGATION TO BE AS BUSY AS POSSIBLE WITH THE HOLY TORAH

1. The Nefesh Hachaim writes in sha'ar 4: chapter 15 how we have been commanded from the mouth of Hashem Himself with an awesome warning, “This Torah scroll must never leave your mouth and you must toil in it day and night.” [Joshua 1:8]. The Zohar writes in his introduction [the translated version], “Come and see just how mighty the power of Torah is, and how it is loftier than anything...” It is therefore necessary that a person put all his effort into Torah day and night and not separate himself from the Torah. This is what it means when it is written, “And you should toil in it day and night”. If one turns away from or separates himself from the Torah, it is as if he has cut himself off from the tree of life.
2. The Tana Debei Eliyahu, Seder Eliyahu Zuta chapter 13, says that a person should put great effort into learning the words of Torah. The words of Torah are compared to bread and water, teaching us that just as it is impossible for a person to exist without bread and water so too he cannot exist without Torah, as the verse says, “This Torah scroll must never leave your mouth...” We find a similar idea in the medrash Tanchuma in parshat Ki Tsavo on the verse, “And it will be when you will surely listen...” We find this also in parshat Ha'azinu and in the medrash in Tehillim 1.
3. The pasuk writes [Mishlei 3:18], “It is a tree of life for those who grasp it...” A person must entrench in his heart and

imagine in his mind that were he drowning in a raging river and then saw a strong tree in front of him in the river, he would summon up the strength to seize the tree and cling to it with all his might. His hands wouldn't weaken from holding it for even a moment. His entire life depends on this tree. Who is foolish enough not to understand that if he is lazy, Hashem forbid, even for one moment, and his grip weakens, he will surely drown?

4. So too the holy Torah is called the tree of life. Only when a person grasps this tree of life with love, and is busy with it, regularly laboring over it, then he lives the real, upper life, connected and joined, so to speak, with the One who is eternally living, blessed be His name, since the Holy One Blessed Be He and Torah are one.

5. Further, in chapter 34 of Tana Debei Eliyahy [adapted] he writes; "From the time of the destruction of our Holy Temple, and the children were exiled from their father's table, the Holy presence of Hashem and His glory wanders - so to speak - without respite. There is nothing left, only this Torah. When Yisrael, the holy nation, are busy with Torah as they should, they themselves are like a miniature sanctuary, to prepare for and to satisfy the Holy Presence, which will rest with them and spreads its wings over them, so to speak. Through this, Hashem has a little reprieve, as Chazal say in chapter 141 in Brachot (8a), "From the day that the Holy Temple was destroyed, the Holy One Blessed Be He has nothing in this world apart from the four amot of halacha".

6. They continue and say, "How do we know that the holy presence of Hashem rests even on a lone person who sits and

studies Torah? Since the verse says, 'In every place that I mention...'" The medrash in Mishlei at the end of chapter 8, explains the verse "Whoever finds me has found life." Hashem says, "Anyone who is situated in the words of Torah, so too I am situated within him in every place." The verse therefore says, "Whoever finds me has found life."

7. A sensible person will see and understand his way in holiness. He will seize his route, ready to be busy with Torah all the days of his life, and to despise evil and to choose that which is good for him and for all creations and worlds, to bring pleasure to his Former and Creator, blessed be His Name.

**CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

**MESILLAT YESHARIM - CHAPTER 25**

1. In Mesillat Yescharim chapter 25, he writes how to acquire a high level of fear of Hashem. The way to acquire this awe is to contemplate two very true things. The first is that the Presence of Hashem exists in every place in the world and He himself watches over everything, small or big. Nothing is hidden from His eyes, neither due to it's magnitude, nor its lowliness. Rather every big thing and every small thing, every minor thing and every major thing, He, without distinction sees and understands.
2. That is what is written [Yishiah 6:3], "The land is filled with His glory", and [Yirmiyahu 23:24] "Surely I fill the heavens and the earth." and [Tehillim 113] "Who is like Hashem ... Who sits on high and lowers Himself to view the heavens and in the earth", and, "Hashem is elevated yet lowers Himself, and is high from distance of knowledge" [the former two pesukim that the Mesillat Yescharim brings are to prove the first principle that His presence exists in every place, and the latter two pesukim come to prove the principle that Hashem observes everything in the world.]
3. When it is clear to a person that wherever he is, he stands before Hashem's Holy Presence, then automatically he will have awe and the fear within him, lest his deeds not be fitting before the height of His glory. That is what is said [in the mishna in massechet Avot - chapter 2: mishna 1], "Know what is above you; an eye that sees, an ear that listens and all your deeds are in the book of records", Since the supervision of Hashem is over

everything, and He sees everything and hears everything, it is certain that all one's deeds will make an impression be recorded in a book - either as a credit or as a debt.

4. This matter can only be pictured well in a person's intellect with regular meditation and serious thought because the matter is very distant from our senses. The mind can only possibly imagine it after much contemplation and in-depth thought. Even after the principles are understood, if one doesn't constantly review it, the image will very easily disappear. Just as contemplation is the way to acquire awe, so too, lack of focus and deficiency in deep reflection are the main causes of it being lost, whether it be due to worry or purposely done. Any ceasing of concentration in this matter will put an end to any incessant awe.

5. This is what The Holy One Blessed Be He told to a king [Devarim 17:19] "And it should be with him and he should read from it all the days of his life, so that he learn to fear Hashem." Here we learn that fear is only learnt from reading without break. Notice that it says, "So that he learns to fear..." and not, "So that he will fear..." because this fear is not within the sensations of nature, in fact it is quite the opposite and very far from it. The senses are physical, and this awe of Hashem is only acquired through unceasing study, and great diligence in Torah and it's ways.

6. A person must ponder and think deeply about this matter. Hashem's presence is in every place and he literally stands before Him at every moment and at every time. Then a person will truly fear Him. This is what David Hamelech prayed for,

“Hashem, teach me your ways, I will go in your truth with my heart to fear your name.”

7. The words of the Mesillat Yesharim in chapter 25 quoted above, are fundamental principles which have the power to bring a person to high and great spiritual levels. Fortunate is the one who is able to, without promises or commitments, learn this chapter of Mesillat Yesharim every day. It is certain that this will greatly improve his ways, especially if he will understand this chapter well. [See the Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 214, where he writes about getting oneself used to a good habit. One should say before he begins that it is all without promises. He explains that apart from saying that it is without any promises, he should also detail that he is not committing himself to it, see well all the words inside the text itself. For reasons for this see the Levush and the Aruch Hashulchan there, what they write at length about this topic, in Nedarim 15. There is no place here to bring the whole discussion.]

8. The essence of the words of the Mesillat Yesharim brought here is, in short, a) two principles; the first being that a person is always standing before his Creator, and the second, that every detail of his actions and business is supervised at every moment by the Creator of the world, whether it be a good deed or Hashem forbid the opposite. All his affairs in their every detail will receive reckoning.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE GREAT BENEFITS FOR THE ENTIRE JEWISH  
NATION RESULTING FROM EVERY INDIVIDUAL'S  
CAUTIOUSNESS IN AREAS OF SANCTITY AND  
MODESTY (TZNIUT)

**Part 1**

1. In areas of sanctity and modesty, halachic detail is brought at length in halachic and ethical works, as well as the great obligation to take care for every pitfall in transgressions in these areas. Great is the merit and the reward of one who is cautious in this, and Hashem forbid for the converse. There is no place here to discuss this further here. Here just one detail is discussed, on the topic of the benefit that there is for the entire Jewish nation from the care taken by every individual in these areas.

2. It is written in Tehillim about the splitting of the sea using the expression, 'The Sea saw and fled'. Chazal explain that the sea saw the coffin of Yosef and explained with a 'gezeira shava' comparing the expression of 'fleeing' which is used with Yosef when he fled from sin, to the expression of fleeing used here. They therefore explain that the merit which caused the sea to split was that of Yosef when he restrained himself from sin. We find more on the matter in the 'Tikunei HaZohar' where he explains that had he not withstood the test, the Jews would have drowned in the Red Sea. [There is what to ponder about the

promise that was made to Avraham Avinu, and there are a few ways to resolve this, no place here for elaboration.]

3. The restraint of Yosef from sin was in the topics of this very chapter. His test was very great. Yosef was a young boy, kidnapped away from home, with no one who knew him or who wanted to help him. Chazal tell us that there was a dread within him that were he to refuse, he would be put in prison for the rest of his life, like they actually did in the end. They imprisoned him for twelve years which was already a great trial, but there was more than this. Usually there would have been no hope that he ever leave prison, and normally he should have been destined to spend the rest of his life alone, and to die in prison alone, without his family. Had he actually gone ahead and sinned, naturally speaking, it would seem that no one would ever know about it apart from the two involved. He would have carried on his profitable life trusted as the chief servant of the great prince, able to advance in every area of success in life. However, due to his fear of Hashem he held himself back from sinning. This strength split the sea and saved the entire Jewish nation.

4. In the end he miraculously acquired royalty and as a result returned to live with his father etc. etc. It was only because he held himself back from sinning that he met the chief butler and explained his dream, who then told Pharaoh about him, who brought him to incredible success. From a simple, superficial, present viewing eye, looking at Yosef in prison, it would seem that nothing would ever become of him.

5. We see that in the merit of an individual's cautiousness from sinning, the entire Jewish nation was saved. Here we spoke

about restraint from a proper transgression, but we find that there is a unique power as a result of any good conduct in areas of sanctity, pouring blessings upon every Jew as will be explained soon in part 2 about Kimchit.

6. Chazal reveal to us that in the merit of Yosef everyone was saved, as they explain from the pesukim. According to this the many individual Jews who, throughout the generations were vigilant in these areas, must have brought about salvation and deliverance for many Jews.

7. Kimchit's sons all merited to become high priests. It was obvious to whoever saw her sons, that the behavior of this woman had brought merit to the Jews. Chazal connect the fact that her sons were so elevated, to become high priests, to her behaviour in areas of modesty and sanctity. Accordingly we learn that the carefulness of Jewish women throughout the generations in areas of modesty has in fact brought much deliverance and salvation for many Jews.

## **Part 2**

1. We find more in Chazal about the carefulness of Kimchit in areas of modesty, and how this brought blessing to the Jewish nation. The gemora in Yuma 47a writes, "Kimchit had seven sons who all served as high priests. The wise men asked her, 'How did you merit this?', she replied, 'Never did the walls of my house ever see the hairs of my head.' The wise men replied and said, 'Many others also did this and didn't achieve what you have!?' There is however a proof that Chazal did accept her words.

2. In the Talmud Yerushalmi we find various places in Yuma 5a, and in Megillah 1a and in Horayot 3b which don't explain like the Talmud Bavli, and it says that the Chachamim did accept her words that she merited to this through her caution. A pasuk is brought to support this - see there.

3. It could even be that the Talmud Bavli does not differ with the Talmud Yerushalmi. Whatever the case the wise men always agreed that this merit of Kimchit was the ruling factor in regards to her special merit. The Bavli simply means to say that this merit alone cannot suffice; it must be that she had some other private merit, or have inherited some merit from her ancestors. Still her merit was certainly the main causative one. Perhaps this explanation will do well to minimize the differences of opinion especially as the argument here is about something factual. [See what the Rashash notes on the sugya, how he brings from other cases where it mentions that many others did the same thing but didn't achieve the same result. In these areas it is certain that the merit greatly helped, even though it was not sufficient and could not have been the sole reason]. Even were we to say that it is a direct argument, still the gemorah quotes all her words, and in a bartering way, pushing her words aside with only the proof that others had done the same and yet still not merited the same, meaning that there is logic in what Kimchit said. In any case the Yerushalmi definitely accepts her logic and the wise men accepted her words.

4. What is so great about the fact that the walls of her house did not see Kimchit's hair? If it means to say that she never exposed her hair in front of males, this is a clear halacha which all women surely kept. The gemarah does not say that this was

reason either. What Kimchit was saying was that she never uncovered her hair, even when she was completely alone. This is something that is basically impossible to do. However Kimchit managed this difficult thing, investing monumental effort for the sake of modesty, thereby meriting to so much. This is not a new understanding of the gemarah. It is essentially written in the gemora, in the words, "Never did the walls of my house see the hairs of my head."

5. The magnitude of the merit of one's son becoming a high priest, never mind having seven sons becoming high priests, is indescribable. The high priest holds the most unique and responsible position in the entire Jewish nation. He is the one who brings atonement to the nation and he is the only one permitted and indeed commanded to enter the holiest place in the world, on the holiest day of the year. There he would perform the service on behalf of the Jewish nation. In truth he would do service in the Holy Temple on behalf of the entire nation every day of the year, according to Torat Hakabbalah. Kimchit therefore in fact succeeded in bringing great merit to every single Jew, as part of the entire nation.

6. Even though the gemarah mentions only one detail of her modesty, we learn from this the general greatness in every halacha and area of modesty and sanctity. This applies equally to men and women. [The Yerushalmi brings another good habit of Kimchit, thus implying that her merit was in the general area of modesty.]

7. With we see Kimchit clearly how her ways brought merit to the whole Jewish nation, through her sons becoming high

priests. We will explain soon just what the exact connection is between Kimchit's actions and her resulting merits. Still we can already learn from here how the many vigilances in areas of modesty that Jewish women throughout the generations took upon themselves, brought great salvations for many Jews.

### Part 3

1. We have seen in parts 1 and 2 the power of being careful in areas of sanctity and modesty to bring down outpourings of deliverance and salvation for the entire Jewish nation. One must question why this strength is especially connected to areas of sanctity and modesty. In truth this is already explained at length in chapter 4, that really every mitzvah and distancing from sin that a Jew performs, results in salvations for the entire Jewish nation. This is because the good influences descending from the higher worlds are increased. We saw earlier in parts 1 and 2 just how far reaching this is, and how in these areas, every action of even an individual is much more powerful.

2. We can explain this according to hidden understandings in many ways. It is hard to speak at length about things connected to the secrets of the Torah, but we will explain here, Hashem willing, one understanding of this, according to a fundamental and great principle brought in Kabbalistic works in various places. What is brought here is mainly from 'Adir Bamorom' of the Ramchal in his essay on 'Yichud Hagan', the language there is relatively easy to understand [it is interesting to know that there is a letter from the Gaon ... a disciple of R' Chaim Volozhin (and he himself was one of the greatest men in the

world and his words are brought in the Mishna Berura) testifying in the name of R' Chaim Volozhin in the name of the Vilna Gaon the incredible greatness of the Ramchal in areas of Kabbalah. Furthermore, in a letter, it was said to R' Chaim about the book 'Adir Bamarom' of the Ramchal, that it is entirely revelations from the upper worlds, especially the essay on 'Yichud Hagan' which is boundlessly awesome. R' Chaim replied saying that this is certainly true. The rest of this topic is discussed later in the aforementioned work.]

3. That is what we have discussed earlier about the way Hashem programmed the worlds, how through mitzvot and good deeds that the Jewish nation perform in this world, many higher worlds receive their rectification. As a result of this, spiritual and physical bounty descends to the Jewish nation in this world. The problem is that protection is required to ensure that this bounty reaches only goodness and that impure higher powers not take it or nurture from it. It is clear from the Ramchal that this is a very big problem, and that due to this only part of the bounty descends to this world. A very large part remains in the higher worlds so that it remains preserved. It is preserved for the Jewish nation in the world to come as there is no other way to preserve it - see the Ramchal. He brings further that if one has a way to preserve the bounty it is a tremendous merit that through it, the great bounty can come to the Jewish nation in this world. [This does not in any way minimize the bounty of the next world, rather this additional bounty which descends, greatly helps to increase the merits - note his words well and you will see how this comes out from them.]

4. Now it is proper for us to inquire as to whether we have some idea how to boost this safeguard, resulting in abundant bounty descending to the Jewish nation. One who looks carefully in the Torat HaKabbalah will see that there is a clear answer for this. This safeguard is formed through diligence to guard the laws of sanctity and modesty, whether through the carefulness of males in areas relevant to them, or the carefulness of females in areas relevant to them. Indeed any type of caution in these areas has a special and incredibly immense power to strengthen this safeguard. The reason why it is especially the mitzvah of modesty which increases this safeguard is difficult to explain here in detail since it is a long and complicated topic. We will however explain a little very briefly here. I hope that whoever is familiar with Kabbalistic ideas will understand these things. The main safeguard is dependent on the keeping of limited countings of the upper countings which have connection with the power called 'The Original Snake' and anything similar to it. This in particular is dependant on the topic of modesty.

5. With this we can understand how appropriate these warnings are to benefit the general welfare of the Jewish people. There is much Torah studied and many mitzvot performed throughout the Jewish nation, whether between man and Hashem or between man and his fellow. There are also plentiful prayers and all wonderful types of service of Hashem, all producing great bounty which has the power to activate salvations for the entire Jewish nation in literally every area. But part of all this bounty is prevented from descending to pour goodness over the Jewish people in this world due to the aforementioned powers of evil. This bounty is therefore saved

for the future. Through vigilance in areas of sanctity and modesty a safeguard is produced thereby enabling the bounty which was already produced and preserved, from the Jewish nations' serving of Hashem, to then descend to this world. It's really something quite easy as this bounty does not need to be produced for the Jewish nation; it is already there, waiting to be given the opportunity to join the Jewish people.

6. This was what could bring about the splitting of the sea and the success of the service of the high priests, since these are matters of salvation for all the Jews. It was necessary to use the merits of the entire Jewish nation as well as the aforementioned safeguards in areas of modesty. The power of outstanding individuals, the strength coming from the merits of the entire Jewish nation can also affect good and blessing in spirituality and physicality in this world for the Jewish nation.

#### **Part 4**

1. From all that has been said it is clear that a person must stir himself to take great care in the areas of sanctity and modesty. This can be either because of the greatness of the mitzvah, or Hashem forbid to the opposite, or because of the benefits for himself. [In truth every mitzvah or Hashem forbid it's opposite, contains benefit for the entire Jewish nation as detailed in chapter 4].

2. A person could also be moved to do this when he thinks of the unique and mighty power that lies in matters of sanctity and modesty to bring salvation for the Jewish people. This must greatly arouse a person, whether because he wants to bring

pleasure to his Creator, since it certainly brings huge pleasure to Hashem when a person spiritually and physically assists the whole of the Jewish nation, or it could arouse one's feelings of mercy for the Jewish people, for an overall deliverance or for individual salvations, which so many are waiting for. It goes without saying that when a person merits to benefit the general community, his heaven sent reward is tremendous and eternal.

3. Rashi speaks in masechet Avodah Zarah about general care against transgressions. He says that there are two types of vigilance. The first is at the time when the opportunity presents itself, to restrain oneself not to Hashem forbid slip up. The second is to be vigilant in the first place to prevent oneself as much as possible from coming into a testing situation. This is true in every area, but even more so when it comes to matters of sanctity and modesty. It is not sufficient that a person arrange that he remain completely holy and pure, rather he must arrange his deeds and business in a way that he will not come to a situation which will test him for a deficiency or imperfection in his holiness and purity. A person must therefore sort out his matters that he not enter places or situations which cause him to stumble. It is hard to bring details here on this topic, but in a general way it is possible to say that the best advice for most people is to try as much as possible to be in the Bet Knesset and Bet Medrash. These are places which protect a person from harm, and there a person can busy himself with the holy Torah, which is the greatest possible protection from harmful things.

4. In particular, when a person is in doubt not just as to how to spend a certain amount of time, but also when settling one's future, one must definitely take care that sanctity and modesty

be a large factor in the decision. For example when it comes to a career, one should arrange as best he can to spend as much time as possible in the Bet Knesset and Bet Medrash, busying himself with Torah.

5. There are places where if a person wishes to take care in areas of sanctity and modesty in their every halachic detail, people will mock him. A person need not be embarrassed before his mockers, as we find in the Shulchan Aruch at the beginning of Ohr Hachaim, "A person should know that the truth is with him, that we heed only the wisdom of our holy Torah, and in the world to come all those who mocked him will realize his righteousness that he kept Torah, and will thank him for his vigilance in it, which shielded and protected them so much." His caution will greatly benefit the whole Jewish nation.

6. On the rare occasions when people in his town or society poke fun at the way he performs the halachot, it would be good for him to move neighborhood or change friends so that he not come to a difficult situation. It is however difficult, for various reasons, to make general rule for this, since there are situations where for other reasons the move is not good for him. The necessary requirement is that the mocking not cause him to humble or lower his level of sanctity and modesty. It is hard to bring a final judgment here without knowing the details of every individual situation.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE PROHIBITION OF HAUGHTINESS

1. In the Nefesh Hachaim in the additional chapters between sha'ar 3 and sha'ar 4, he writes [adapted], “You the reader, here is your guidance, with Hashem’s help, in the ways of truth, to show you the way that you should safely go. You will then be able to slowly rise through the aforementioned levels, according to the purity of your soul and according to your aspirations, more than what is laid out before you here, and also according to one’s habit. You will see with your very own eyes that whatever you make a habit of, from all these levels, will add purity onto your previous purity, though engaging oneself in Torah and performing mitzvot, and in the fear and love of Hashem.”

2. We see therefore that one must guard and take great care that one’s self-opinion not overtake nor lift him up from serving his Creator with purity of thought. A person should not feel haughty from this. One must search and investigate this very much. It is written clearly, “Any haughtiness of heart is an abomination before Hashem” (Mishlei 17). This is even if the haughtiness is not apparent to others, only within his own heart, it is still a disgrace before Hashem, and as is well-known, is the source and the cause for all bad character traits.

3. It is written in the gemarah that one who is proud is as if he built a forbidden private alter, and the presence of Hashem wails over it. It also says in Pesachim 66b, “Whoever is proud, if he was a wise person, his wisdom is removed from him.”

4. Whoever has fear of Hashem within him will tear the hair of his head and bring tears to his eyes when he takes to heart from who Chazal teach this principle; Hillel the Elder, who is described in the words of Chazal for his unbelievable humility. Despite this, it occurred once that it seemed he raised himself high and was punished for this immediately; the halacha was hidden from him [Pesachim 66]. What can we say, and what can we speak about. We need to investigate and inspect for this at every moment. (End of adapted quote from the Nefesh Hachaim)

5. See at length the great severity of the prohibition of haughtiness in the gemarah and in ethical works. Although we can not elaborate here, we can only bring a little to awaken ourselves that a person, strengthen himself in the service of Hashem, and not come to haughtiness.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE PROHIBITION OF ANGER

1. The gemarah and the Zohar deal very severely with the prohibition of becoming angry - see Nedarim 22 and Pesachim 66, and that which is brought in sha'arei Kedusha, part 2:sha'ar 4, in the name of the Zohar - there is no place here to elaborate further.
2. It is written in the book 'Sha'ar Ruach Hakodesh' of Harav Chaim Vital in the name of the Arizal [p10b] [adapted] that the character trait of anger apart from entirely blinding one's comprehension, as we find on the posuk, "And Moshe was angry with Elozor and Itamar...", Chazal say that whoever becomes angry, if he is a prophet, his prophesy is removed from him, if he is wise, his wisdom is removed from him [Pesachim 66b].
3. It is even worse than this, as we will explain. The Arizal was very particular in the area of anger, more than all other transgressions, even when he would be angry for the sake of a mitzvah, like in the case with Moshe brought earlier. He would reason that all other aveirot do not entirely disable, rather each aveirah blemishes one limb. Anger, however, wounds the entire soul and alters it completely. The point here is that when a person becomes irritated the holy soul completely withdraws from him, and in its place comes a soul from the 'exterior' (lower) side - this is a hidden matter - the pasuk speaks about this, "He tears his soul with his anger" [Iyov 18]. At the time of anger and fury, it literally tears out his holy soul and leaves it torn, killing it. And as the Zohar brings in parshat Tetzaveh

p182b. how much the Zohar stresses the topic of anger, so much so that one who is together with an angry person is as if he is right next to an idol - see the text inside

4. Even if a person makes rectifications to his soul and does a fantastic repentance for all his sins, and does numerous and great mitzvot, it is all completely lost to him. The holy soul which did all those good deeds has been exchanged for an impure one and left him, leaving the impure maidservant in its place to inherit it's mistress. It requires that he return again and correct all that the original corrections that he did. This happens every time that he is angry because an angry person cannot receive rectification at all; he is like a dog that repeatedly eats his own vomit.

5. He also damages himself in another way. This is that it could be that he did some great mitzvah which brought down the soul of a righteous person to come to help him. Now due to the anger, this also departs from him. This is another part of the meaning of the soul being torn.

6. As long as a person has the trait of anger, he can never reach any spiritual heights, even though he may be righteous in every other area, since he builds and then when he become angry immediately destroys all that he has just built. Other transgressions do not tear out and uproot the soul, although they remain stuck to it. They are however blemishes in the aspect of that aveirah alone. When he corrects that blemish it is entirely fixed. But anger requires numerous rectifications and much preparation to return his soul that was ripped away from him. Perhaps, as we find in the Zohar in parshat Tezaveh,

according to the type and essence of the anger, sometimes it cannot be fixed at all. Even more than this, my teacher would rebuke me greatly even for the times that I would get angry with my brother whilst teaching him.

7. When it is written that the aveirah of anger is the most severe in the Torah because of the departure of the soul, it refers to the severity from one specific aspect. Of course from other aspects there are transgressions more severe than anger. Obviously if a person is forced to choose between desecrating Shabbat or to become angry, he must choose the option of anger and not desecrate the Shabbat. Not only with Shabbat, which is more severe, but with all other transgressions too, there is no way that one can slip up in a particular prohibition in order to hold himself back from becoming angry, even though there is a unique gravity with anger. There are of course many other sides to this and therefore there is no leeway to fall into any prohibition in order to save oneself from anger.

8. There is another very severe thing about anger. Apart from anger itself being very serious, the fact is that an angry person is very likely to harm others with his words. One must take great care with this because there is a Torah prohibition of paining someone with words - see what is written about this earlier in chapter 11.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### THE ADVANTAGES OF STUDYING TORAH AND SERVING HASHEM WITH JOY AND EXCITEMENT

1. The Gaon R' Chaim Volozhin writes in a letter [printed at the end of the augmented version of the Nefesh Hachaim p421] about how Torah study is something which needs constant encouragement. "I have never held back from encouraging you and from hurrying a conscientious person to learn Torah with alacrity and great enthusiasm, because what one learns lazily taking a whole day, he can learn in just a few hours were he to learn with zeal...

2. ...The thoughts of your heart should always be on words of Torah. Even whilst eating and sleeping, one's thoughts should be on words of Torah. One's studies should also be in Torah, so that the words of Torah are constantly in one's mouth" - see the text of the Nefesh Hachaim for further details.

3. Harav Chaim Vital writes in his book 'Sha'ar Ruach Hakodesh'[p.10b] in the name of the Arizal, "Whenever a person performs a mitzvah, or is engaged in Torah or in prayer, he should be happier and merrier than one who has earned or found many thousands of golden dinars." See all his words inside. He means to say here that this is the correct way to serve Hashem, since the happiness shows how important the service of Hashem is to him. [However he does not mean to say that if a person has no way to be happy, he should still not slacken in his service of Hashem. He should always do as much as he can manage.]

## **CLOSENESS TO HASHEM**

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4. Torah should be studied with great joy, as should the performance of all mitzvot be. R' Chaim Vital adds that by learning with enthusiasm and happiness, it usually helps the success of the study, see what is written in the letter mentioned in point 1 above.

5. Know that excitement and happiness in Torah study, and in other areas of serving Hashem, greatly sanctify and purify a person's soul, for many reasons. One reason is that a person has many layers in his soul and often when a person serves his Creator, it grasps and strengthens only part of these layers, and the other layers participate less. But when he learns Torah or serves Hashem in any matter, with excitement and zeal, more layers of the soul are used in this learning and mitzvah performance. The happiness also affects deeper layers of his soul and as a result he is greatly purified.

## CHAPTER 21

### REFERENCES IN OTHER WORKS RELEVANT TO THE TOPICS DISCUSSED IN THIS BOOK

All the topics in “Words of encouragement for the study of gemarah” are relevant to this work.

There are various points relevant to this work in my commentary on the Torah, mainly in parshat Vayeitzei, parshat Metzora, parshat Acharei-mot, parshat Emor, parshat Behar, parshat Vayelech, parshat Vezot-haberacha and various other places.

In my work on Neviim and Kesubim there are relevant points in Yirmiyahu (chapter 32) and in Yoel (chapter 2) and a few other places too.

There are very many connecting points in my commentary on Agadot.

The entire work on the collection of matters in areas of ethics, from the Vilna Gaon is very relevant to this work.

Similarly the essays, “Mordechai Ha’alyah” and, “Ma’alot Hakedusha” are connected to this work.



**TO LOVE THE TORAH**

**CHAPTER 1**

**WHY YOUNG PEOPLE CAN FIND IT DIFFICULT TO LEARN  
GEMARA**

1. Nowadays there seem to be many young students who find that learning Gemara does not attract them as it should. Judging by the ones with whom I am personally acquainted, I am convinced that it is not in any way because they dislike mitzvos, or are not interested in learning Torah. On the contrary, I see that they are boys who genuinely want to do what Hashem requires of them.

2. The first possible reason for this disturbing trend is that they simply do not realize how tremendously important it is to learn Gemara. They sincerely want to know what is so unique about learning Gemara and why it is held in such esteem, and they would be more than grateful to anyone who could come and explain it to them. The surest proof that ignorance is to blame for their disinclination to learn, can be seen once they do come to appreciate the true worth of learning Gemara. Then, as soon as they start to understand the powerful effect it has on them, they begin to feel the attraction to learning Gemara no less than anyone else.

3. Another difficulty standing in the way of many students is that they think they will never manage to understand Gemara in depth. They see it as hopeless and give up even before they start. Although they are mistaken; the chances to succeed in learning

Gemara, for anyone, are very high. Nevertheless such a negative attitude is obviously very discouraging and prevents them putting much effort into learning Gemara.

In the following pages we will attempt to elaborate on these two points. We would like, first of all, to clarify how vitally important it is to learn Gemara, and then to demonstrate how each and every student has the potential to learn Gemara productively and meaningfully.

4. There are also many parts of the Gemara which appear to be complicated or difficult, and they can be problematic for some students. They don't understand why they should exert themselves to understand these texts and prefer to concentrate on the more straightforward sections of the Gemara. What they don't realize is that there is so much to be gained from the actual עמל, the toil and effort. If they would only know about the spiritual benefits and the refining influence to be derived from the actual learning and from striving to understand, it would completely change their attitude, and make them enjoy their learning much more.

5. Throughout the generations of our history, learning Gemara has been the ultimate pleasure and joy for all Jews. Jews from all walks of life, from the simplest to the most learned, were always happy to sit down and learn a 'daf Gemara'. Essentially it is no different today. The spiritual delight that learning Gemara affords can still belong to every Jew. The obstacle standing in the way of today's youth is simply that they lack the knowledge of certain basic facts - facts which are the key to the wonderful happiness that lies in learning Gemara.

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In the following pages we will, with Hashem's help, elaborate on the subject and discuss ways and means to overcome the afore-mentioned difficulties. There are sources in the writings of our Sages for all we have written, and they will be listed elsewhere. In these pages, however, we have tried to write in simple terms and without quoting the sources and proofs, so that the reader should find the text easy to read and understand.

## CHAPTER 2

### EVERY MOMENT LEARNING TORAH STRENGTHENS A JEW'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM AND ENHANCES HIS SOUL, AND THIS IS THE QUINTESSENCE OF THE MITZVA OF LEARNING TORAH

1. The first thing one has to know before beginning to learn Torah is that there is a fundamental difference between the Torah and other branches of knowledge. When studying any other subject the purpose is to gain erudition, and whatever you stand to benefit from the extra wisdom. Torah is different. Not only is the actual knowledge incomparably superior to any secular form of knowledge; unlike any other studies or science, the learning itself has an uplifting and improving effect on the person involved in it.

2. The supremacy that learning Torah has over other sciences is something which Hashem put into the very fiber of the universe. It has been there ever since He created the world, so that every instance of learning Torah and any knowledge of Torah, automatically reinforces the bond between the soul of a Jew and His Creator. It also brings forth the אור עליון, the Light from Above, i.e. spiritual advantages which strengthen a person and increase his ability to improve himself spiritually.

It is possible that at the time of learning you might not always feel the inspiration from Hashem. Nonetheless, whether perceived or not, it is always present, even if physical limitations temporarily prevent you from being aware of it. In time you will undoubtedly come to feel that Divine inspiration, at least

partially; for it is only natural that in this world a person is unable to appreciate more than a fraction of what his soul really gains from learning Torah.

3. It goes without saying that a man's relationship with Hashem and the brilliance of the spiritual Light from Above can be experienced on different levels. The intensity of the experience will be determined by the quality of the learning. There are a variety of factors that affect the way you learn and it is worth knowing about them:

1. the duration of the learning
2. learning without interruption
3. concentration
4. learning with pleasure and yearning
5. understanding what you learn
6. repetition of what you learn until you remember it for some time.

To be sure, every time a person learns, without any exception, he reaps spiritual benefits and the unification of his soul with Hashem is intensified. There is no such thing as non-productive learning. The above-mentioned points, separately and in combination, all enhance the learning and add to the extent of the spiritual gain.

4. The more you get used to learning, the more these feelings are intensified and you develop a powerful inclination to learn more and more. There may be setbacks, but the general tendency is that the desire to learn grows progressively stronger.

Harav Aharon Kotler said that when a person has to close his Gemara, for instance late at night when he goes to sleep, he should not feel that he is leaving the Gemara, but that he is being torn away from it. Which means that a Jew should feel that the truth of the Torah's light and the essence of his soul are so closely intertwined that they have become a single entity.

5. In the second blessing of the evening prayers it says: **כי הם חיינו ואורך ימנו ובהם נהגה יומם ולילה** – "for they are our life and the length of our days and we will speak about them day and night." Our Sages explain that the second half of the verse is a natural consequence of the first; as much as a person feels that the Torah is his very life - that he lives only for Torah - to that extent will the end of the verse - **ובהם נהגה** - be true, and the quality of his learning will improve.

6. You should know that there is no pleasure in the world that can even compare with the wonderful happiness that a person feels when Hashem's spiritual bounty, His **אור עליון**, comes down to him. A human being is made up of a body and a soul, the physical and the metaphysical, and it can be taken for granted that the essence of the soul is the dominant force. Worldly pleasures and enjoyments are all physical ones; Hashem's exalted light shining on to a person's soul is, by definition, an entirely spiritual experience, and in comparison to it all physical pleasures are insignificant.

7. In Tehilim (chapter 42) David Hamelech says: **כאיל תערג על נפשתי לאלקים**.... – "Like a deer yearns for flowing waters, so my soul yearns for You Hashem. My soul thirsts for Hashem, The Living G-d; when will I

come and see Hashem's Presence?" A man's soul experiences thirst in the same way as his body does. His physical being thirsts for water, and his soul thirst to be with Hashem. If someone would offer you all the riches in the world, but make it conditional on not drinking for a month, would you not refuse? – for what is money worth if you are going to die of thirst? The thirst your soul feels for Hashem's proximity and His spiritual light is exactly the same. How can worldly enjoyments quench a spiritual thirst? The only way in which yearning for spiritually can be satisfied is by learning Torah and keeping its mitzvos.

8. However, in order to reap the full benefit of the brilliant light that comes from Torah-learning, it is important for a person to know about it and always be aware of it. Learning Torah brings a Jew's soul closer to Hashem. It is a proven fact that the more a person knows about the power Torah has to unite a his soul with his Creator and the spiritual benefits of His exalted light, the more he stands to gain from it. Even though those forces are present whether he is aware of them or not, knowing about them has the effect of increasing their potency.

9. In his commentary on the Orach Chaim, there is a passage written by the Bach which has disturbing implications. He says that, "the reason why the Children of Israel were exiled from their land was because they studied the Torah only to gain knowledge, and they were not concerned with the spiritual bounty and the closer relationship with Hashem that learning Torah leads to. Thus there was something fundamental lacking in the way they learnt." We should learn from this how important it is not to ignore the aspect of learning Torah because it brings us closer to Hashem.

10. The above passage contains a very important message and it is the responsibility of teachers and educators to make every effort to give it over to their pupils. The students must be made aware of the concept that every moment of learning Torah consolidates a person's relationship with Hashem and makes him more worthy of receiving His spiritual bounty. If the teachers manage to ingrain it in the hearts of their students, it will act as a powerful incentive to help them relate positively to learning Torah and the quality of their learning will improve tremendously.

11. Simultaneously - at the same time as explaining how learning Torah brings one closer to Hashem - it is important to stress the significance of a close relationship with Him. One has to make every student realize how much a Jew's soul - his own soul - yearns for His exalted light and for spiritual growth.

It says in the Mesilath Yesharim (chapter 1) that whenever a person sees anything that might help him improve his relationship with Hashem, he should take advantage of it and pursue it with all his might. Conversely, from something that might distance him from Hashem, he should flee as if he was running away from fire. The Mesilath Yesharim also mentions that a person has to know that the only good thing in the world is being close to Hashem and any other things that people might consider good are really worthless.

In the above chapter we have elaborated on the aspect of what a man gains from learning Torah. In truth, the ultimate level of perfection is to learn Torah for no other reason than to please Hashem, to give Him נחת רוח. Nevertheless learning for

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the reasons discussed in this chapter is a very great thing indeed. Even someone who has reached the sublime level of learning only to please Hashem should be aware of the concept of drawing closer to Hashem and His exalted light. The difference is that he will be doing it for Hashem's sake, not for his own pleasure. In fact, the above reasons for learning can themselves help one reach the lofty level of learning to please Hashem. When one feels close to Hashem and basks in His exalted light, that itself makes you want to please Hashem and give Him נחת רוח.

### CHAPTER 3

**THE TREMENDOUS GOOD THAT COMES FROM  
LEARNING TORAH AT EVERY LEVEL AND FOR EVERY  
PERSON, YET ALWAYS COMMENSURATE WITH THE  
QUALITY OF THE LEARNING AND THE STATURE OF THE  
PERSON**

1. When told about the spiritual value of learning Torah, the reaction of many students is to agree that it may well be true – "but we are on too low a spiritual level for it to apply for us, both because our learning standard is so low and because our relationship with Hashem is so poor."
2. They are sadly mistaken; they don't realize that Hashem loves every single Jew very dearly. At every moment He is waiting for you to fulfill your spiritual obligations to serve Him in whatever way you are capable of. When you do learn Torah – at your own level – then you and your Torah are beloved in Hashem's eyes to an extent that we cannot even imagine. Whether you are aware of it or not, He is pouring His spiritual bounty down on to you.
3. This is true of every sphere and every level of learning Torah, without any exceptions. In the Gemara it says that the world exists because of **הבל פיהם של תינוקות של בית רבן** – the empty words that come from the mouths of children of the schoolroom, because their meaningless talk is untainted by sin. The Chafetz Chaim says that it refers to very young schoolchildren, and the level of Torah that they learn is not very high since they are too young to understand it properly. From

this we can infer that learning Torah even at lower levels contains the spiritual elements of Torah-study.

4. All the same, as explained by the Derech Chaim, the superiority of Torah learnt at a loftier level can not be denied. The more you understand of what you learn, the more the Torah's truth becomes clearer and more obvious to you. You will feel the Torah's exalted light of spirituality shining through your soul with increased brilliance, and your contact with Hashem intensified.

5. Even if his behavior causes a person to fall very low spiritually, ח"ו, he can still learn Torah, and that Torah is very dear to Hashem. From some ספרים it might be understood that it is not so; - but see what is written in the קריינא דאיגרתא of the קהלות יעקב on the subject: He explains in detail why it can not be that our Sages meant that a person on a low spiritual level should not learn Torah. It would not be right to suggest that if a person is experiencing a spiritual decline, the Torah he learns is not holy and blessed. Our Sages say that when a wicked man occupies himself with Torah, the radiance within it will bring him back on to the right track. In other words they are saying that the Torah's radiance is present even in Torah learnt by sinful people.

6. The Nefesh HaChaim too, writes to the effect that if someone finds himself struggling in the murky depths of a sinful life, it is through learning Torah that he can get the spiritual strength he needs to escape from it. If he learns, Hashem will give him the spiritual strength to repent and put right the harm he has caused.

The conclusion, therefore, is that someone who י"ח feels that he is backsliding spiritually, is even more strongly obligated to intensify his Torah studies, and devote himself to it with all his might and in every way possible.

7. It still remains true that the more righteous a person, the more his learning builds up his relationship with Hashem and brings his soul more of His exalted light. All the same, even for someone who is not so righteous, or going through a temporary spiritual depression, learning Torah is an extremely powerful force which actively draws him closer to Hashem and His exalted light.

**CHAPTER 4**

**EVERY SINGLE PERSON WHO LEARNS TORAH IS  
CAPABLE OF GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS EVEN IF HE IS NOT  
PARTICULARLY GIFTED INTELLECTUALLY, OR BY  
NATURE NOT STUDIOUSLY INCLINED**

1. A common trait that people have is that they are prepared to invest a great deal of time and effort in a task only if they know that they will make a success of it. Unfortunately, such an attitude is a serious drawback for someone who wants to learn Torah. There are young students who do not think they are capable of becoming great Torah scholars. Some think they are not clever enough, others admit that they do have intelligence in other fields but claim that Gemara is too difficult for them to master. Still others feel that they will not be able to sit and learn diligently for any length of time. Most likely of all to fall into the trap of despair are those who think they have neither intellectual ability nor the innate nature conducive to sitting and learning.
2. Know that this is a fallacy – for a variety of reasons. Numerous examples from personal experience have proven that this is not the case. Quite a number of famous Rabbis appeared to be limited by intellectual or behavioral handicaps in their youth. Yet they successfully overcame those limitations to become accomplished Torah scholars: Many had large followings of students and others published works of Torah which are still used today wherever people learn Torah.

3. There are several ways to explain why it is possible to learn Torah successfully in spite of natural disadvantages. The Chazon Ish (based on the writings of the Arizal) elaborates on the subject: The reason that a person does not want, or is not able, to perform a particular element of Hashem's service often derives from the fact that the root-source of his spiritual personality identifies more directly with certain facets of Hashem's will and not with others.

Nonetheless a person is still obliged to at least make an effort to serve Hashem in those areas as well. The result of his efforts will be that Hashem will reward him by adding extra elements to his spiritual make-up; the ones which he was lacking until then. He will then discover that he does have the inclination and the abilities to perform those tasks which beforehand did not appeal to him.

4. There are other reasons too why a person can experience a radical spiritual change. It is axiomatic that Hashem can do everything; the term impossible does not exist for Him. When Hashem sees a man sincerely straining himself to do what He wants him to, He will take pity on him and give him all the tools he needs to perform His will in an exemplary manner.

5. There is another suggestion in the Gemara (סנהדרין צ"ט ע"ב) and Rashi ad loc) which helps explain the phenomenon of people who achieve far more than their apparent potential: Our Sages say that when a person exerts himself for Torah, the spiritual lights of the Torah go and beseech Hashem to help him to be successful in his learning.

6. It is known that the Chazon Ish said that every bachur who is wholly committed to Torah has the potential to become one of the Torah leaders of the generation. There are no other conditions attached to becoming great in Torah learning. The only requirement is the basic one; to be constantly busy learning Torah and striving to be a true servant of Hashem. It is a condition that every individual can aspire for. It is dependent on no-one but himself, and no-one is able to prevent him fulfilling it.

7. We have just explained that every student can be successful learning Torah and become a Torah scholar. At the same time, we do not want to detract from the merits of natural intelligence. For the truth is that someone who has been blessed with superior intelligence should know and appreciate that it is a gift from Hashem and was given to him to use in full for learning Torah.

The Chofetz Chaim wrote that people who are born with an abundance of natural intelligence can go very far indeed and reach awe-inspiring heights if they exert themselves. The converse is also true; if ח"ו they do not use their intelligence, or use it for other purposes, they will be very sorry indeed when their lives are over and they come to the next world. There they will realize the magnitude of what they could have accomplished in their lifetimes, including things which others of their generation could never have done. In the world-to-come they will understand that they were granted a very precious gift for a specific purpose, and will be filled with bitter remorse when they see the futility of the worldly vanities on which they wasted it instead. (Quoted from the Chofetz Chaim.)

8. Therefore, someone who is naturally inclined to diligent study should make use of that characteristic for learning Torah, and his accomplishments will be truly impressive - and how much more impressive will they be if he has been blessed with a quick mind as well as being studiously inclined.

Even in the later generations we know of famous Torah personalities who were not particularly gifted intellectually, nor were they all naturally studious, yet they persevered and the result was that they became very great Torah scholars.

**CHAPTER 5**

**THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF PRAYER IN LEARNING  
TORAH**

1. Another key to success in learning Torah is to ask Hashem for it - you can ask him that you should be able to learn, whether it is the time or the natural inclination you think you are lacking. You can also ask Him to help you understand a particular Gemara that you are trying to learn.

2. In several places in our daily prayers our Sages included prayers for learning: In the morning we say וְהָעֶרֶב נָא... in the ברכת התורה: 'Make pleasant the words of Your Torah...', in the blessings before Shema: אֲהַבְתָּ רַבָּה in the morning, and אֲהַבְתָּ עוֹלָם in the evening prayers, אֶתְּךָ חוֹנֵן and הַשִּׁבְנוּ in Shemone Esre. When saying these prayers a person should beg Hashem to make him want learn, to help him enjoy learning, to enable him to learn diligently, to let him understand what he learns, to make it easy for him to remember what he learns, and anything else he needs to learn Torah.

3. It is advisable to daven to Hashem at other times as well – your own personal prayers. In your own words and at any time you want, you can always ask Him to help you learn Torah and to enjoy the learning.

Another place in the mandatory daily prayers where one can ask about Torah is at the end of Shemone Esre, before the last יְהִי לְרִצּוֹן. There one may also insert personal prayers, as many and as detailed as one wishes to.

4. Know that tefilla, prayer, is a very powerful force. The Chazon Ish wrote that a person has to know that sincere prayers can change every situation in life for the better.

5. In the Gemara it says that in order to learn Torah successfully there are two essential requirements: To work hard, and to daven. To daven to Hashem for success is as necessary as it is to put effort into your studies.

6. Hashem listens to all our prayers. He hears your prayers and accepts them and gives you what you ask for. Moreover, the actual prayer itself also unites you with your Creator. Tefilla forms a link which very effectively unites your soul with Hashem, and, as we mentioned earlier, the closer a person feels to Hashem the more successful will he be when he learns Torah.

**CHAPTER 6**

**TO THOSE WHO COMPLAIN THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND GEMARA IT WILL BE EXPLAINED THAT THE PERSEVERANCE ITSELF A VERY IMPORTANT GOAL SINCE IT MAKES YOUR HOLIER**

1. Young people often find learning Gemara too much of a challenge because they think it is very difficult to understand.

There are two fundamental rules they ought to be aware of. Firstly, experience shows, more than any number of theoretical proofs, that as one gets used to learning Gemara, it does get progressively easier. That does not mean that there will be no more difficulties to solve or questions to answer; learning Gemara always involves effort. Nevertheless, understanding the 'pshat', the straightforward meaning of the Gemara does get easier.

2. The second point one ought to be aware of is that if it takes effort to learn and understand a Gemara, in no way does it imply that anything is wrong. On the contrary, the toil and effort is the most important part of learning Torah. The Chazon Ish wrote: "The main thing is the effort; it is precisely through the struggle to understand the holy words of the Torah that a person comes to deserve the soul-illuminating light of Hashem's Torah."

Therefore, even if a man is a genius, and understands the Gemara without exerting himself, it is still important that he should use all his powers of concentration to come to a more thorough and profound understanding of the same Gemara.

Otherwise an essential element of learning Torah is still missing. The effort one has to put into learning is vital, for it contains a powerful force that effectively refines the soul of the Torah scholar.

3. The effort that goes into learning Torah purifies and refines the soul. To a young student it might sometimes seem as if he is suffering when he tries so hard and doesn't manage to understand a Gemara. He may feel disappointed when he finds that he has to study the same passage over and again, and pore over every detail, before he begins to get the gist of what the Gemara is saying. Yet the truth is that these very factors are assets to his learning; they are what purify his soul and confer on it Divine qualities.

4. The Vilna Gaon was famous as an intellectual genius from his earliest youth. Nevertheless in the writings of his pupil, R. Chaim Volozhin (Nefesh Ha'Chaim) there are remarkable accounts which give insights into the tremendous energies the Vilna Gaon used to expend on learning Torah, and we feel that it is important to quote from what he wrote.

5. "The Vilna Gaon, our pious and holy master, was a world-renowned genius. His manner of learning Torah was to think and concentrate and strain himself to a degree that is impossible to appreciate or to describe. Because of his superior powers of concentration and most wonderful holiness, he merited to grasp the edge of understanding the Torah. It is unbelievable how that mighty giant among men exerted himself until he arrived at the absolute clarity of truth. Even though he was endowed with remarkable depth of understanding and had

gained vast stores of knowledge from scholars of past generations. Nevertheless his pure heart never allowed him to take advantage of those qualities. Instead he delved into a subject until he had contemplated it from every angle and considered all the ramifications - hundreds of times. In his awesome concentration he could continue for several days and nights without eating or drinking and without sleeping, until his appearance showed that his physical being was exhausted. He quite literally gave himself up totally for the Torah. Then, when Hashem lit up his eyes with the true understanding, he underwent an instant transformation, and his face shone with purity and happiness at the clarity of the Torah."

6. Quite obviously the Vilna Gaon's remarkable powers of concentration are not expected of everyone. However we can, and ought, to learn from his example. Everyone must strive intensely - to the limits of his own abilities - when he learns Torah, because the effort is what purifies and refines you.

## CHAPTER 7

### PARENTS DUTY TO ENABLE THEIR CHILDREN TO LEARN AND LIVE TORAH LIVES AND THE ROLE OF PARENTS PRAYERS IN THEIR CHILDREN LEARNING TORAH SUCCESSFULLY

1. A student's success in his Torah studies often depends to a large extent on the encouragement he gets from his parents. Therefore the attitude of parents to their sons' Torah studies is a topic that we would like to discuss here as well.
2. In every generation it was always manifestly clear that Jewish parents wanted their children to grow up to be great Torah scholars. Irrespective of whether or not the fathers themselves were able to learn Torah, their most sincere wish was that their children should be able to learn, and for that goal were prepared to make great sacrifices.
3. There are any number of well-known stories to corroborate this idea. Here is not the place for them, but anyone who knows older people who were alive a generation or two ago can ask them and they will surely verify it.
4. Unfortunately, in recent years there are houses where the priorities have changed and parents do not all understand how important it is for their children to learn Torah.
5. Know that man is only a temporary guest in this world. We all hope to live and be healthy until the ripe old age of 120, but when his time comes each one of us will find himself in the next world. Our souls will remain there for all eternity - millions and

millions of years, without any end. What happens to a person - his soul - in the world-to-come depends on many things, but the two most important ones are contained in the answers to: How did he conduct himself in this world? and what are the children and descendants he left in this world are doing here now? Every moment when they learn Torah and do what Hashem wants of them in this world, their parents enjoy the reward of the world-to-come, a kind of reward which is too indescribably sublime for us to even contemplate.

6. All parents ought to be aware of the fact that in the next world they will rejoice about whatever they did to encourage and support their children learning Torah. Similarly, if **וְהִנְיָוּ** they prevented them learning, or made it difficult in any way, there is no doubt that in the next world they will regret it very much. Just as we can not grasp the splendor of the reward in the world-to-come, so too do we have no inkling of how terrible will be the regret one feels there in the world of truth.

Know too, that the Torah does not change. It has been passed down through all the generations by word of mouth ever since Moshe Rabbeinu heard it directly from Hashem.

The traditional way in which Jewish parents conducted themselves has always been to use everything at their disposal to encourage their children to learn as much Torah as possible. If anyone has any doubts about the matter, he need only find out about his own ancestors - maybe even his own parents - and he will hear that they were, quite literally, prepared give up everything they had and live lives of poverty and deprivation, so that their children could learn Torah. We are no cleverer than

those generations of the past, but unfortunately foreign influences, originating from non-Jewish sources, have found their way into our camp. They have complicated matters which to our parents and grandparents always seemed straightforward and obviously true. We could elaborate with proofs from our Sages and their holy writings, but this is not the place for it; this chapter was written only as incidental to the others.

7. Furthermore it is well-known that in the past, parents used to daven for their children (- and many do still nowadays, regrettably not all) They prayed to Hashem and begged him that their children should be worthy of learning Torah as much as possible and that they should have the pure, holy, and exalted fear of Hashem that every Jew strives for. They would pour out their hearts to Hashem every day in tearful supplication for these things.

The Chazon Ish claimed that "when a non-religious Jew does teshuva and comes back to the fold, whether he came to the truth himself or others made him aware of it, it is very often the result of the prayers of his grandparents several generations earlier who used to daven that their children and grandchildren should all learn Torah."

Harav Shach said that when someone becomes a learned Torah scholar, or one of the Torah leaders of the generation, or if he publishes seforim which become popular and are studied by many Torah scholars, it is natural for people to give the Talmid Chacham himself the credit for his accomplishments. Yet, the truth is that it may not always be so. Very often the

prayers of his parents, grandparents and great-grandparents influenced his success more than anything else.

8. Know that prayer is a very powerful force indeed. We can not even imagine the impact it has on everything around us. The Medrash says that the 'gates of prayer' are never shut, and quotes a possuk in פרשת ואתחנן which says: ומי גוי גדול אשר לו אלקים קרובים אליו כה' אלקינו בכל קראנו אליו. 'Which is so great a nation that it has Hashem close to it, as Hashem our G-d is close to us whenever we call to Him?'

## CHAPTER 8

### THE ROAD TO LEARNING TORAH MEANINGFULLY IS MUCH EASIER THAN PEOPLE TEND TO THINK

1. Young students should never forget that the way to success in Torah is wide open to them.

The Yetzer Hora, the evil inclination, has two main strategies which it uses to dissuade youngsters from learning. Firstly, it tries to make them believe that greatness in learning Torah is dependent on complicated issues that they don't know about or won't be able to fulfill.

The Yetzer Hora's other tactic is to persuade them to think that their position as far as learning Torah is concerned is not a good one, for whatever reasons, and because they are in such a negative and unproductive state there is no way for them to deserve greatness if they learn Torah.

2. The truth is that when it comes to learning Torah the road to success is extremely straightforward. It is within the reach of every Jew; simply by making maximum use of all the tools he has been provided with for the purpose.

3. There are four separate fields on which our Rabbis tell us to concentrate:

- to try to learn as much as possible,
- to concentrate on prayer as much as possible,
- to be careful that his eyes do not see anything unsuitable,
- and to be careful about how he speaks.

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Anyone who always pays attention to all these four points can be sure that he will successfully scale to lofty heights of Torah-learning and fearing Hashem.

4. Even if one does experience an occasional setback or times of weakness - and who does not? - one should never despair. As soon as possible, you should make every effort to focus your attention on those four points again: Torah, prayer, and keeping a check on your eyes and mouth. You should, of course, also do whatever you can to prevent such relapses recurring.

## CHAPTER 9

### ALL KLAL YISROEL GAIN FROM THE LEARNING OF EACH INDIVIDUAL

1. Another very important thing to know is that when a Jew learns Torah he is not doing good only for himself; the whole of Klal Yisroel benefit at the same time.

The Nefesh HaChaim explains in detail why this is so: The universe has been arranged in such a way that, as well as the world we recognize, there are millions of other more exalted spiritual worlds in existence. Those spiritual realms depend on whether or not Klal Yisroel learn and keep the Torah. The more Torah there is in this world, the more firmly those spiritual worlds are substantiated.

2. The stronger the spiritual realms become, the more of Hashem's bounty is bestowed on His people. Hashem's bounty is felt in all fields, material as well as spiritual. Every hour that a Jew learns Torah brings relief for all Klal Yisroel and prevents tragedies and misfortunes befalling them.

3. For a person who lives with a sense of responsibility towards his people - who wants to do things for Klal Yisroel - it means that he should learn as much Torah as he can. If he sincerely wants to help Klal Yisroel, he should be aware that, in all matters, learning Torah is the surest way to do so.

4. It can sometimes happen that a man is in the middle of learning Torah and he is suddenly confronted by some pretext or other aimed at making him stop learning. He knows that he

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should overcome the inclination and continue his studies. If he is successful, then when he comes to reckon up what he gained by learning without interrupting, he should consider the benefit for all Klal Yisroel as well as his own personal gain. In this world, we have no way of knowing what it is or how far it reaches, but we can be quite sure that the whole of Klal Yisroel will benefit considerably. It is even likely that an extra few minutes of learning can be of assistance for many Jews and prevent major calamities befalling them.

## CHAPTER 10

### SEVERAL POINTS TO ADD

1. A person should feel that the only thing that matters in this world is doing what Hashem wants us to do, and nothing else has any relevance whatsoever. It is the most basic truth that there is. In the first chapter of the Mesilath Yesharim it says that, 'Only cleaving to Hashem is good; anything else that people think good is really worthless and misleading vanity.'

2. Doing Hashem's will means learning Torah and doing whatever is written in it. Torah is unlike worldly occupations which are all transitory and without any substance. Torah is eternal and gives eternity to its adherents. When a man is learning Torah, its pure spiritual light is being added to his soul the whole time, and that light is eternal and lasts for ever.

His reward in the world-to-come is far beyond anything that exists in this world, and in addition to his own personal gain, at the same time the whole of Klal Yisroel reap unlimited benefits too.

3. If you contemplate these subjects, it will arouse in you an overwhelming desire to make the best use of your time and learn Torah whenever you can. You will also take into consideration that every minute you waste when you could have been learning, causes irretrievable loss for all Klal Yisroel.

4. It should be every man's sincerest ambition to spend his life learning Torah, and he should strive with all his being to fulfill that aim. If, for whatever reason, he is unable to do so himself,

he should at least make every effort to encourage his children and enable them to learn Torah.

5. When you learn it is important that you strive to use all your powers of concentration whenever possible,. You should work on making yourself feel that you want to learn, and try to feel the pleasure in learning as deeply as possible. The more yearning and pleasure and excitement you put into learning, the more it comes from the innermost depths of your soul, and the more productive the resultant learning will be. Hashem's exalted light will radiate through your soul and the happiness that comes from learning Torah will be more intense, since those are the most essential features of constructive Torah-learning.

Nonetheless even at times when you find that you can not concentrate very well or feel that you don't want to learn, you should still try to learn to the best of your ability. Learning Torah at whatever level is always desirable and meaningful to Hashem.



**METHODS OF SERVING HASHEM**

**BASED ON TEACHINGS OF THE VILNA GAON**

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**CHAPTER ONE**

**GENERAL TOPICS**

A. *Biur HaGr"ta* on *Zohar, Parshas Pekudei* (Sha'am printing: p. 30 column 4) states: "Pinchas is Eliyahu; and the reason that he was later called Eliyahu and not by his original name is because when a person increases his good deeds, a new soul is renewed for him, and all the previous ones are annulled for him. This is the secret of the righteous men of early generations who each had many names; each time they were called by a different name. For every *neshama* (soul) has a different name. And Pinchas merited that a new *neshama*—which was called Eliyahu—should clothe his soul."

This concept is paramount to our faith. Oftentimes, a Jew acknowledges that he harbors the potential to strive and progress in his *avodas Hashem* (service of Hashem), yet he desists since he fears that he will never attain the loftiest levels of spirituality and holiness for which he strives. However, not only is this not an excuse to avoid striving, but indeed, it is also possible that his constant, concerted effort to serve Hashem will result in his acquiring a new *neshama*. This fresh *neshama* can then endow him with new, fantastic spiritual strengths that will

allow him to attain the greatest heights in Torah study and *avodas Hashem*, spiritual levels of which he never even fathomed.

B. *Biur HaGr" a on Zohar, Parshas Pekudei* p. 31 column 4 cites a *Heichal* of the *Zohar* and expands: "Any aspiration and desire for *dveikus* that a person acquires is rooted in this *Heichal*. Although the bounty derives from above, the preparation and desire must be founded within the person's soul." It is written that the person's service is parallel to the bounty that he receives, and the same applies to the upper worlds and even the *sefiros* (spiritual spheres), etc."

This statement contains a paramount and relevant message: Even if a person believes that he does not own the spiritual potential to succeed and achieve the *dveikus* or intensity in learning that he craves, he must know that he is sorely mistaken. Moreover, he must recognize that those occasions that allow him to believe that he will succeed and that he does harbor the potential for greatness are not drawn from within his soul, but are a gift from Hashem Yisborach. However, there are times when this awesome gift is an outcome of his devoted service of Hashem, and he is deserving of it. Hence, even at times when he feels remotely distanced from Hashem and spiritual growth, he should continually strive, endeavor and beseech Hashem Yisborach for help, and Hashem will surely have mercy upon him and grant him the courage and power to achieve his goals.

C. *Biur HaGr" a on the Zohar, in the Lukutim following Parshas Pinchas* p. 31 column 2 states: "And from this you will learn

great mystical secrets regarding the spiritual defects of sins [that cause] the spirit to depart from the soul, even when he is living, and this is why 'The wicked are called dead even during their lifetimes,' and one who performs *mitzvos* is called a 'Living man.'"

There are times when a person feels that he lacks spiritual strength in his soul and that he has lost the powers to serve Hashem that he once possessed. Sometimes, these feelings are merely obsessive worrying, and there is nothing to fear. However, there are unfortunately times when there is truth to the person's fears, and it is possible that his sins caused an aspect of his soul to depart.

In such cases, the ideal recourse is *teshuva* (repentance). A person must regret his evil ways and return wholeheartedly to Hashem Yisborach. Then, he must continually endeavor to enhance his service of Hashem until the heavens restore the missing aspect of his soul. Even if he does not merit regaining his previous spiritual level, he should never desist in his service of Hashem. Rather, he should double his efforts and continue persisting until he perseveres. He must never despair of regaining his goal and previous spiritual strengths, as emphasized in the *Biur HaGr"a* on *Tikkunim (Zohar HaChadash*, p. 49 column 2-3), "A Jew can never despair of achieving the lofty spiritual levels that he once possessed. Even if he is presently unable to attain these levels, the heavens safeguard them and allow him to reclaim them whenever he is spiritually equipped."

D. *Biur HaGr" a, Parshas Vayera* p. 27 column 1 writes that the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) will never depart from one who is meritorious , until it leads him to his final resting place, as written, "Righteousness will walk before him, and place its footsteps upon the way;" "How beautiful are your footsteps in shoes, etc."

Every individual merits seeing the *Shechina* before his demise. A wicked person glimpses briefly; but the *Shechina* quickly absconds, and the Angel of Death then inflicts terrible pain upon him and takes his soul with the most painful death possible (see *Brachos* 8a). However, the *Shechina* itself removes the soul of a *tzaddik* (righteous person) with a kiss, as the *tzaddik* said, "Do not pass from upon your servant." (See there.)

E. *Biur HaGr" a on Tikkunei HaZohar, Tikkun* 58 p.106 column 4 states: "This is as it is with every one of man's sin, just as Odom [HaRishon] lost his spiritual radiance [as described in *Sefer Shaar HaGilgulim*—see there], which Chanoch inherited, despite the fact that he performed a mighty repentance. The same occurred with *Bnei Yisrael* when they sinned with the Golden Calf. Indeed, a *baal teshuva* (one who repents) is lowered in the bounty of this world that is described above. Only Dovid merited regaining his former spiritual level because of all that he did to achieve it, and this took him several years."

(See source to study the subject on a deeper level.) This is a formidable message, one that underscores how difficult it is for a person to achieve complete spiritual rectification through repentance. (Also see *Biur HaGr" a on the Zohar HaChadash, Rus* p. 106 to understand the concept of a *gilgul* (reincarnated soul))

and how it applies to the above. This will all be understood in the times of *Mashiach* (Messiah) and the Resurrection of the Dead. In the continuation of this section, the Vilna Gaon relates that this concept was revealed to him.)

F. *Biur HaGr"ra* on *Zohar, Parshas Shlach* p. 16 column 4 states: "This is the way of nature, but all is governed and watched by Hashem, for "Man does not move a finger below unless the heavens decree it so from above," (*Chulin* 7b) and "A little bird is not trapped." This is referring to *Yerushalmi Shvi'is* Ch. 9:5, p. 25b. cited by *Tosfos Avodah Zara* 16b that if a tiny bird is not trapped without Hashem's consent, certainly a person will not be trapped without Hashem willing it to be. (See *ibid* for complete discussion.)

"The laws of nature are the messengers that fulfill all that is decreed in the heavens. Hashem commands whether one will be rich or poor; Hashem decrees who will be lost and who will be found. He does not perform a miracle to create money or rule that money will grow from any place. These are the laws of nature.

"This resembles the parable of a king sitting in his magnificent throne in the royal court when he sees a person on the right side and an animal on the left, and he sends the person food—wheat—through a variety of strategies and tactics, with wheels and ropes, until it reaches him; and he sends the animal barley without either one realizing that it came from the king. They both think that the one who provided it was the messenger that stood closest to them. The king then spreads a large net to carry them to their destination, and when the time comes, he

pulls the net and the man is trapped by his neck, and his mind allows him to imagine that it happened by chance and that it is all because of the forces of nature. Indeed, it is written, “Everything is a concealed miracle, and only manifest miracles are performed by the Name *Hava-yā*, as is known.”

G. *Biur HaGr”a* on *Zohar, Parshas Mishpatim* p. 10 column 3 states: “Until he learns *Shas*, and then he will learn the secrets of the Torah, and from there he will achieve inner fear and he will strive to [serve Hashem] not for the sake of reward, and then he will have attained the spiritual level of Atzilus, as written, ‘If there is no fear, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no fear.’ The explanation is that the first statement refers to external fear and the simple meaning of Torah, but the second statement refers to Kabbalah and a sincere, inner fear.”

[Despite intensive searching, the author has yet to discover the source of the Vilna Gaon’s exact text, ‘If there is no fear, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no fear.’ *Avos* 3:17 refers to this concept of Torah study and fear of heaven. See also *Avos* 2:5; *Avos* 3:9; *Avos* 3:17; *Shabbos* 31a, b; *Yuma* 2b; *Sefer Nefesh HaChaim Shaar D Ch. 4, 5*; *Biur HaGr”a* on *Zohar, Parshas Pekudei, Heichalos*, p.291a (in the new printing—p.23 columns 1-2) regarding the concept of *Yichudim*.

H. *Tikkunei HaZohar, Likutim* p. 100b column 3 places fear before Torah in its order of levels of spiritual greatness, as follows, ‘One whose fear of sin precedes Torah, his Torah is realized,’ (*Avos* 3:9). Thereafter, he presents love and ‘An ignoramus is not one who is pious,’ as one who is a total ignoramus of even societal norms cannot fear sin.

The above refers to two levels of spiritual deficiency:

- A. An ignoramus who does not even conform to societal norms.
- B. An ignoramus who conforms to societal norms but does not learn Torah.

These two levels parallel the spiritual levels of fearing sin and piety, which is an even loftier spiritual level of love. One who is an ignoramus can never become pious, although he can achieve the level of *yiras cheit* (fear of sin). Hence, *yiras cheit* leads a Jew to achieve Torah and Torah leads one to achieve love of Hashem.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOURCE LIST FOR *DVEIKUS HAMACHSHAVA* TO HASHEM YISBORACH BASED ON THE VILNA GAON

#### Part I

A. The writings of the Vilna Gaon encompass many key statements regarding the significance of *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach. *Biur HaGr" a* on *Zohar, Parshas Pekudei* p. 16 columns 3-4 discuss this subject at length, but we will not expand upon it in this booklet as it is necessary to be well-versed in Kabbalistic Torah in order to fully grasp the content. However, in a general sense, this section of the Vilna Gaon's commentary states that for every moment that a Jew reflects upon Hashem Yisborach, he is granted additional aspects to his soul, heavenly, lofty aspects that he never had previously. Moreover, the more intensity, fervor and concentration that a Jew imbues into these thoughts, the greater and loftier are these new aspects that his soul acquires.

B. *Biur HaGr" a* on *Zohar*, at the end of the *Heichalos* in *Parshas Bereishis*, p. 12 column 3, states as following: "The spirits are included one within the other, and they rise higher and higher and unite into one. This is not the case with the *Chayos* and *Ofanim* (two types of ministering angels) which are bodies of spirit and lights which do not harbor the potential for spiritual growth, but only for absolute clairvoyance... And the ascent of the man's soul [occurs] on *Shabbos* and holidays, during hours of prayer. Only the spirit ascends; the body does not ascend, as it

was in the case of Moshe on Mount Sinai.” [See below Part II for the Vilna Gaon’s discussion regarding Moshe Rabbeinu’s ascent on Mount Sinai.]

C. *Biur HaGr”a* on *Zohar, Parshas Pekudei* p.221a, before the *Heichalos* of *Parshas Pekudei* p.16 column 3, states: “And this is the key to all spiritual ascents, as it is an ascent of the soul in thought; and this is the secret of all growth.”

Later in his commentary, he adds, “And you shall know of all spiritual ascents, that all occurs in the mind of all the worlds, as the thoughts of man.”

D. *Biur HaGr”a* on *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 1:1 on the words of the Ram”a, “I place Hashem before me always; this is a paramount rule in the spiritual levels of the righteous.” [The Ram”a notes that this statement was originally made by the Rambam in *Sefer Moreh Nevuchim* Vol. 3 Ch. 51-52—see there.]

The Vilna Gaon comments that the concept of ‘placing Hashem before me always’ is the foundation of the lofty spiritual levels achieved by the righteous *tzaddikim*.

This statement is more severe than that of the Ram”a’s, who maintains that ‘placing Hashem before me always’ is a ‘paramount rule’ in the lofty spiritual levels of the righteous. (See *Gemara Shabbos*, beginning of Ch. 7.) Obviously, the Ram”a did not wish to detract from the significance of *dveikus hamachshava*, yet the Vilna Gaon specifically emphasizes that *dveikus hamachshava* is an essential aspect of spiritual growth, to the extent that a person cannot ascend spiritually without it. (See *Biur HaGr”a* on *Orach Chaim*, which quotes the opening verse in *Parshas Noach*, “And Noach was a righteous

man...Noach walked with Hashem.” He explains that ‘walking with Hashem’ refers to ‘placing Hashem before me always.’) It is no coincidence that the Torah’s first mention of the word ‘*tzaddik*—righteous’ includes a clear, concise explanation of the qualities of a *tzaddik*, as a *tzaddik* must constantly know that Hashem is Present with him always.

E. See *Biur HaGr”a* on *Sefer Yetzira* Ch.1:6 p. 9 column 4, beginning with the word, “*U’I’maamaro*,” to further understand this concept.

## Part II

A. In reference to the Vilna Gaon’s statement as quoted above in Part I Paragraph A, “And so it was with Moshe on Har Sinai,” it is obvious that he does not intend that Moshe Rabbeinu did not ascend physically with his corporeal body to the heavens, as the Torah states this explicitly. Indeed, it is known that every verse in the Torah can be understood according to its simple explanation, which means that it is certain that Moshe did ascend physically to the heavens.

B. Hence, the Vilna Gaon is likely referring to *Gemara Sukkah* 5a, which states: “Rabbi Yosi taught, ‘The Divine Presence never descended, and Moshe and Eliyahu never ascended to the heavens, as written, “The heavens are for Hashem, and the land, He gave to man.” [The *Gemara* asks:] Did the Divine Presence not descend? Indeed, it is written, ‘And Hashem descended on Mount Sinai.’ [The answer is] Above ten handbreadths. And it is written, ‘And his feet stood on that day on the Mount of Olives.’ [This also means] Above ten handbreadths. [A second question

is] Did Moshe and Eliyahu not ascend to the heavens? Indeed, it is written, 'And Moshe ascended to Hashem.' [The answer is] below ten. And it is also written, 'And Eliyahu rose in a tempest to the heavens.' [This also means] below ten. And it is written '[Hashem] makes it possible for His Holy Throne to be grasped' [*Iyov* 26:9]. Rabbi Tanchum teaches, 'He separates a portion of His *Shechina* and fashioned it as a cloud above man.' This is still above ten handbreadths. [The next question is] how can it be above handbreadths if people can still grasp the Throne? [The *Gemara* answers], Hashem brings the Throne exactly above ten handbreadths so it can still be grasped."

C. See the *Ein Yaakov* which elucidates this point regarding Moshe Rabbeinu and Eliyahu who ascended, 'less than ten handbreadths.' Obviously, the number does not refer to a physical height, since this would mean that they hardly ascended at all and remained very close to the earth. Rather, they ascended to a height that was a mere ten handbreadths beneath the heavens. Similarly, when the *Shechina* descended upon Mount Sinai and the Mount of Olives, it descended almost to the earth but remained ten handbreadths above the earth.

D. The Vilna Gaon adds that when Moshe ascended to the heavens, his body remained beneath the heavens and certainly did not rise above the heavens. However, his soul ascended to a far greater height and actually reached the heavens and perhaps even a higher level than that. Moshe merited this enormously lofty level due to his sincerity in serving Hashem and cleaving to Him constantly with his thoughts. (See *Nefesh HaChaim* regarding Moshe Rabbeinu's spiritual powers.)

### CHAPTER 3

#### *KEDUSHAS YESOD* BASED ON THE VILNA GAON.

- A. *Bi'ur HaGr" a* on *Tikkunei HaZohar*, *Tikkun 21* p. 56 column 2 states: "All strength is dependent upon this, as it says in *Maseches Avos*, 'Who is strong? One who vanquishes his inclination.' This is the *tzaddik*, and any evil inclination in safeguarding the *bris* (covenant of the circumcision); and upon this is says, 'And any inclination of his heart was only evil...'"
- B. 1. See the Vilna Gaon's commentary at the beginning of *Tikkun 23* p. 76 column 3 which states as following: "A covenant of fire... The mouth of the *ama* (place of the circumcision) contains the quality of Malchus, and this is why it has a foreskin; and the Malchus that is degraded here will be rectified here, for Chessed is revealed through the circumcision. And the purpose of every man is to rectify it in order to achieve this spiritual level."
2. It would seem that the Vilna Gaon is referring here to safeguarding the place of one's circumcision from spiritual flaws. [*Sefer Ana Avda* and the Chazon Ish's *Sefer Maase Ish* both assert that this is the ultimate purpose of man's sojourn in the physical world; and it is possible that these statements were based upon these words of the Vilna Gaon.]
3. It is also possible that the Vilna Gaon's statement in *Tikkun 23* refers to the *mitzvah* of *pru u'r'vu*—procreation. Indeed, the Vilna Gaon wrote expansively of the significance

and greatness of this *mitzvah* in his commentary on *Tikkunei HaZohar*, at the end of *Tikkun* 43, p. 92 column 3.

4. See *ibid* in the Vilna Gaon's commentary on *Tikkun* 23, citing the *Idra Rabba* p. 142 which includes a powerful description of the importance of safeguarding the *bris* from prohibition. This ostensibly proves that the above was the subject of his statement.

5. Also see *Bi'ur HaGr"a* on *Zohar*, *Parshas Pekudei* in the *Heichalos*, p. 253a (p. 24 end of column 4) which cites the *Idra Rabba*.

6. It is also possible that the Vilna Gaon's statement in Paragraph A referred both to safeguarding the *bris* from forbidden acts and to the *mitzvah* of procreation.

7. Another possibility is that this statement refers to the *mitzvah* of circumcision. See *Idra Rabba*.

C. See the *Bi'ur HaGr"a* on *Zohar*, *Parshas Mishpatim* p. 115a (p. 10 column 1) in the *Likut Nusach Acharina* which explains that the Vilna Gaon was mostly discussing the concept of *teshuva* (repentance) which is an aspect of the quality of Yesod. (See source for complete explanation.) Also see the exact text of the *Zohar* *ibid* p. 114b which discusses the result of one who repents from sins violated by the place of the *bris* (see *ibid*).

D. Also see *Biur HaGr"a* on *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 70 p. 161 column 1 which states: "Just as Yosef who safeguarded the *bris*, so a Jew merits that he will control the heavenly angels. And so it was with Chanoch who safeguarded his *bris* during the time of the great Flood; his reward is known."

E. *Biur HaGr" a* on *Tikkunei Zohar HaChadash* p. 31 column 3 states: "And they said, 'One who transgresses a sin in private'; sins that are called transgressions by the *Gemara* always refer to adultery and thoughts of adultery, and so it is in many places."

F. *Biur HaGr" a* on *Tikkunei HaZohar Tikkun 22*, p. 73 column 4 states: "And this is the decree of the grave: One is saved from this through his *bris*."

The above statement means that a Jew is spared the pain of death and burial by safeguarding his *bris*; and any suffering is a result of failing to safeguard it as possible. [See *Tikkunei HaZohar*, and the Vilna Gaon's commentary beside it which discusses that, occasionally, a person will suffer from poverty instead of actual death, as poverty is likened to death.]

G. *Biur HaGr" a* on *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 69* p. 115 column 2 states: "And he wishes to say that Odom and Chava, his wife, were knowledgeable of shame; and thus, when they united, their knowledge were joined, and she conceived and gave birth... If not for the sin, they would have united without this knowledge—the evil inclination. Instead of from the Tree of Knowledge, their union would have been with the Tree of Life, as it will be in the world-to-come when people will pray for an arousal of unity from Hashem; and the children will live forever from the Tree of Life." [See below for lengthy explanation of the *Biur HaGr" a* on *Tikkun 69* p. 115.]

In this section of his commentary, the Vilna Gaon describes the concept of physical arousal that causes a man and woman to unite as one. Physical desire only became a factor in procreation after Odom HaRishon's sin. Had Odom refrained from sin and

abided by Hashem's command, procreation could have occurred through prayer and beseeching for Hashem's mercy, as in the case of *Bris HaLashon*.

Moreover, the physical desire that leads to procreation causes death in this world. However, if it were possible to procreate through prayer, as Hashem had originally intended, then the babies born would live forever—as those babies would be a product of the Tree of Life.

This teaches us a powerful lesson regarding the significance and necessity of sanctifying oneself prior to and during the fulfillment of this *mitzvah*, and *Chazal* have emphasized this in many places. The Vilna Gaon's message highlights that every Jew must strive to fulfill the *mitzvah* to the utmost with the thoughts and reflections that would have accompanied these *mitzvos* before Odom HaRishon's sin. Not only is this the ideal method of fulfilling the *mitzvah*, but it is also most beneficial for the child.

H. *Biur HaGr"i* on *Tikkunei Zohar Tikkun 69* p. 126 column 2 states: "And this is why Moshe feared him [Og, King of Bashan—see source], until he was told, 'Do not fear him,' as he had defiled the *bris*, as stated at the end of *Parshas Chukas*, "With this, he will be uprooted." These words are explained by the *Zohar* at the end of *Parshas Chukas* p. 184a-b.

I. See *Biur HaGr"i* on *Zohar Parshas Pekudei, Heichalos*, p. 253a (p.24 columns 3-4) for a lengthy explanation regarding safeguarding the *bris*. Also see *ibid* p. 254b (p. 30 column 2).

J. Also see *Biur HaGr"i* on *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 21* p. 60 column 4: "That one must sanctify himself tremendously while

uniting, and then the evil inclination will not rule over the children.”

K. See *Biur HaGr”a* on *Zohar Parshas Pekudei* p. 248a (p. 21 column 1, 3) regarding the concept that the wisdom and mystical secrets of the Torah are dependent upon the *sefiros* of Chochmah and Yesod, which is also rooted in Chochmah, and can be regained through the path of Yesod. (See source for complete explanation.)

The same applies to Kedusha, as written, “In Kedusha is all the Chochmah, and it is dependent upon fulfilling the *bris*,” as written, “The secret of Hashem is to those who fear Him; and His covenant, to let them know.”

L. *Biur HaGr”a* on *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 56* p. 105 column 1 states: “As they sinned in the covenant...and this is [what the verse] ‘The sin of my heel will surround me’ refers to. [*Chazal*] elucidated, “[These are] the sins that man is *dash b’akeivo*—steps on with his heel,” and ‘this’ alludes to this sin, as written, “Even a faint discussion.” The word ‘*dash*’ refers to Er and Onan’s sin that they were ‘*dash*’ inside. The word *eikev* refers to the placenta that comes from between her feet, as the heel is the lowest part of the body. [Regarding the statement that “This is the final aspect created in a man,” it is necessary to clarify that although the feet are the final aspect in the physical order of a person; in the order of the *sefiros*, the legs precede the *bris*, and it is the *bris* that is the final aspect of a man. Thus, *Chazal* refer to the *bris* as the ‘heel,’ as it is the conclusion and culmination of a person.]

M. 1. The Vilna Gaon writes in his explanation to *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 69 p. 136 column 4: “There are two evil inclinations in each person, which are the two aforementioned ‘holes.’ And they are as follows: The first is a person’s desire; and this is the worst of all, as written, ‘As honeycombs, it will drop from your lips, my bride.’ The second inclination is for the emptiness of this world, either for a lot of money or for exhilaration, as it says, ‘Money will answer everything....’ But this one is not as challenging as the first.”

2. The inclination to sin in adultery is an exceedingly compelling, powerful craving that surpasses all other desires for physical pleasure in this world. It is unclear whether the Vilna Gaon deliberately quoted the verse, ‘As honeycombs, it will drop from your lips,’ in order to accent the lips which form speech, which is the toughest inclination to overcome; or if it was randomly selected to describe the sin of adultery. According to the secrets of the Torah that regard speech, it would seem that the former is correct.

N. See the *Biur HaGr”a* in the *Tikkunim* of the *Zohar HaChadash* (p. 49 column 3) and the *Biur HaGr”a* on *Tikkunim* of the *Zohar HaChadash* p. 27 column 2, beginning with the words ‘*V’asidim hevu*,’ regarding the sixth thousandth year which is the *sefirah*, ‘Yesod’.

O. *Yeshaya* 60:22 states: “I, Hashem, will hasten it in its time.” *Gemara Sanhedrin* 88a expounds that this verse refers to the ultimate future Redemption. “Rabbi Alexandri said, Rabbi Yehoshua *ben* Levi said, ‘What is the meaning of the verse, ‘I will

hasten it in its time? [How can one hasten something if it occurs in its time? They explained.] ‘If they are meritorious, then [Hashem will] hasten it; and if they are not meritorious, [the Redemption will arrive] in its time.’”

See *Biur HaGr”a* on *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 21* p. 56 column 2 which seems to allude that the merits required for a hastened redemption are largely dependent upon safeguarding the *bris*.

P. Also see *Biur HaGr”a* on *Tikkunei Zohar Tikkun 10* p. 26 column 1 and *Biur HaGr”a* on *Tikkunei Zohar Tikkun 56* p. 105 column 1.

Q. *Biur HaGr”a* on the *Tikkunim* of the *Zohar HaChadash* p. 52 column 1 beginning with the words ‘*Zaka’in ekron,*’ affirm that “A *tzaddik* is one who safeguards his *bris*.”

R. See *Biur HaGr”a* on *Zohar Parshas Shlach* p. 160a (p. 18 columns 2-3) which discuss that safeguarding both covenants—speech and circumcision—are the foundations of all spiritual growth.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROHIBITION OF DEFILING THE BRIS BASED ON THE VILNA GAON.

- A. *Sefer Sha'ar Hakavanos, Drushei HaLaila*, p. 56 column 2 describes the reason and severity of the prohibition of defiling the *bris*, which causes souls to escape the *Otzar HaNeshamos* (Storehouse of Souls) and enter the bodies of *mazikim* (harmful entities) instead of entering the bodies of Jews. (See *ibid* for lengthy description and explanation.)
- B. 1. *Biur HaGr"a* in *Safra D'tzniusa* also expounds upon this concept. (See *Biur HaGr"a* in *Safra D'tzniusa* Ch. 5 p. 36 column 4 beginning with the words, '*Vayehi ki ad b'keren hayovel*,': "And it is known that man [was fashioned] in the image of the heavens in miniature. Just as man, heaven forbid, releases in vain in this world, so the 'person' above does in the Upper Worlds to the evil forces, heaven forbid.
2. *Biur HaGr"a* on *Safra D'tzniusa* Ch. 4 p. 29 column 2 explains that when a person defiles his *bris*, he causes the birth of *mazikim*. (See *ibid* for complete explanation; see *ibid* p. 31 column 3 and p. 32 column 2 for brief explanation.)
3. *Sefer Sha'ar Hakavanos* *ibid* explicitly states that defiling the *bris* not only causes souls to exit the *Otzar HaNeshamos* needlessly, but that these souls also transform into *mazikim*.

4. The Vilna Gaon also in Ch. 5 p. 36 column 4 that “Souls exit the *Otzar HaNeshamos*,” although he does not add that they transform into harmful entities. In Ch. 4 p. 29 column 2, he discusses that defiling the *bris* causes the birth of *mazikim*, although he does not mention that the *mazikim* are born as a result of souls fleeing the *Otzar HaNeshamos*. (These points are also summarized on p. 31 column 3 and p. 32 column 2.)

5. Although the Vilna Gaon does discuss both points of souls fleeing the *Otzar HaNeshamos* in vain and of the birth of *mazikim*, he does not relate these two issues or state that the same souls that flee the *Otzar HaNeshamos* are those that transform into the souls of *mazikim*. Nonetheless, it is logical to connect both results of defiling the *bris*, especially as Rav Chaim of Volozhin does relate these both points.

C. *Biur HaGr”a* on *Zohar Parshas Pekudei* p. 266a (p. 16 column 3) states, “And this is the secret of the sin of releasing in vain, as it draws *mazikim* into this world, and this is a terrible destruction.”

D. See *Biur HaGr”a* on the Introduction to the *Zohar*, p. 12a (p. 5 column 1): “And this is the sin of one who releases in vain, as he did not take form inside a woman, and all that remains is the stringent forces; and the two sides do not unite as one. And this is why the generation of the Flood were wiped out with water and judged harshly.” (See *Biur HaGr”a* for complete explanation.)

E. See *Biur HaGr”a* on *Tikkunei Zohar Tikkun 21* p. 48 column 1 regarding the sin of releasing in vain and it is likely that Paragraph C and D relate to this topic.

F. *Biur HaGr"ra* on *Zohar Parshas Pekudei, Heichalos* p. 254b (p. 30 column 2) states: "And this is the great secret of *keri* (releasing in vain). One takes something *yakar* (precious) and transforms it to *keri*. (In Hebrew, the words *keri* and *yakar* are formed of the same letters—*kuf*, *yud* and *reish*.) See source for complete explanation and *Sha'ar HaPsukkim L'Chavakuk* in order to acquire a clearer understanding of this topic.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DEEP IMPACT OF EVERY ACTION; THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *KRI'AS SHEMA AL HAMITTA*.

A. *Biur HaGr"ta* on *Zohar Parshas Bereishis, Heichalos* p. 43b (p. 17 column 2) beginning with the words, '*Trein nehorin*,' contains a very powerful message.

The Vilna Gaon writes, "With the seven Eyes of Hashem, all actions committed in this world are written, every action that a person performed, exactly according to its form and specifics, on the exact day and in the exact place. This is what they exhibit to man before his death; and these are the seven layers of the Eyes... And the reason for the Eye is because the whole world is recorded in the Eye, and all that is in it, and everything that he does, the place is listed in that place, with a Good Eye or an Evil Eye; and this *Heichal* is called Hand, as known, as it is written, 'Your hand is Left,' as said, 'Even My Hand...' This is what it means when it says, 'And with the hand of every man, He will seal,' as this is where the hands of every person are found—in the root of his soul."

B. The above corresponds to Rebbi's teachings in *Avos* Ch. 2:1: "Look at three things, and you will not come to sin. Know what is above you: An Eye that sees; an Ear that hears; and all your actions are written in the Book." See the Vilna Gaon's explanation of this *Mishnah* in his explanation to *Tikkunei Zohar*.

C. *Biur HaGr"ta* on *Zohar Parshas Yisro* p. 74b (p. 6 column 4) beginning with the words, '*B'sha'ata d'na'im.*' He writes, "And this is 'In the hand of every person, He will stamp.' This means, when a person is sleeping is when [Hashem] writes all that happened on that day, and the etchings change according to the person's actions."

D. According to the Vilna Gaon, a person's actions are written in the Book when he is sleeping. This also clarifies Rav Chaim Vital's instruction in *Sha'ar Hakavanos, Drushei Halaila* that one should recite *Viduy* (Confession) before going to sleep (see source).

The *Ohr HaChaim's* commentary in *Parshas Vayechi* adds an interesting point regarding the sparks of the soul that divide during the day and ascend to the heavens at night when a person sleeps.

## CHAPTER 6

### ADDENDUM

A. For a deeper understanding of the concepts of *yetzer hatov* (good inclination) and *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), see *Sefer Kabbalas HaGr" a* Vol. 1 in his explanation to the *Likutim* in the beginning of the *Biur HaGr" a* to *Idra Rabba* which is printed as an introduction to the *Tikkunei HaZohar*, column 4. Also see commentaries on *Biur HaGr" a* on *Tikkun 21* p. 70.

B. See Rav Chaim Volozhin's introduction to *Biur HaGr" a* on *Safra D'tzniusa* which describes the Vilna Gaon's vast spiritual endeavors and lofty levels in *avodas Hashem*.

C. *Biur HaGr" a* on *Zohar Parshas Bereishis, Heichalos*, p. 42b (p. 14 column 2) beginning with the words, '*Ad d'askililu*. "All the above is accomplished through prayer. But the spirit is acquired through desire, as is focusing upon the Oneness of Hashem."

The section beginning with '*V'hahu rucha*' describes, "It emerges that everything is dependent upon focusing upon the Oneness of Hashem and the will of people."

Column 2 beginning with the words '*Hacha hachra'a*' states: "In all six *Heichalos*, there are actions. In the seventh *Heichal*, there is only will; and that is The Will." (See *ibid.*)

D. *Biur HaGr" a* on *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 69* p. 130 column 3 beginning with the words, '*V'ed ya'ale*,' describes, "Just as with rain, every action in this world is hanging in a mist that rises from the earth; so it is with every action of the *Shechina*, and its

behavior is dependent on man's speech. And this is the way that the lower world operates; thus, everything that is created on this earth, 'It is all nothing.'"

E. *Biur HaGr"a* on the Introduction to the *Zohar* p. 11b (p. 4 column 3) states: "And the main thing is that a Jew must cleave to these four things, as all follows the action; and for this, the world was created, so that they shall recognize the power of His Kingship."

F. These 'four things' are a reference to his list in the Introduction to the *Zohar* on p. 11b. "Fear is essentially that people should fear their Creator, as He is Great and Supreme and the Essence and Root of all worlds; and all before Him are as nothing, as it says, 'And all who dwell in the world are considered as nothing.'"

The Vilna Gaon explains that this *Zohar* is divided into four parts. The first point—Hashem is Great—is expressed in Chessed. The second point—He is Supreme—is expressed in Gevurah. The third point—Hashem is the Essence and Root of all worlds—is expressed in Tiferes; and the fourth point—the fact that all inhabitants of the earth are as nothing before Him—is expressed in Malchus. See *ibid.*

Glossary

<i>Avodas Hashem</i>	Service of Hashem
<i>Baal teshuva</i>	Person who repents
<i>Bnei Yisrael</i>	Jewish Nation
<i>Bris (</i>	[Place of] circumcision
<i>Chazal</i>	Sages
<i>Dveikus</i>	Cleaving [to Hashem]
<i>Gilgul</i>	Reincarnated souls
<i>Mashiach</i>	Messiah
<i>Mazikim</i>	[Spiritual] harmful entities
<i>Mitzvah/mitzvos</i>	Commandment(s)
<i>Neshama</i>	Soul
<i>Otzar HaNeshamos</i>	Storehouse of Souls
<i>Sefiros</i>	Spiritual spheres
<i>Shabbos</i>	Sabbath
<i>Shas</i>	Talmud [Torah]
<i>Shechina</i>	Divine Presence
<i>Teshuva-repentance</i>	Repentance
<i>Tzaddik(im)</i>	Righteous person(s)
<i>Yiras cheit</i>	Fear of sin

## IN THE WAYS OF ASCENT

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- Chapter 15: List of the miracles enacted by Eliyahu and Elisha.
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PREFACE

**Part A: General Content and Methods of Attaining Supernatural Powers**

I. This book, *In the Ways of Ascent*, presents tried-and-true methods of ascending the spiritual ladder which leads a Jew to appreciate his spiritual connection to Hashem (G-D) and inspires him to cleave to the Creator with his heart and soul. This book highlights the most essential aspects of spiritual growth, impelling man to take steps to further enhance his service of Hashem.

II. Many were the *tzaddikim* (righteous sages) who possessed supernatural powers due to their virtues; and this book presents the keys to acquiring these powers. (The definition of supernatural powers and the benefits of possessing them are explained below in Ch. 12.)

III. There are numerous means that can be exploited to achieve these powers; this book will present the foundational pillars of these methods, as transmitted from teacher to student throughout the generations. It is known that many of the righteous individuals who acquired supernatural powers employed the methods described in this book.

IV. Some of the methods to acquiring supernatural powers that are presented in this book were transmitted secretly from generation to generation in order to prevent them from being

exposed to the masses, not all of whom are worthy of exploiting them.

V. In our day and age, many are those who seek to acquire supernatural powers. There are several reasons for this passionate search, one of the primary ones being the force of *kedusha* (holiness) in the world, as written, “Behold days are coming, said Hashem, and I will send a hunger in the land; not a hunger for bread nor a thirst for water, but to hear the words of Hashem, And the waters will move until the sea, and from the north until the east, they will wander to seek the word of Hashem; and they will not find it” (*Amos* 8:11-12).

The *Gemara* (Talmud) expounds upon the verse, “The word of Hashem is *Halacha* (Jewish law); the word of Hashem is Prophecy; the word of Hashem is the end of days.” Although the verse states that they will not find; it says the same of the *Halacha*” (*Shabbos* 138b). The *Gemara* concludes in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that this does not mean that there will come a time when *Halacha* will be forgotten totally, but that the nation will not find a conclusive explanation and clear-cut *Halacha* in one place.

Prophecy no longer exists in this day and age (see the *Smag’s* explanation regarding the Prophets and Scriptures at the end of *Sefer Malachi*). Yet, with tremendous Divine assistance, it is still possible for a Jew to attain a magnificent spiritual light that endows him with supreme spiritual capacities.

VI. There were many motives in the publication of this book, the foremost being the depressed spiritual level of our generation.

Unfortunately, on many occasions, man's determination to achieve supernatural abilities that are beyond him lead him to err and traverse false paths, which cause him terrible hardship throughout his spiritual journey and impairs his service of Hashem.

VII. A second motive is the vast spiritual challenges faced by the members of our generation. For some, the only method of avoiding total spiritual degeneration is the discovery of the lofty spiritual levels that allow a Jew to cleave to Hashem and His Torah absolutely. This is especially true for those who possess extremely lofty *neshamos* (souls), but who are unaware of it, and thus confront enormous spiritual challenges in their lives, as written "One who is greater than his friend, his evil inclination is greater than his" (*Sukkah* 52b).

Thus, following a period of extensive debate, it was determined to publish the contents of this work, *In the Ways of Ascent*, for the benefit of Jews worldwide.

## **Part B: Studying This Book with the Goal of Achieving Spiritual Strength**

I. This book was written in the clearest form possible in order to allow every Jew, including those who are remote from spirituality, who have never learned Torah or observed the *mitzvos* (commandments), to understand the maximal content and utilize the inherent messages in order to draw nearer to truth, spiritual strength and lofty spiritual levels.

II. However, due to concerns in publicizing the sensitive contents of this book, there are several sections that were recorded cryptically, compelling the reader to study the text in depth in order to gain maximal clarity and lead the *neshama* to discover and connect to the sacred concepts embedded in the text.

III. Even one who is *mitzvah*-observant, who has studied Torah for years and who has already attained lofty spiritual levels is likely to encounter new information and important lessons in this book. He may, likewise, be compelled to read the text several times before he is familiar enough with the concepts to merit the vast powers described. It is insufficient to identify with the concepts on an intellectual level, as one must merit a soul connection to these lofty ideals. Ironically, one who is already familiar with the concepts may actually be forced to invest extra thought and effort into appreciating them before attaining the desired spiritual heights.

IV. It is advisable to occasionally reread this book, or at least the sections of it that most inspire a soul-connection with Hashem. This will maximize the benefits that can be gained from this work and help the reader acquire the desired spiritual levels.

V. This book contains sixteen chapters that highlight various means toward achieving spiritual greatness. Ideally, one should endeavor to implement all these methods simultaneously. However, if this is unfeasible, one should focus intensely on a single path; and one will still attain vast spiritual accomplishments.

For example, one who meticulously studies, reviews and strives to follow even the instructions listed in the very first chapter in the book can already achieve astonishing spiritual results. Still, it is recommended that the reader at least read and familiarize himself with the other paths to spiritual greatness, as knowledge itself reinforces his strength and endeavors. Moreover, if there is one part in the path that he selects that he is unable to understand or follow, he may be capable of achieving the same results via another path. Then, once he has achieved his goal via a different course, it is possible that when he returns to read the first ambiguous section, he will be able to grasp and implement the part that he was previously unable to comprehend.

VI. Chapters 13 and 14 primarily discuss the famous *Gemara Ksubos* 111b and the commentaries of the *Rishonim* (Early Sages), as opposed to methods of achieving *dveikus* (cleaving to Hashem). Notwithstanding, these chapters both contain vital elements toward achieving supernatural strengths, as clarified by Rabbeinu Chaim Vital in *Sefer Eitz Chaim* regarding the importance of *pilpul* (sophisticated Torah-based debates) as a powerful weapon against negative forces that block spiritual light. While his statement actually pertains to all aspects of Torah study, it is especially significant when applied to this subject of acquiring supernatural strengths. As stated above, even if there are sections in this book that seem ambiguous or confusing to the reader, one can still attain extraordinary spiritual heights through learning and absorbing other sections of the book.

## **IN THE WAYS OF ASCENT**

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VII. Chapter 7 and 8 are fundamental to this work, as they emphasize that mocking or scorning its sacred content may cause one to lose all that he stands to attain or has already attained through other sections of the book.

VIII. A glossary at the end of the book translates and defines Hebrew words and terms.

## CHAPTER ONE

THE ESSENCE OF THE JEWISH *NESHAMA* ; THAT WHICH IS ACTIVATED IN THE *NESHAMA* VIA TORAH AND *MITZVOS*; AND HOW THIS TRANSLATES INTO A JEW'S PRACTICAL SERVICE OF HASHEM.

### Part I

A. The *Ramchal*, *Nefesh HaChaim* and many other *sefarim* (holy books) quote the *Zohar Hakaddosh's* famed statement: "Hakaddosh Baruch Hu (The Holy One Blessed Is He), Torah and Yisrael (Nation of Israel) are One" (*Adir Ba'Marom; Nefesh HaChaim Shaar 4 Ch. 11*). [This exact text is not found anywhere in the *Zohar*, yet it paraphrases the words of the *Zohar* on *Parshas Acharei Mos 73*).

B. The above statement is perplexing and requires due explanation. How can it be said that Hashem is One with the Torah and Yisrael? It is known that Hashem possesses neither physical body nor corporeal form, that His Presence fills the entire universe and that He created both the universe and Torah. The Torah is a holy book from which the world was fashioned; and Yisrael are mere flesh and blood! How can they merge into One?

C. The explanation must be prefaced with the following statement:

Man is composed of a physical body and spiritual soul. The body is corporeal, manifest to all. The soul, albeit obvious as it distinguishes between a live and dead person, is invisible; and it is exceedingly difficult to aptly define its essence.

The Jewish *neshama* can be compared to rays drawn from the sun. The existence of sunrays and their very essence are conditional to their drawing light from the sun. If one were to place a barrier between the sunrays and the sun, those rays of light would cease to exist. The Jewish soul, drawn from its Sun—Hashem—are as sunrays. The essence and definition of the Jewish soul is that it is drawn from Hashem Yisborach.

(Obviously, the model of the sun is but a parable, as the gap between Hashem and a human being is inconceivable, whereas there is a measurable gap between the sun and the distance that rays of light travel. The purpose of this parable is to underscore that the Jewish soul is merely an extension of Hashem, drawn totally from Him.)

D. The above explicates the statement, “Hashem, the Torah and Yisrael are One.” The souls of *Bnei Yisrael* (People of Israel) are as a bounty of spiritual light. (Kabbalistic works regularly refer to a positive spiritual bounty as ‘light’ or ‘radiance,’ since the most spiritual substance that can be found within the physical world is light, and because it is extremely beneficial to the world.) *Bnei Yisrael’s* soul—a bounty of spiritual radiance—is drawn from Hashem, the Source of all light. This is why the Sages state that Hashem Yisborach and Yisrael are One—as Hashem is the Source, and *Bnei Yisrael* are the bounty emanating from that Source.

E. The connection between the Torah and Hashem-Yisrael is explained as follows:

*Gemara Sanhedrin* 89 quotes the verse, “A soul that toils, toils for itself.” *Chazal* (Sages) explicate the redundancy as, ‘A person toils in one place, and the Torah toils for him in another place.’ *Rashi* elucidates that when man toils in the study of Torah, the Torah turns to Hashem and entreats that man should be blessed with understanding of Torah.

The Torah is not simply a code of laws to which we must adhere; rather, it is an actual spiritual creation called Torah. The Torah exists in the heavens and harbors the force to beseech for mercy from Hashem, similar to the heavenly Angels.

F. This explains how the Torah is One with Hashem and Yisrael. Hashem molded Creation in a way that the bounty that He emits toward Yisrael is directed via the spiritual entity called Torah. The bounty comprising the Jewish soul is created by and passes through the holy Torah, which is also a type of bounty that emanates from Hashem. (*Ramchal, Adir Ba'Marom*)

G. The most compelling, potent soul-desire of a Jew is to connect to his Source and benefit from greater bounty and vigor that fortifies his soul. The means of acquiring this powerful force is Torah—by increasing hours of learning and *mitzvah* observance. Enhancing one’s fulfillment of the Torah includes all aspects of *avodas Hashem* (service of Hashem), including observing *mitzvos*, refraining from *aveiros* (transgressions) both in regard to man’s relationship with Hashem and man’s relationships with his fellow men; and prayer. These three

simultaneously awaken the spiritual bounty in the heavens and draw it toward man via the radiance of Torah.

H. As a Jew endeavors to connect to Hashem, his heart must blaze with fierce aspiration to learn Torah, spill his soul in prayer, observe the *mitzvos*, avoid *aveiros*, and strive to fulfill the Will of Hashem. These should be accomplished with the clairvoyance that his endeavors will lead his soul to connect to its Source and enjoy enormous spiritual radiance.

This is truly the ultimate desire of the Jewish soul, a yearning that surpasses any longing or aspiration that can exist in this physical world. Indeed, the *Ramchal* writes, “As the soul derives from Above, its truest pleasure can only be the light emanating from the Face of Hashem Yisborach” (*Mesilas Yesharim* Ch. 1).

I. A Jew who grasps this foundational pillar of Judaism is automatically aroused to achieve lofty levels of spiritual growth. As he prays, learns Torah, fulfills the *mitzvos* or refrains from *aveiros*, he should focus on the concept that his actions fortify his soul connection with Hashem and convey a heavenly radiance from Hashem that illuminates his own *neshama*.

J. When a Jew focuses single-mindedly on this concept, he generates a profound effect on his soul and also fortifies his *neshama* with tremendous power and strength. The more he concentrates on his prayer and Torah study, the greater power he infuses into his soul.

## Part II

A. As explained in Kabbalah, a Jew's constant focus must be to reinforce his soul connection to Hashem Yisborach through his performance of the *mitzvos*, albeit he may reflect upon this in a very general sense.

B. However, ideally, one should focus on the following two intentions:

1. *Down-Up*. To intensify his soul connection to Hashem. (Although man's soul is always connected, his focus should be to strengthen that connection.)
2. *Up-Down*. To draw spiritual radiance from Hashem and implant it in his soul.

C. A Jew's intellect and thoughts are eminently powerful. Every Jew owns the capacity to reflect upon these intentions; and his thoughts harbor the power to transform these into reality.

It is essential that one focus on these two intentions while engaged in fulfilling the will of Hashem. For example, as one commences his daily prayers or begins learning Torah, he should contemplate that his utmost desire is for the words of prayer/Torah that he utters to reinforce his soul-connection to Hashem.

One who is able should likewise reflect upon this repeatedly in the midst of his prayers/learning, as well. The same applies while performing a *mitzvah* or refraining from *aveirah*. (Obviously, one who forgot to reflect upon this desire before he began praying/learning should do so whenever he remembers.)

D. One who does not focus on these intentions or who is unaware of these fundamental concepts will still benefit from the results of his *mitzvos*/learning/prayer, since the connection between Hashem and the Jewish *neshama* is inevitably strengthened when a Jew fulfills the will of Hashem. However, being cognizant of and striving to focus on these two intentions while fulfilling the will of Hashem is more effective in terms of absorbing spiritual radiance. Moreover, it allows one to sense that spiritual radiance as it penetrates one's *neshama*, endowing one with profound strength that impels him to ascend higher and higher upon the ladder to spiritual attainment.

E. The subjects discussed in this chapter are essential to the concept of the *neshama* acquiring its spiritual power and force. The Vilna Gaon explains that not only does a Jew benefit from an additional radiance to his *neshama*, but he also receives added parts to his *neshama* that he previously lacked. It is via these newfound aspects of his soul that he acquires greater spiritual powers. (Vilna Gaon on *Zohar, Parshas Pekudei* 16)

F. The more effort a Jew invests into Torah, prayer, *mitzvah* observance and refraining from *aveiros*, the more he will enjoy the spiritual radiance that penetrates his soul. Likewise, the more he affixes his holy thoughts to his endeavors, the greater bounty and spiritual powers he will merit. (See *Kisvei Ha'Ari, Mevo She'arim, Sha'ar B* Vol. B Ch. 6 p.9 regarding the two concepts that embody Kabbalah which are related to the above two intentions.)

### Part III

A. A Jew who yearns to acquire those added portions of his *neshamah* that will lead him to acquire vast spiritual strengths is obligated to avoid the quality of anger at all times. The *Zohar* writes that anger is such a terrible trait that it can cause man to lose the parts of his *neshamah* that he gained through his positive endeavors and aspirations. The *Zohar* likewise presages that anger can cause a Jew to lose even the most basic elements intrinsic to his soul.

B. Thus, a Jew must beware of anger at all times, especially while ascending the ladder of spiritual growth. The evil inclination is constantly at war with the Jew, seeking to impede his spiritual ascent and causing him to stumble and fall. Thus, specifically when a person feels that he has received new parts to his *neshamah*, he should exercise extreme caution to avoid anger, as the evil inclination will choose that moment to present him with numerous challenges in order to cause him to stumble and fail.

### Part IV

A. A basic foundation of Judaism is that thoughts harbor a powerful existential force in the spiritual world. (Rabbeinu Chaim Vital, *Sha'arei Kedusha*)

B. Just as it is possible to join two objects in the physical world with a hammer and nails and fuse them into a single unit that allows a person to lift only one object, but actually lift both; so

too, man's thoughts harbor the spiritual power to fuse two spiritual aspects.

When a person focuses on binding his soul to Hashem, a spiritual connection is automatically forged. Then, as he reflects that this connection draws spiritual light into his soul, his thoughts actually effect a real change in the spiritual world, infusing his soul with a greater spiritual glow.

### **Part V**

A. *Tehillim* 42 states: "As a deer desires for the water brook, so my soul will desire for You, Hashem. My soul thirsts for G-D, for the Living G-D; when will I come and see the Face of G-D?"

B. This verse is elucidated as follows:

Hashem created the world in two categories: Animate and inanimate. Inanimate objects, as metals and stone, are inert; they do not require food or water. Animate objects, as plants and wildlife, require sustenance in order to survive. Plants wilt and eventually die without water; animals perish from lack of food and water.

C. Like all animate objects, man also requires sustenance; but as he is composed of both a body and a soul, he requires both physical and spiritual nourishment.

D. As the soul is an entirely spiritual creation, its sustenance is spiritual as well. It is not satiated with mere food and water like plants, wildlife and the corporeal body. The *Ramchal* explains that the essence of the soul is a sacred spiritual light that emanates from Hashem; thus the sustenance of the soul is

additional spiritual light from Hashem. When the soul receives this vital nourishment, it enjoys feelings of vigor and power; and when it is deprived of its sustenance, the soul feels empty, pained and anguished. (*Adir Ba'Marom*)

E. This is the explanation of King David's poignant words, "As a deer desires after the water brook, so my soul desires for you Hashem." A deer instinctively gallops across the sandy desert in the heat of the day toward a refreshing spring of water, although there was no one who taught him to do so. Even if one were to offer it all the gold and silver in the world, it would still head toward the water. So too, the Jewish soul thirsts endlessly to connect to Hashem and for the added spiritual light that is so vital to its continuity.

F. The Jewish soul acquires added spiritual light through Torah, prayer, fulfilling *mitzvos*, refraining from *aveiros* and assisting one's fellow man. It is these positive actions that endow the soul with life and spiritual power. However, when one affixes one's thoughts of spiritual connection to one's actions, the resulting spiritual light and added strength to one's soul are far greater, harboring the power to elevate one's very essence and way of life.

## CHAPTER 2

THE *OHR HACHAIM'S* COMMENTARY ON THE  
BEGINNING OF *PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS* REGARDING  
THE METHODS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CLEAVING TO  
HASHEM YISBORACH, AND THE SUPERNATURAL  
POWERS THAT ARISE FROM THIS.

- A. The *Ohr HaChaim* presents a beautiful elucidation of the first verse in *Parshas Acharei Mos*, regarding the tragic demise of Aharon *HaKohein's* elder sons, Nadav and Avihu. (The actual death is described in *Vayikra* 10:1-2 and mentioned again in the first verse of *Acharei Mos*.)
- B. The *Ohr HaChaim's* commentary, which delineates clear steps to attaining spiritual growth in the service of Hashem, has the potential to arouse man to achieve *dveikus*. His words also encompass vital elements toward acquiring the special spiritual strengths and supernatural forces desired. Many of our righteous sages engaged in the daily study of this *Ohr HaChaim* in order to ensure that his message remained constantly in their minds; and there are many who attribute the lofty spiritual levels that they attained to the hours and effort that they expended immersed in this sacred teachings.
- C. The *Ohr HaChaim's* message in this section is deeply mystical and requires due explanation. Part I of this chapter will quote the sacred words of the *Ohr HaChaim* and Part II will illuminate their meaning.

D. There are several existing versions of the exact text of this *Ohr HaChaim* with negligible variations in the wording; the author's choice of text is the most commonly accepted version.

### Part I: Quote from the Ohr HaChaim

(This section is divided into paragraphs for the benefit and clarity of the reader.)

A. The *Ohr HaChaim* writes: "And Hashem spoke to Moshe following the death of the two sons of Aharon, when they approached before Hashem; and they perished" (*Vayikra, Parshas Acharei Mos* 16:1).

The *Ohr HaChaim* elucidates: "Another way to explain this is that Hashem told Moshe the way of their deaths, which occurred because they 'approached before Hashem.' The meaning of this is that they approached the Upper Light with a love of all that is holy; and with this, they perished.

B. "And this is the secret of the 'Death by Kiss' through which *tzaddikim* perish.

C. "And their [deaths] is similar to the deaths of all the righteous; yet the difference is that [in the case of] the righteous, the Kiss approaches them; and they [Nadav and Avihu] approached the Kiss.

D. "And this is why it says, 'As they approached before Hashem.'

E. "And when [the verse] says, 'And they perished' with an extra letter *vav*, the Torah alludes to the magnificence of the love of

the *tzaddikim*. Even as they felt that death was imminent, they could not repress their urge for greater *dveikus*, pleasure, sweetness, closeness, love, longing, bliss until their souls departed. And one must delve into this in order to comprehend this.

F. “It is impossible to fathom the value of this quality, nor can it be explained or encapsulated in words nor is it able to be grasped; and the mind is limited in its ability to realize this fully.

G. “But one who attains partial understanding; the barriers that block his perception will be removed; and he will recognize it through its symptoms. For his enemy will turn from before him, and there will be a manifest result upon him to negate the force of that which opposes it and sustains it. And occasionally, [this force] will despise and will engage it in fierce battle; and this is the secret to the ecstasy of the prophets [*Shmuel* A 19:24]. And when this quality increases within him, his soul will despise the body; and it will depart it and return to the House of its Father.”

H. In the next segment of his commentary on *Parshas Acharei Mos*, the *Ohr HaChaim* poetically prescribes how one may achieve these lofty spiritual levels, the feelings that accompany this dramatic achievement, and the steps one must take in order to attain this lofty goal. However, the *Ohr HaChaim* conceals these profound and insightful secrets of the Torah in an elaborate, eloquent and brilliant poetic description that has been fathomed only by the greatest of our sages after concerted effort and intense reflection. This outstanding section of the great and holy *Ohr HaChaim's* commentary is beyond the scope of translation and must be meticulously read and analyzed

numerous times in the original Hebrew in order to merit grasping the dazzling secrets contained within it.

I. The *Ohr HaChaim* then continues, “And then the surplus will be crowns of kings and their thrones.

J. “For there is life to life, of which Moshe said, ‘And you shall choose life’ (*Parshas Nitzavim* 30:19). [The Hebrew verse uses the word, ‘*Ba’chaim*—Life.’] The letter *beis* is a ‘referring *beis*,’ and precludes the regular life experienced by the masses. And the Living G-D shall be blessed, as He endowed this capacity to His Chosen Nation.’

## Part II: The *Ohr HaChaim*, Expanded

(The paragraphs in this section correspond to the above section)

A. *The Ohr HaChaim* describes the sequence of events leading to the death of Aharon’s two sons and how their deaths occurred. He writes that Nadav and Avihu approached Hashem with supreme *dveikus*, they bound their souls to the Upper Light with a spiritual connection that was so extreme that their corporeal bodies could no longer withstand the force of the radiance spurred by their drawing near to Hashem. The intensity of this *dveikus* compelled their bodies and souls to separate, which inevitably resulted in their physical deaths.

B. The *Ohr HaChaim* also expands upon the concept of *Misas Neshika*, the ‘death by kiss’ merited by the righteous (see *Bava Basra* 17a). This unique form of death intensifies the soul’s connection to Hashem until it reaches the point that the body

can no longer bear it; and the body and soul are forced to separate.

C. Notwithstanding, there is a difference between the *Misas Neshika* experienced by the *tzaddikim*, as mentioned in *Gemara Bava Basra* 17a, and the one that preempted the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. The former occurs when Hashem approaching the *tzaddik* with ultimate *dveikus* and an Upper Light that forces their deaths, whereas Nadav and Avihu, in contrast, endeavored to approach this Light on their own accord.

D. The *Ohr HaChaim* notes that the first verse in *Parshas Acharei Mos* alludes to the above in the words, ‘Following the death of the two sons of Aharon, *when they approached before Hashem.*’ Indeed, they instigated their own demise by choosing to draw close to Hashem.

E. The *Ohr HaChaim* expounds upon the letter *vav* in the word “*va’yamusu*—and they perished.”

The Torah could have employed the shorter word ‘*meisu*—and they died’, which is in the past tense. Grammatically, the word ‘*va’yamusu*’ is written in the future tense, with the prefix letter *vav* added to change the inflection to the past tense. The *Ohr HaChaim* focuses on the Torah’s usage of the more complicated past tense (with the correcting *vav*) as opposed to the simpler past tense.

The *Ohr HaChaim* explains that the complex form of the word alludes to the fact that when Aharon’s two sons achieved the desired level of *dveikus*, they understood that if they were to continue experiencing the *dveikus* for any longer, they would surely perish. Still, despite their clear knowledge of impending

death, they chose to sacrifice their lives in order to prolong the supreme experience of *dveikus*. The added letter *vav*, which converts the future tense to the past tense, hints to the future, as Nadav and Avihu were cognizant of their imminent deaths.

F. It is impossible to encapsulate this lofty level of *dveikus* in words, as it is a feeling, an experience of thought and emotion that cannot be described. Yet, such *dveikus* fosters an existential spiritual reality of connecting the soul to the Upper Light; and this connection has profound effects on a person's soul that are beyond human comprehension. Thus, there are no words or natural ways to explain the essence of *dveikus*, and we have no choice but to simply discuss the parts that surround it as best as we can. *Dveikus* is an unparalleled, unfathomable experience for most people; one who merited attaining it can understand it, but is unable to describe it to others.

G. *Dveikus*, the soul's intense spiritual connection to the Upper Light, conflicts with the body which is a physical creation. The corporeal nature of the body interferes with the soul's ability to absorb the vast Upper Light.

The *Ohr HaChaim* divides this into two categories:

1. The ultimate soul connection to the Upper Light conflicts with the body and eventually instigates physical death. This connection is an absolute spiritual binding to the Light which cannot be tolerated by the body and forces the soul to flee from it, as demonstrated by *Misas Neshika* and the death of Aharon's two sons.
2. A slightly-lower level of connection that does not cause total conflict between the body and soul and permits the soul

to remain within the confines of the body. However, the intense connection still causes friction between the body and soul, which is expressed as the ecstasy of the prophets (see *Shmuel A* 19:24).

The writings of the *Ohr HaChaim* seem to indicate that there is yet a tertiary level of soul affiliation with the Upper Light, which is an even lower level than the one described above. This third level also instigates a mild friction between the body and soul, but not to the extent of the ecstasy experienced by the prophets.

H. Throughout the generations, our sages have been challenged by the enigmatic and mystical insights recorded in this magnificent segment of the *Ohr HaChaim*. Some who indeed merited fathoming his teachings have endeavored to reveal this great light of understanding to the nation in their own elucidations of the *Ohr HaChaim's* inspiring words. A partial listing of these inspiring works include the *Ohr HaGanuz*, *Segulas Moshe*, *Arvei Nachal*, *Ma'amar Mordechai*, *Ner La'Maor*, *Otzar HaChaim Mitzvah 125*, *Ohr HaBahir*, *Marganisa Tava*, *Eidus B'Yaakov*, and *Bikurei Aviv*.

[The *Arvei Nachal* asserts that the *Ohr HaChaim's* message refers to Rav Chaim Vital's writings in *Sefer Sha'ar HaKedusha* Vol. 3 regarding the connection between the soul and the Upper Worlds.]

I. “And then the surplus will be crowns of kings and their thrones.”

Previously, the *Ohr HaChaim* describes meriting a vastly spiritual Upper Light, an indescribable radiance. Yet, here, he also writes that one who merits this light likewise merits many other

conceivable supernatural gifts. These endowments are likened to the crowns and thrones of kings, as they are merely the ornaments of the light, but not the core desire.

These conceivable gifts are not the lofty levels discussed by the *Ohr HaChaim*, but rather special qualities that accompany them. On the contrary, the ideal soul-connection to Hashem is greater than any accompanying gift. This soul-connection is one that is known only to Hashem; only He can express or describe it. (See *Sefer Leshem Shvo V'Achlama* Vol. 2 page 38, which discusses the levels of *dveikus* that may be achieved at the time of learning Torah and fulfilling the *mitzvos*. This *dveikus* stimulates a lofty spiritual rectification that is even greater than the rectification acquired through the actual learning and fulfilling of *mitzvos*.)

J. “For there is life to life, of which Moshe said, ‘And you shall choose life’ (*Parshas Nitzavim* 30:19). [The Hebrew verse uses the word, ‘*Ba’chaim*—Life.’] The letter *beis* is a ‘referring *beis*,’ precluding the regular life experienced by the masses. And the Living G-D shall be blessed, as He endowed his Chosen Nation with this capacity.’

It would seem that the *Ohr HaChaim's* message is that just as natural life requires both physical body and spiritual soul, the spiritual soul being that which endows life to the physical body; the same applies to the Spiritual Light that enters man when he attains *dveikus*, relative to the soul. The Upper Light is as a soul to man's soul, which takes the form of the body during periods of *dveikus*. This is why he writes, ‘For there is life to life, and it says regarding this life, ‘And you shall choose life.’ The word

*ba'chaim*—the life' is punctuated with a *pasach* beneath the *beis*. This *pasach* is similar to a *hey ha'yedia*—the referring *hey*. Indeed, the absolute fulfillment of the *mitzvah* to 'choose life within life' is the greatest spiritual level attainable.

The *Ohr HaChaim* then concludes, 'And the Living G-D shall be blessed, as He endowed this capacity to His Chosen Nation.'

### **Part III: Two Important Points Gleaned from the *Ohr HaChaim***

A. The *Ohr HaChaim's* commentary on *Parshas Acharei Mos* contains two fundamental lessons:

1. *Dveikus hamachshava* (cleaving to Hashem in thought) is not an abstract concept. Indeed, the period of *dveikus* creates an awesome reality of the Jewish soul actually connecting to Hashem Yisborach.
2. When a Jew merits a period of soul-connection and *dveikus*, a new soul penetrates his regular soul. This loftier soul-time, which encompasses an intrinsic connection to Hashem, surpasses the connection that can be attained by the regular soul.

The above two points contain profound messages that allow each and every Jew to ascend the ladder of spiritual growth and serving Hashem.

B. As prophecy was appropriated from the world centuries ago, many of the spiritual stages described by the *Ohr HaChaim* are unattainable in this day and age. However, his main points

regarding the acquisition of lofty spiritual levels certainly remain applicable.

## **Part IV: The Ohr HaChaim's Commentary on Parshas Bereishis**

### **Regarding Ruach HaKodesh**

- A. *Parshas Bereishis* 6:3 states: “And Hashem said, ‘My spirit will not judge man forever, as they are only flesh; and their days will be one-hundred and twenty years.’”

The *Ohr HaChaim* writes: “This verse requires clarification; and our Sages elucidated it in many forms. Although the simple meaning of the verse remains ambiguous, it would seem that, previously, Hashem interacted with His creations and judged them overtly. [As written,] ‘And Hashem said to the Snake... and to the Woman... And to the Man He said... And Hashem said to Kayin, ‘Why?’... And Hashem said, ‘Where is Hevel?’... But when mankind increased their sins, Hashem said, ‘I will not judge man face to face, to judge him directly.’ The deeper meaning of the word *Ruchi*—My Spirit—is *Shchinaso*—His Presence. Indeed, man will no longer be able to achieve this spiritual level (*Bereishis Rabba* Ch. 26:7).

- B. “We find that in accordance to man’s actions, his spiritual level descends lower and lower. Indeed, initially, Hashem would rebuke man to his face; and all creations merited the spiritual level of prophets. However, as the verse states, ‘And it was when *hechel ha’odom*—man began.’ The word *hechel* derives from the same root as *chillul*—defilement. As man repeatedly defiled his

soul, he plummeted from the status of a prophet. Yet, eventually, righteous people sprouted in the land and restored the crown of holiness to its Master.

“Yet, when the Temple was destroyed, all visions of prophecy were eliminated, albeit we still remained with *ruach hakodesh* (a sacred spirit). But then *Bnei Yisrael’s* eyes were concealed, and there was no one to even merit the *ruach hakodesh*. This is a terrible tragedy for *Bnei Yisrael* that there is nothing greater for those who thirst to revel in the spirit of our Father in heaven and revive our spirits. This curse first began in the times of the Flood.”

The Ohr HaChaim then explains the continuation of the verse, ‘As they are flesh’ (see there.)

- C. “When the Temple was destroyed, visions of prophecy were eliminated.”

*Bava Basra* 12 states: “Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘From the day that the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was appropriated from the prophets and given to fools and children.’

*Yuma* 9b; *Sotah* 48b; and *Sanhedrin* 11a shed light on this concept: “From the time that the last prophets, Chaggai, Zecharya and Malachi, passed away, *ruach hakodesh* abandoned Yisrael, but they continued to use *Bas Kol*.”

The *ruach hakodesh* mentioned in these *Gemara* apparently refers to prophecy, as Chaggai, Zecharya and Malachi were legitimate prophets who lived in the initial era of the second Temple and whose books are included in *Trei Asar*. If so, the *Gemara* in *Bava Basra* cannot be elucidated as pertaining to the

First Temple era since there were clearly several prophets who lived during the era of the Second Temple as well. (Moreover, Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel also relayed prophecies after the destruction of the Temple.)

However, it is known that prophecy was appropriated from the nation long before the destruction of the Second Temple. Thus, how can one clarify the *Gemara* in *Bava Basra*? (See *ibid Bava Basra, Bi'urei Aggados*).

- D. In the quote described in Paragraph 2, the *Ohr HaChaim* laments that *ruach hakodesh* has vastly diminished in recent generations. In fact, he writes that the greatest tragedy of our modern era is that we are thirsting for the scent of our Father in heaven to revive our spirits.

Rav Chaim Vital writes that the punishment to Odom for eating from the Tree of Knowledge was the removal of the *nefesh-ruach-neshama* aspects of *atzilus*, which is also referred to as the radiance of Odom HaRishon. This was the fulfillment of Hashem's decree, 'For on the day that you eat from it, you will die.' Indeed, there is no worse death than the removal of the three levels of *atzilus*. (*Shaar HaGilgulim*, Preface 31)

The connection between *ruach hakodesh* and the removal of *atzilus* is that both represent a deficiency in the lofty spiritual powers of the soul that connect man to Hashem in the closest possible way. (See Rav Chaim Vital, *Sefer HaChezyonos* regarding his dream about the Arizal and Mahari di Kuriel.)

**Part V: The Ohr HaChaim's Commentary on *Parshas Bechukosai***

A. The *Ohr HaChaim's* commentary on *Parshas Acharei Mos* compliments his commentary on the verse in *Parshas Bechukosai*, "And I will place my dwelling place amongst them, and my soul will not detest you."

B. In *Parshas Bechukosai*, he shares the astounding revelation that "The whole fact that it is possible to draw a Jewish soul to the abyss of this lowly world; the root of everything is with the removal of an aspect of the G-Dly light intrinsic in his soul. Through this, it is possible for materialism to penetrate" (see there). This fundamental knowledge allows a Jew to remove material distractions by augmenting the G-Dly light within his soul.

C. A second monumental lesson gleaned from the words of the *Ohr HaChaim* is that the magnitude of a prophecy is not necessarily contained in the message that the prophet is bound to relay to the nation, but rather in the achievement of intense *dveikus* to Hashem. *Dveikus* to Hashem is the greatest imaginable experience, so intense and lofty that it cannot be encapsulated in words; and the message of the prophecy is a mere by-product of the experience of *dveikus* as opposed to the core of it.

D. The Ramchal concurs with the *Ohr HaChaim* in *Sefer Derech Hashem*, Vol. 3 Ch. 3:3 in his section regarding prophecy. (Several *Rishonim* assert similarly as well.)

E. The understanding that prophecy is secondary to achieving *dveikus* has practical implications on life. The *Tur* in *Ohr HaChaim*, Ch. 98 (Laws of Prayer) wrote that the early pious ones would wait one hour before commencing prayers, thereby meriting to ascend to a spiritual level similar to that of prophecy.

If the goal of these pious Jews was to achieve prophecy, then they were clearly unsuccessful, as it is known that prophecy was appropriated from the world immediately following the period of Prophets. It is impossible that these righteous Jews could have merited hearing the word of Hashem.

F. However, if one appreciates that the loftier aspect of prophecy is the achievement of *dveikus* and solidifying the soul's relationship with Hashem through shackles of love and commitment, then one can understand that these pious Jews did, in fact, ascend to the spiritual level called 'prophecy,' albeit there was no message to deliver to the nation.

G. This vital concept underscores the prime significance of an infinitely close-connection to Hashem Yisborach and of spilling one's soul in heartfelt prayers before him.

H. *Sefer Leshem Shvo Achlama* Vol. 2 p. 38 describes that the experience of *dveikus* serves as ultimate spiritual rectification, and one who does not merit *dveikus* cannot atone for all his sins, even if he fulfills all the *mitzvos* in the Torah with absolute purity. Indeed, absolute spiritual rectification for the soul can only result from *dveikus* (see *Leshem Shvo Achlama; Divrei Yaakov Kabbalas HaGr"a* Vol. 2 in his explanation of the *Leshem Shvo Achlama*.)

I. The *Ohr HaChaim* also indicates that the many miracles and wonders enacted by the righteous *tzaddikim* of all generations was also a consequence of their lofty experience of *dveikus*, as written, “And its surplus will be the crowns of kings and their thrones.”

*Megilla 27a* cites the verse in *Melachim B Ch. 25* regarding the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem: “And he burned the House of Hashem and the palace of the king and all the homes of Jerusalem; and the Great House he burned in a fire.’ ‘And the great house.’ Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua *ben* Levi taught. One said, ‘A place where they make Torah great’; one said, ‘A place where they make prayers great.’ Torah, as written, “Hashem desires for his righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorify it. Prayers, as written, ‘Relate of the great things that Elisha did, and Elisha served in prayer.’” [*Melachim B Ch.8:4*]

The *Gemara* is ambiguous, as the second verse seems to discuss the miracles that Elisha performed. Indeed, Elisha *HaNavi* only merited performing miracles because of his earnest prayer, which explains why the *Gemara* relates the miracles and wonders to a house of prayer.

It emerges that miracles are mere byproducts of *dveikus* to Hashem. Elisha, who immersed himself in prayer and attained absolute *dveikus* through his prayers, was capable of performing some of the greatest miracle sin history. (See Ch. 17 below for an expanded explanation of this concept.)

### **Addendum**

A. The *Me’or Va’Shemesh* comments on the *Ohr HaChaim’s* description of Nadav and Avihu’s deaths in his explanation of the

concept of *mesirus nefesh* (sacrificing oneself for the sake of Hashem). He expounds that there are times when man desires such an intense experience of *dveikus* and connection to his Creator that his soul separates completely from the body. (See *Me'or Va'Shemesh*.)

B. See the *Baal HaTanya's Sefer Likutei Torah, Parshas Re'eh* and *Ha'azinu* for more regarding the above. In contrast to the *Me'or Va'Shemesh*, this work does not discuss the concept of perishing for the sake of *dveikus*, and his writings are reminiscent of the *Ohr HaChaim*.

C. Although in this day and age, it is nearly impossible to arrive at this ultimately lofty spiritual level of *dveikus*, the teachings of the *Me'or Va'Shemesh* underscore that it is still commendable to strive toward this goal.

D. The above follows the *Kisvei Ha'Ar"i, Sha'ar HaKavanos* in his elucidation of *Kri'as Shema*, explanation 6, p.24 column 2 regarding a Jew's obligation to reflect upon sacrificing one's life in order to sanctify the Name of Hashem while reciting *Kri'as Shema*. (See also *Sha'ar HaKavanos*, elucidation of *Kri'as Shema She'al HaMitta*, explanation 5, p. 95 column 1 regarding focusing on sacrificing one's life in order to submit to the four capital punishments delivered by *Beis Din* (Halachic Court) in order to atone for one's sins. This subject is also discussed at length in the *Zohar, Bereishis* 124; *ibid Bamidbar* 195; *Sha'alos U'Teshuvos HaRashba* Vol. 5 Ch.55; *Sefer HaKavanos* Vol. 1 regarding thoughts during *Kri'as Shema*, etc.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE *MESILAS YESHARIM* REGARDING THE STEPS THAT CONVEY A JEW TO THE PRAISEWORTHY SPIRITUAL LEVEL OF FEARING SIN.

##### Part I: Excerpt from *Mesilas Yescharim* Chapter 25

A. The *Ramchal* in *Mesilas Yescharim* describes the path toward acquiring *yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem) at its loftiest level, which is called *yiras cheit* (fear of sin). The means to acquire this level of fear is reflecting upon two major concepts:

1. “Hashem’s Presence is everywhere in the world.
2. “Hashem observes and knows everything. There is nothing hidden from His eyes, whether big or infinitesimal; and He sees both the negligible and small and the giant and great; and He understands everything.

B. “The Prophets state: ‘The whole world is filled with His Honor’ (*Yeshaya* 6:3) and ‘Behold, I fill the heavens and the earth’ (*Yirmiyahu* 23:24). The Scriptures state: ‘Who is as Hashem Who dwells on high, Who looks down to see the heavens and the earth? (*Tehillim* 113:6-7) and ‘For Hashem is Great, yet has respect for the lowly; but He is remote from the proud’ (*Tehillim* 138:6).”

The former two verses cited by the *Mesilas Yescharim* attest to his first foundation that Hashem’s Presence fills the world constantly; and the latter two prove the second foundation that

Hashem watches and directs every situation and occurrence in the world.

C. “And when it becomes clear to him that Hashem’s Presence exists wherever he may be; fear and awe of Hashem will automatically follow, as he will fear of stumbling in his actions or that his actions will not be proper in the Eyes of Hashem. This is as *Chazal* taught ‘Know what is above you: An Eye that sees; an Ear that hears; and all your actions are inscribed in the Book’ (*Avos* 2:1). As Hashem observes everything, sees all, and hears all; it is obvious that each and every action—both positive and negative—makes a lasting impression and is inscribed in His Book.

D. “Man has difficulty fathoming this vast concept, yet he can absorb it properly through constant reflection and contemplation. As this concept is remote from man’s mindset, the intellect cannot easily depict it without concerted thought and rumination. And even once it is depicted in the mind, the vision will swiftly disappear if man does not persist and contemplate it frequently. Hence, just as constant reflection allows one to acquire constant fear of Hashem; so too, diverting attention and ceasing to contemplate this causes man to lose the fear that he has acquired.

E. “This is as Hashem commanded the kings: ‘And [the Torah] will be with him; and he will read from it all the days of his life, so he will learn to fear Hashem’ (*Devarim* 17:19). From here, we learn that one can acquire fear only through constantly reading and learning the Torah. The verse states, ‘So he will *learn* to

fear,' instead of 'So he will fear.' Indeed, fear of Hashem is not ingrained in man's nature, but remote from him due to the physicality of the senses. It can only be acquired through perpetual, continuous study of the Torah and its sacred ways.

F. "Thus, man should reflect and contemplate these things at all times—when he sits and when he walks; when he lays down to sleep and when he arises, until he embeds the truth of it firmly in his mind: The truth that Hashem's Presence is everywhere at all times, and that we literally stand before Him at every hour. Then, he will fear Him sincerely; and this is what Dovid HaMelech beseeched when he said, 'Teach me, Hashem, Your ways; I will along Your truth. Unify my heart to fear Your Name.'"

## **Part II: *Mesilas Yeshtarim* Chapter 25—Elucidated**

A. The above excerpt from the *Mesilas Yeshtarim* contains vital foundations of our nation's beliefs that harbor the potential to lead man to attain the loftiest spiritual levels imaginable. It is recommended that one study these words of the *Mesilas Yeshtarim* repeatedly, as they will surely instigate a positive change in one's soul and spiritual path, especially if one merits attaining a deep understanding of their inherent meaning.

B. The following is a brief summary of the *Mesilas Yeshtarim* above:

1. There are two primary foundations toward achieving fear of Hashem. The first is that Hashem's Presence is

everywhere, and the recognition that man stands constantly before Him. The second foundation is that every individual action—both positive and negative—is closely monitored by Hashem, and that man is accountable for every detail of his every action, which is meticulously inscribed in the heavenly Books.

2. Reflecting upon these two fundamentals of our beliefs safeguards man from sin. As such, man should reflect upon these beliefs constantly.

C. The advantage to perpetually contemplating these two fundamentals of our belief is that the mere notion that Hashem is observing us at every moment and marking our positive and negative deeds causes fear of Hashem to penetrate our hearts and motivates us to carefully guard our actions from sin.

The *Rama* wrote in *Orach Chaim* Ch.1:1: “I place Hashem before me always. This is a vital rule in the service of the righteous,” as one cannot compare the behavior of a person when he is alone to his behavior when in the presence of a king.

The Vilna Gaon connects another Kabbalistic concept to this topic. He writes that for every moment that man reflects upon Hashem, he merits additional parts to his soul that he did not previously possess; and this is what sanctifies a Jew with lofty purity. (See *Zohar, Parshas Pekudei* 16)

## CHAPTER 4

### HASHEM'S OMNIPOTENT PRESENCE IN THIS WORLD.

#### Part I

A. One of the qualities that lead man to attain the greatest spiritual level is the recognition that Hashem is Present everywhere in the world. (See *Iggeres HaRamban, Kisvei HaRamban* beginning with '*Terem e'e'ne ani shogeg*.') The *Nefesh HaChaim* discusses this concept at great length and emphasizes that this recognition leads man to attain supernatural strengths and achievements in Torah.

B. *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar A* and *C* discuss two fundamental points:

The first point regards Hashem's actions in this world: Hashem activates everything in this world, and there is no force in the world other than Him.

The second point is that Hashem created the world in a way that He perpetually causes it to exist at each and every moment of time. If Hashem wished to destroy the world, He could do so by pausing for an infinitesimal moment from His constant desire to create and sustain it. Hashem stimulates every action and experience in the world and in man's life; and the very fact that man and the universe continue to exist is only a result of Hashem constantly willing them to be.

The recognition of the above two concepts inspires a Jew to attain greater *dveikus* to Hashem Yisborach. (See *Gilyonei*

*Leshem Shvo V'Achlama* p. 307 regarding the Splitting of the Sea.)

C. There are also two essential principles regarding Hashem's existence:

1. Hashem's Presence is everywhere, always.
2. There is none other than Hashem.

There is a famous question regarding the second principle: If there is none other than Hashem, how, then, is there a concept of a choice between *mitzvah* and *aveirah* in the world?

It is possible that the *Nefesh HaChaim's* intent is that although Hashem did endow man with the ability to choose, He did not bequeath the force of existence to any creation; and He recreates them at each and every moment through His desire for their existence. As such, nothing in this world is independent of Hashem as its very existence is contingent upon Hashem's desire for it to exist.

D. The *Nefesh HaChaim* thus teaches that in order to attain absolute *dveikus*, one must depict in one's mind that there is absolutely nothing in the world—even negligible—except Hashem.

E. The question may also be resolved with the understanding that absolute *dveikus* is the binding of man's thoughts to the concept that Hashem encompasses all. Although there is a very negligible concept of things created, the ideal level of *dveikus* is when man chooses not to focus on this at all but rather on the omnipotence of Hashem alone. Such a level of *dveikus* can only

be achieved by focusing solely on Hashem and regarding those things created as nothing at all.

Another way to explain this is that, unfortunately, man does not perceive Hashem's Presence in the world, whereas he does constantly perceive the minor forces of the things created—which is why he is barred from attaining that lofty level of thought. Vision often overcomes knowledge, and the sights and scenes to which man is constantly exposed prevent him from perceiving the truth. Hence, in order to overcome this barrier, man must view things created as if they do not exist at all.

F. In summary, there are five aspects regarding Hashem's omnipotence in the world: The first two regard Hashem's actions, as mentioned in Paragraph B; the next two regard Hashem's Presence, as mentioned in Paragraph C; and the last regards man's perception of it all as mentioned in the above two paragraphs.

According to the *Nefesh HaChaim*, it is these five aspects that lead man to acquire spiritual greatness—whether via his ability to instigate a miracle or salvation or via the removal of spiritual barriers which is also a supernatural event. (See *Gilyonei Leshem Shvo V'Achlama* p. 307)

G. The explanation of *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar A* and *C* seems clear; however, the author himself inscribes that it is impossible to fully grasp these concepts. (Thus, we must conclude that we are either mistaken in our explanation or that the *Nefesh HaChaim* wrote this in regard to a different question that is not addressed by this book.)

Notwithstanding, it is obvious that achieving *dveikus* is hugely beneficial. (*Sefarim* state that many people are challenged by the task of focusing on the above concepts and achieving *dveikus* due to myriad distractions. However the task becomes easier when one is engaged in serving Hashem.)

## Part II

A. *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar* C Ch. 12 describes the significance of *dveikus* and enhancing it in order to merit supernatural powers.

“Indeed, this is a great thing and propitious *segula* (auspicious tool) that allows one to remove and annul all decrees and negative wishes, so they will not control him and will make no impression at all. When man commits in his heart to say, ‘Hashem is the true G-D and there is none other than He, nor any force in this world or the universe at all, and everything is filled only with his Unity;’ eliminates any other thoughts from his heart; does not account for any other force and power in the world; subjugates himself and connects his thought in purity only to the One and Only Master, blessed is He; then Hashem will decree that any negative forces and aspirations that do exist in this world will have no effect on him at all.”

B. The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains the meaning of the *Zohar* 12a: “The fourth *mitzvah* is to know that Hashem, may He be blessed, is G-D and to include all the spiritual lights that are hinted in the Name *Elokim* in the upper light that is alluded to in the name *Havaya*, and to know that there is only One force in the world that is Hashem Yisborach. Then, even the lofty negative spiritual

forces will be removed from this world and will be unable to render damage or diminish the positive bounty to the world.”

C. The *Nefesh HaChaim* continues: “And he will also decree something, and it will be fulfilled; and he will initiate wonders and miracles that transcend the laws of nature, as he subjugates and connects the pure, enduring faith of his heart in truth only to Hashem, to Whom all is equal—whether it adheres to or counteracts the laws of nature. This is as we find with Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa who spoke and caused nature to accede to his will at all times, as described in *Taanis* 25a: ‘The One Who said that oil should burn shall command the vinegar to burn.’ This *Gemara* underscores that, to Hashem, all is equal; the laws of nature do not possess any power in of themselves. Thus, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who recognized this, was capable of performing many miracles, as described by the *Gemara*.”

D. The *Nefesh HaChaim* likewise describes that Moshe Rabbeinu merited attaining his exalted spiritual stature as he directed his thoughts constantly to this very belief. Chapter 14 states that this lofty thought elevates man’s prayers, affords his prayers extraordinary powers, and vastly augments man’s power for learning and absorbing Torah. Obviously, the extent to which a Jew embraces this concept in depth and time is the extent to which his own powers increase in this world. The Brisker Rav mentioned this point repeatedly in his teachings.

E. This section has revealed the awesome strength and force that arise from man’s reflection on the singular greatness and omnipotence of Hashem in the world. In order to fully grasp and absorb this truth, one should intently study Ch. 4 Part A above. Moreover, after one has studied and grasped this section

in depth, one should continue reviewing the section time and again, each time with greater depth and intensity, to order to truly attain the lofty level of spirituality that one desires.

### Addendum

A. *Sefer Me'Ein HaChochmah*, an ancient work printed inside *Yalkut HaRo'im*, is cited by the *Pardes* in *Shaar Mahus V'Hanhaga; Emek HaMelech, Shaar K'Dor Hit'hiru*, Ch. 3; and *Sha'arei Gan Eden, Sha'ar Derech Ha'Emes*, Ch. 1, *Derech* 50. (More recently, it has been reprinted in *Yalkut HaRo'im HaGadol*).

This *sefer* lists various means of achieving the loftiest spiritual levels, to the extent that man can even understand the conversation of the heavenly angels. (The capacity to even overhear the talk of the angels requires an exalted spiritual level; understanding their conversation is even greater. The latter spiritual level is mentioned in both *Sukkah* 28a and *Bava Basra* 134a regarding the lofty spiritual level of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai.) This *sefer* also lists the step-by-step order of spiritual ascension through which man can attain this goal (see source).

B. He concludes with the sage counsel: "...Until you stand in total clarity, and your mind will settle with lofty thoughts, as there is no greater level than this." These words emphasize that fathoming the speech of angels is the loftiest spiritual level attainable and that all other spiritual levels are merely the preparatory stages toward achieving this divine goal. This concurs with the *Nefesh HaChaim* which also states that this is the greatest spiritual level of all.

CHAPTER 5

THE *BACH'S* COMMENTARY ON *ORACH CHAIM* CH. 47  
REGARDING THE *MITZVAH* OF TORAH STUDY; AN  
EXPLANATION OF THE THOUGHTS THAT SHOULD  
ACCOMPANY TORAH STUDY; AND *SEFER SHA'AR*  
*RUACH HAKODESH* REGARDING THIS TOPIC.

Part I

A. Diligence in Torah study is the prime factor leading a Jew to attain the loftiest levels of spirituality. The Maggid (angel) who appeared to the Beis Yosef (Rav Yosef Karo) frequently reiterated that if he wished to merit miracles and wonders that transcend the laws of nature, he must increase his diligence in learning. The Beis Yosef, one of the greatest of our *Rishonim*, was a revered Torah scholar who undoubtedly invested endless hours in diligent study; yet the Maggid still emphasized this point to him, underscoring the significance of Torah study. (Chapter 12 below cites several of the points relayed by the Maggid Meisharim to the Beis Yosef.) See also *Pirkei Avos* Ch. 6, which lists the lofty spiritual levels that man achieves through learning Torah *lishmah* (for the sake of learning), and *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar D* Ch. 11 and onward which expounds upon this.

B. *Maseches Nedarim* adds an interesting point regarding diligent Torah study that leads man to attain lofty spiritual levels: "Rav Yehuda said, Rav said: 'What is the meaning of the verse, "Who is the wise man who will understand this and to whom the Mouth of Hashem spoke to him and will tell why the

land was destroyed?' This question was posed to the sages, prophets, even to the heavenly angels, but it was unanswered until Hashem Himself replied, as written, 'And Hashem, "For they forsook My Torah that I gave before them, and they did not hearken to My Voice; and did not follow in its ways.' What is the meaning of the phrase, 'And they did not hearken to My Voice and did not follow in its ways?' Rav Yehuda says, Rav says: 'That they did not bless the Torah first.'"

C. The *Bach* elucidates the *Tur* in *Orach Chaim* Ch. 47: "It is difficult to understand why Hashem chose to punish them so severely for not reciting the blessings of the Torah, a seemingly minor transgression."

D. He explains that Hashem's purpose in creating the world was so mankind would engage constantly in Torah study in order to fortify our souls in the spirituality and holiness that derives from Torah. "Hence, Hashem presented the Torah to Yisrael as a gift, so it would never be forgotten, and so our souls and the 248 bones and 365 tendons of our bodies, which correspond respectively to the 248 imperative commandments and 365 transgressions, would cling in totality to Him. If *Bnei Yisrael* would indeed engage in Torah to this extent, then they would serve as a vehicle and sanctuary for Hashem's Presence in the world, and the Divine Presence would rest constantly within us. Then, the entire land would radiate in purity from His Honor and there would be an unbreakable connection between the congregations above in the heaven and congregation below in this world, and it would all be one large resting place for Hashem.

E. “Yet tragically, it is now prevalent that man only studies Torah in order to attain material wealth and physical pleasure, to grasp business laws, to gloat arrogantly and display his knowledge. This is instead of learning in order to fortify the soul and induce it to cleave in purity and spirituality to Hashem and draw the Divine Presence into the world with the goal of exalting one’s soul after death. This trend has rent a terrible breach between man and Hashem and caused the Divine Presence to abandon this world. Thus, the Divine Presence has fled, and the land remains only physical, lacking holiness and sanctity; and this is what actually caused the destruction and loss of our holy Temple.”

F. “Hashem describes the reason for the destruction in the above *Gemara*: ‘...My Torah is a Torah of Truth, which I bestowed upon them as a gift not so they should learn and forget. I also gave them a reason and explanation for all that is written there, as written, “As I gave you as a set table, etc.”’

“*Chazal* elucidate the verse, ‘And these are the statutes that you shall place before you,’ as Hashem’s intent was that *Bnei Yisrael* should bind themselves to the essence of Hashem’s Torah—a Torah of sanctity—which would then cause the Divine Presence to dwell in their midst. Yet, *Bnei Yisrael* abandoned the Torah and did not follow in its ways; they did not progress along the rungs of the Torah’s spiritual ladder with the goal of binding their souls to the essence of the Torah’s sanctity.”

The meaning of the phrase, ‘They did not walk in its ways,’ is that when they recited the blessing of ‘Giving the Torah,’ they did not focus on Hashem’s intention in giving the Torah. Indeed,

they did not even begin to go in its ways by commencing with the proper focus in the blessing. Thus, they also failed to express gratitude to Hashem Yisborach for granting us the Torah which allows us cleave to its sanctity and Hashem's Divine Presence.

The *Bach* continues: "The meaning of the next blessing, 'Who chose us,' is to express gratitude to Hashem for drawing us to Mount Sinai and granting us the Torah—His most prized creation with which He delights Himself always—so our souls can cling to the essence of the Torah's sanctity and spirituality and draw the Divine Presence into our midst. Yet, we did not heed the words of this blessing and failed to engage in the study of Torah *lishmah*. Thus, we were punished as the Divine Presence abandoned us and our land was subsequently destroyed, ravaged as a desert and forsaken, with no passersby. With the Divine Presence departed, the land became barren, absolutely physical with no vestige of spirituality. There was no one to pass through; the Divine Presence's holiness had absconded and returned to the heavens."

## Part II

A. In order to better understand the message of the *Bach*, it is recommended to review Chapter 1 above which discusses the concept of Hakaddosh Baruch Hu, the Torah and Yisrael being One. An in-depth review of this fundamental concept sheds light on the *Bach's* statement in reference to the *mitzvah* of Torah study. He explains that the learning itself causes the radiance intrinsic in man's soul and the radiance of the Torah to merge

into one, which causes a vast bounty of spiritual radiance to spill forth from Hashem Yisborach directly onto the soul.

B. On a practical level, this becomes easier when one focuses on two general points while learning Torah:

1. The act of learning Torah should bind one's soul to Hashem Yisborach. (In actuality, this means that the learning should augment the soul's connection to Hashem, as there is a perpetual connection between man's soul and Hashem.)

2. The learning should cause an upper spiritual radiance to shine down from Hashem onto the soul.

C. Rabbeinu Chaim Vital's *Sefer Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* 11a quotes the teachings of the Arizal: "Regarding Torah study, my master, z"l (may his memory be blessed), taught that the essence of man's thoughts and intentions while learning Torah is that it should lead him to spiritual attainments and sanctity. This concept embraces the fact that man's entire focus should be to connect his soul and bind it to its exalted Source via the Torah. Man is obligated to bear this thought in mind constantly, so it will allow him to attain complete spiritual rectification which is the ultimate realization of Hashem's purpose in creating mankind and commanding them to engage in the study of Torah."

D. Understanding the Arizal's statement in the paragraph above requires familiarity with fundamental points in introductory Kabbalah. However, Paragraph 2 above already includes a large portion of the points listed in *Shaar Ruach HaKodesh*, which will be beneficial in the quest to acquiring the spiritual levels

mentioned in *Shaar Ruach HaKodesh* that are attained through these intentions.

E. The *Bach's* intent is not to add a new perspective in regard to learning Torah, but rather to highlight that the foremost purpose of learning Torah is to bind man to Hashem and allow him to merit the wondrous spiritual light that emanates from Him. As the *Bach* explicitly wrote, "For this is the prime intention in giving the Torah to Yisrael; and when this was lacking, the land was inevitably destroyed and they were exiled from it."

The message in *Shaar Ruach Hakodesh* can be explained according to this point. Rav Chaim Vital writes, "Through this, he enhances the fulfillment of the purpose for which man was created and the purpose for which Hashem commanded him to engage in Torah study." Hence, man must accustom himself to reflect upon this concept at all times and embed it in his soul so that whenever he begins studying Torah, he will automatically focus on these two points—augmenting his soul connection to Hashem and drawing Hashem's bounty upon his soul.

F. The study of Torah and reflection upon these lofty concepts not only grant man spiritual sanctity, but they also imbue him with a greater desire to invest in diligent, devoted Torah study. This improved commitment to Torah inevitably causes one to overcome many of the barriers and distractions that prevent him from learning.

The above affords a deeper understanding of *Gemara Yuma 35b*: "They said of Hillel HaZakein that every day he would labor and earn his wages of a *tarpik* (small coin). Half he would give to the

guard of the *Beis Midrash* (House of Study), and half he would keep to support his family. One time, he did not find work; and the *Beis Midrash* guard refused to allow him to enter. He climbed onto the roof and sat on the skylight so he would hear the words of the Living G-D from the mouths of Shmaya and Avtalyon. It was *Erev Shabbos* in the month of *Teves*, and snow fell upon him from the heavens. The next morning, at sunrise, Shmaya told Avtalyon, 'Avtalyon, my brother, every day, the *Beis Midrash* is illuminated, but today, it is dark; perhaps, it is a cloudy day.' They peered outside and saw the figure of a man against the skylight. They climbed onto the roof and found a pile of snow that was three handbreadths high. They removed him, washed him and revived him, etc..."

This story illustrates the supreme greatness of Torah study. Hillel so desperately craved to hear the words of Shmaya and Avtalyon—the words of a Living G-D—that he was willing to climb atop the roof to learn Torah.

*Chazal* included this inspiring story in the *Gemara* in order to demonstrate from where Hillel drew his exceptional spiritual strength to the extent that he was willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of learning Torah. Hillel refused to miss even a single lecture, a single moment of pure Torah learning. Thus, when the guard forbade his entrance, he climbed to the rooftop on a freezing, snowy day and placed his ear against the skylight, almost freezing to death, in order to hear the sacred words of Torah.

The paramount lesson to be learned from this *Gemara* is that Hillel developed his inner spiritual drive as he perceived the Torah taught by Shmaya and Avtalyon as the words of a Living G-

D. The very act of hearing their words was akin to hearing the Voice of Hashem! The Torah that Hillel acquired by listening and learning drew an upper spiritual light from Hashem onto his soul, which both revived and enlivened his soul. Indeed, one who accords the study of Torah the same reverence will enjoy the benefits of a boundless strength coursing through his body, allowing him to continue learning diligently with desire and commitment always.

G. This next concept must be unequivocally clear to the reader: Even if one does not focus on both intentions simultaneously—at every time and in every place; the above benefits are still achieved through learning Torah. Every moment of Torah study automatically augments the connection between Hashem and the soul, regardless of man's thoughts. Similarly, a spiritual light shines from Hashem onto man, whether or not man reflects upon this point. These two gifts—the enhanced spiritual connection and the bounty of spiritual light—sanctify the Jewish soul, even a soul that is remote from Torah and Hashem Yisborach. Indeed, this is the meaning of *Chazal's* description of Torah, 'For the light in it returns them to good.'

Of course, one who does focus on these points merits the gifts of connection to Hashem and spiritual light on a higher and more potent level, which sanctifies the soul to a much greater extent than would have been had he not focused upon these intentions. Then, the very act of learning inspires the soul to invest increased energies and abilities into learning the holy Torah, which allows for the continuation of this blessed cycle.

CHAPTER 6

SOURCES FROM THE VILNA GAON REGARDING THE  
EXTRAORDINARY POWER OF *DVEIKUS HAMACHSHAVA*.

**Part I: Cited from the Vilna Gaon's elucidation of  
*Zohar Parshas Pekudei***

**Regarding the Positive Outcome of Proper  
Thoughts  
& Negative Outcome of Improper Thoughts**

A. *Bi'ur HaGra* in *Zohar Parshas Pekudei* 226a p.16 column 3 extol the fantastic spiritual level that man attains through *dveikus hamachshava* (cleaving to Hashem in thought). He describes that *dveikus hamachshava* is the primary means of attaining all lofty spiritual levels and adds that for every moment that man binds his thoughts to Hashem Yisborach, the heavens bestow upon him new elements of a pure soul that he did not previously possess.

B. Conversely, column 4 describes the appalling results of blemished thoughts. The Vilna Gaon explains that the root of Odom and Chava's sin in eating from the Tree of Knowledge was that it caused a terrible decline of thought and intellect.

C. In his elucidation of *Safra D'Tzniusa* Ch. 5 p.34 column 1, the Vilna Gaon states that every man harbors qualities of both Odom HaRishon and Moshe Rabbeinu.

D. As the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge was the root of Odom's initial spiritual decline; the basis for every spiritual challenge presented to man in this world is rooted in the concept of preserving pure thoughts and maintaining *dveikus* to Hashem Yisborach while severing oneself entirely from evil.

**Part II: Cited from the Vilna Gaon's Elucidation of *Zohar Parshas Bereishis* and *Parshas Pekudei*: Spiritual Ascent Is Rooted in Elevated Thought**

A. The Vilna Gaon inscribes in his elucidation of *Zohar Parshas Bereishis, Heichal A* 12 column 3: "The spirits are encompassed one within the other; and they rise higher and higher and become one. This is not the case with angels, which are absolutely pure spiritual entities that do not have any potential for spiritual elevation, but only for clarity... The spiritual ascent of man's soul occurs on *Shabbos* (Sabbath) and holidays, during times of prayer. Man's spirit, alone, ascends; but the corporeal body does not have potential for spiritual ascent." (See Addendum below for his explanation regarding Moshe Rabbeinu who physically ascended upon Mount Sinai.)

B. In his elucidation of *Zohar Parshas Pekudei* 266a (prior to *Heichalos Pekudei*), the Vilna Gaon asserts: "And this is the key to all spiritual ascension: It is the soul's ascent in thought that is the secret of all spiritual ascension."

He continues later: "And you should know that all spiritual ascents are rooted in the mind of all the worlds, just as the thoughts of man."

**Part III: The Rama and Vilna Gaon Emphasize the Importance of Attaining**

**the Spiritual Level of ‘Shivisi Hashem L’Negdi Samid’**

A. The *Shulchan Aruch* commences with the famous quote, “*Shivisi Hashem l’negi samid*—I place Hashem before me, always. This is a paramount rule in the spiritual attributes of the righteous.” (*Orach Chaim* Ch.1:1)

B. The *Biur HaGra* comments that the spiritual level of ‘*Shivisi Hashem*’ encompasses all spiritual attributes of the righteous. This indicates that the recognition that Hashem is present everywhere, always, is not only a paramount foundation of the Jewish faith, but the very essence of a *tzaddik’s* service of Hashem.

C. One could argue with the above, as the *mitzvah* of devoted Torah study surpasses all spiritual level, as documented even by the Vilna Gaon himself.

D. However, there is really no contradiction at all, as gleaned from Ch. 5 above which cites the teachings of the *Bach* and *Sha’ar Ruach Hakodesh*. Indeed, both affirm that for every moment that man engages in the study of Torah, his soul-connection to Hashem is augmented, and Hashem rains a spiritual bounty down upon his soul, albeit man should ideally focus upon this goal during his learning. (See the Vilna Gaon’s writings on *Sefer Yetzira* in the section below.)

**Part IV: Cited from the Vilna Gaon's Explanation to  
*Sefer Yetzira***

**Torah is a Covenant between Hashem and Yisrael**

A. See *Biur HaGra* on *Sefer Yetzira* Ch. 1:8 p. 10 columns 3-4 regarding the Torah and covenants in the Torah.

B. In this section, The Vilna Gaon describes that the sole purpose of the world's creation and of giving the Torah was so *Bnei Yisrael* would be perpetually connected to Hashem without interruption.

C. However, due to the corporeal nature of man and the world, this is an extremely difficult goal.

D. Hence, Hashem created extremely powerful upper forces that are connected to Him. As *Bnei Yisrael* connect to these powers, they automatically attach themselves to Hashem Yisborach. These forces are described as, "A covenant between Hashem and the Nation of Israel."

E. The Torah itself is one of the covenants between Hashem and Yisrael, as the essence of Torah is the intense spiritual connection between Hashem and Yisrael.

F. Anytime that man learns or fulfills the Torah, he adds to this connection and strengthens the bond between his soul and Hashem. (All the above is discussed by the Vilna Gaon *ibid.*)

**Part V: Cited from the Vilna Gaon Explanation to  
*Sefer HaYetzira***

**Regarding the Divine Presence Clinging to Yisrael  
& the Outcome of This Force Which Binds Yisrael  
to Hashem**

A. *Biur HaGra* on *Sefer Yetzira* Ch. 1:6 o, 9 column 4 discusses *Bnei Yisrael's* connection to Hashem Yisborach.

B. The Vilna Gaon explains that there is a concept called the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) which is described as *malchus d'atzilus*. It is an extremely lofty element deriving from the Upper Worlds, which is why it harbors a power and force stronger and more compelling than any force in this world.

C. The essence of this lofty element is an intense connection to Hashem Yisborach and an unbridled pull to Him.

D. This element enters and unites with the soul of *Bnei Yisrael*, which is why every Jew harbors a trace of *Shechina* within his soul. However, the powers of this element are largely dependent on man choosing to unite his soul and entire being to this element within him. Heaven forbid, he may ignore this lofty element and allow it to become dormant within him. However, if he chooses to join forces with it to activate his soul, then he arouses this element and connects to it, thus drawing his soul to Hashem Yisborach with the most compelling force that exists.

E. There are two practical lessons to be gained in terms of serving Hashem with this element:

1. Each and every Jew can attain the exalted spiritual level of connection with Hashem Yisborach, even if it seems too lofty to be attained by his soul. Indeed even if man is correct in his assumption based on the source of his own *neshama*, this is never the case in terms of the *Shechina*. The connection between his soul and the *Shechina* and the fierce pull that the *Shechina* has to Hashem is unfathomable and certainly indescribable. Thus, man's soul can certainly attain these indescribably-lofty spiritual levels, as his soul unites totally with the *Shechina* inside his soul—which then draws him nearer to Hashem.

2. One who has stumbled spiritually and fears that he can no longer reconnect to Hashem fears for naught. Every Jew is capable of connecting and reconnecting to Hashem. Even if one's soul has plummeted spiritually and been totally disgraced, one can never eradicate or even diminish the sanctity of the *Shechina* that rests within him. Inevitably, the pure *Shechina* retains its holiness and uninhibited connection to Hashem. Hence, as the *Shechina* can always be found united with man's soul, man is likewise always able to connect closely and intensely to Hashem Yisborach.

## Part VI: Summary

A. One who studies the above sources in-depth and relates to all that has been learned will discover the extraordinary nature of the powers of the mind, the thought and of *dveikus* and fathom the spiritual heights that these can lead a Jew to attain.

B. It is difficult to describe all this at length as many of these topics require lengthy introductions and background in Kabbalistic topics. However, even one who is not versed in Kabbalah can arrive at lofty spiritual levels if he reviews these teachings repeatedly and strives to act accordingly.

## **Part VII: The Vilna Gaon Regarding Moshe Ascending Upon Mount Sinai**

### **As Explained in Ch.2:1 Above**

A. The Vilna Gaon in Ch.2:1 above discusses Moshe Rabbeinu's ascent upon Mount Sinai. It is clear that the Vilna Gaon did not allude that Moshe did not physically ascend upon Mount Sinai, as the verse clearly states that "Moshe ascended to Hashem," and the deeper meaning of a verse can not contradict it. It thus emerges that Moshe ascended with his corporeal body to the heavens.

B. The Vilna Gaon cites *Sukkah* 5a: "Rabbi Yosi taught, 'The Divine Presence never descended, and Moshe and Eliyahu never ascended to the heavens, as written, "The heavens are for Hashem, and the land, He gave to man." [The *Gemara* asks:] Did the Divine Presence not descend? Indeed, it is written, "And Hashem descended on Mount Sinai." [The answer is] Above ten handbreadths. And it is written, "And his feet stood on that day on the Mount of Olives." [This also means] Above ten handbreadths. [A second question is] And did Moshe and Eliyahu not ascend to the heavens? Indeed, it is written, "And Moshe ascended to Hashem." [The answer is] below ten. And it is also

written, “And Eliyahu rose in a tempest to the heavens. | [This also means] below ten. And it is written “[Hashem] makes it possible for His Holy Throne to be grasped” [*Iyov* 26:9]. Rabbi Tanchum teaches, ‘He separates a portion of His *Shechina* and fashioned it as a cloud above man.’ This is still above ten handbreadths. [The next question is] how can it be above handbreadths if people can still grasp the Throne? [The *Gemara* answers], Hashem brings the Throne exactly above ten handbreadths so it can still be grasped.”

C. See the *Ein Yaakov* which elucidates this point regarding Moshe Rabbeinu and Eliyahu who ascended, ‘less than ten handbreadths.’ Obviously, the number does not refer to a physical height, as this would mean that they hardly ascended at all and remained very close to the earth. Rather, they ascended to a height that was a mere ten handbreadths beneath the heavens. Similarly, when the *Shechina* descended upon Mount Sinai and upon the Mount of Olives, it descended almost to the earth but remained ten handbreadths above the earth.

D. The Vilna Gaon adds that when Moshe ascended to the heavens, his body remained beneath the heavens and certainly did not rise above the heavens. However, his soul ascended to a far greater height and actually attained the heavens and perhaps even a higher level than that. Moshe merited this enormously lofty level due to his sincerity in serving Hashem and cleaving to Him constantly with his thoughts. (See *Nefesh HaChaim* regarding Moshe Rabbeinu’s spiritual powers.)

## Addendum

A. *Sefer Leshem Shvo V'Achlama* sheds light upon this concept of connection to Hashem Yisborach. In Vol. 2 p.38 column 4, he poignantly elaborates on the magnitude of man yearning for Hashem.

“All our actions in rectifying the *Atzilus* are not accomplished through any physical or corporeal action, but through our desire and yearning. Any desire and yearning that we have toward the Holy One Blessed Be He is expressed within each and every *mitzvah* and through our service of prayer and learning Torah when fulfilled with heart, soul, aspiration and yearning to Him. Then, that very same desire and yearning ascends with *Atzilus* itself, and this is pure desire without any thought at all; it is pure repentance.

B. “Yet the actions of all the *mitzvos* with their intentions only affect the worlds of *Bri'ah*, *Yetzira* and *Asiya*. The only part that does rise is the pure desire from each and every *mitzvah* as we have mentioned. This is what ascends level upon level to *Atzilus*.” (See *ibid* for elaborated explanation.)

C. *Sefer Kabbalas HaGr"i* Vol. 2 cites the above at the end of the *Bi'urim* to *Leshem Shvo V'Achlama* and quotes various statements pertaining to this subject.

D. See *ibid* for the Vilna Gaon's explanation citing the *Sha'ar HaKavanos* and *Nahar Shalom* regarding the differences between *Atzilus* and *Bri'ah*, *Yetzira* and *Asiya*. His words emphasize the vast importance that he ascribes to man's inner yearning for Hashem Yisborach, which is why man must strive intensely in this realm so he merits experiencing this while learning and serving Hashem.

## CHAPTER 7

THIRTY-SIX INDIVIDUALS GREET THE FACE OF THE SHECHINA EVERY DAY (SUKKAH 45B); ONE WHO WISHES TO ATTAIN SUPERNATURAL POWERS MUST BE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS REGARDING HALACHOS THAT ARE PUNISHABLE BY KAREIS.

### Part I

A. *Gemara Maseches Sukkah* 45b states: “*Chazal* taught that in every generation there are at least thirty-six men who greet the face of the *Shechina* every day” on a lofty level. [See the Steipler’s *Sefer Chayei Olam* regarding this subject.]

The above *Gemara* is the primary source regarding the existence of thirty-six hidden *tzaddikim* who sustain the world with their Torah. One who merits achieving this spiritual level attains phenomenal spiritual strengths and surpasses the natural spiritual levels of this world. Notwithstanding, one who does not achieve this, but who strove to the maximal extent of his abilities and exerted effort within the realm of that which allows one to achieve the level of the thirty-six individuals who greet the *Shechina* every day will automatically attain a great level of spirituality. Hence, man should endeavor to learn about the means of arriving at lofty spiritual heights. Obviously attaining the spiritual level of greeting the *Shechina* is contingent on many aspects of spiritual growth, and it certainly cannot be attained by endeavoring in only one realm or one form of *avodas Hashem*. Thus, man must strive constantly in all realms

of serving Hashem—both between man and Hashem and man and his fellow man.

B. It is worthwhile to mention one specific aspect in *avodas Hashem* that can lead man to achieve this exalted spiritual level, as alluded to by the number thirty-six. *Krisus 2a* states that the number of transgressions punishable by *kareis* (death of the soul) is also thirty-six. [See *Divrei Yaakov* on *Maseches Krisus 2a* regarding the number thirty-six.]

C. Commentaries write that the two numbers ‘thirty-six’ are not coincidental. Indeed, *kareis* occurs when a division occurs between the sinner’s soul and Hashem Yisborach; and the punishment is merely a result of this separation as described in *Parshas Vayelech 31:17*. This verse discusses that the source of all evil in this world is when Hashem hides His Face, and that evil is disconnection from Him. (See *Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim* Vol. 3 Ch. 51-2.)

D. The concept underlying the thirty-six individuals who greet the Face of the *Shechina* every day is that there are people in the world who can elevate their souls to such a lofty height that they reach Hashem Yisborach. The concept underlying *kareis* is the diametric opposite. The reason that both numbers are equal is because the world harbors thirty-six channels of connection to Hashem Yisborach which means that there can be no less than thirty-six individuals meriting acceptance of the *Shechina*. To maintain these pure spiritual channels, the Torah delivered thirty-six prohibitions that have potential to injure these spiritual channels and man’s connection to Hashem.

E. The source of all supernatural powers is working on an ultimately close connection to Hashem Yisborach, and this can be achieved through myriad means of serving Him. Still, one of the most effective means of increasing one's connection to Hashem is exerting extreme caution to avoid prohibitions that are punished by *kareis*. Of course, one must avoid all form of sin, yet one must work even harder to shun any action that harbors even a slight trace of connection or an element of one of the prohibitions that Hashem punishes with *kareis*. Endeavoring to do this will greatly assist a Jew in his spiritual quest toward achieving supernatural strengths.

F. Rabbeinu Chaim Vital alludes to the above in the end of *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* in the list of directives that the Arizal issued to him: "And the things that he told him regarding the purpose of his soul...The aspects in which he most encouraged him is to strive and excel regarding anything that bears the slightest hint to the prohibitions punishable by *kareis*." (See *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*).

G. Avoiding sins punishable by *kareis* allows man to grasp onto the lights emanating from the *sefirah 'Kesser*, which is the root of the miracles and wonders that transcend the laws of nature. The *Eitz HaChaim* reveals that *Kesser* is not included per se within the ten *sefiros*, as it harbors an element that is greater and more wondrous than the other ten *sefiros*.

*Tikkun 70* in *Tikkunei HaZohar* explains that exceptionally long life is achieved by those who grasp onto the *sefirah Kesser*. This is why those who lived in the earliest generations—who grasped the *sefirah Kesser*—merited extremely long lives, as detailed in

*Sefer Bereishis. Sefer Matzas Shimurim* also states that grasping onto *Kesser* is the opposing force to the transgressions punishable by *kareis*. The Hebrew words for *kareis* and *Kesser* both include the letters *kuf*, *reish*, and *taf*, but in a different order, alluding to their ability to counteract one another. Indeed, the concept of *kareis* is vanquished by the radiance of *Kesser*.

### Part II

A. The number of sins punishable by *kareis* is longer than the list in *Mishnah Krisus 2a*. The *Mishnah* states that there are thirty-six prohibitions, but there are actually more, since the *Mishnah* includes several forms of prohibitions in one.

The following is a list of the most common categories of sins punishable by *kareis* which every Jew must endeavor to avoid:

1. Laws pertaining to *Shabbos*
2. Laws pertaining to family purity
3. Laws pertaining to *Pesach*
4. Laws pertaining to *Yom Kippur*
5. Laws pertaining to the prohibition of eating *cheilev* (suet) and blood that causes death, (as opposed to blood from the limbs which is also prohibited by the Torah, but not punishable by *kareis*.) Moreover, if one cooked the blood, Rabbinical authorities maintain that this is only a transgression of a law instituted by the sages. Although

all are certainly terrible sins, this section only deals with sins of the greatest severity.)

B. The above categories each encompass laws that were forbidden by the Torah and those that were instituted by the Sages. The concept discussed in Part I above primarily refers to laws that were forbidden by the Torah, although it is obvious that exerting caution in regard to laws instituted by the Sages is also beneficial to a Jew's quest to attaining spiritual growth.

C. The sections below list more specific aspects of the five categories mentioned above.

D. Much of the content in the sections below regards basic information, yet it was included in this booklet in order to provide the reader with a complete understanding of this topic.

### **Part III: *Shabbos***

A. Observing the sanctity of *Shabbos* allows man to achieve lofty spiritual heights, both because he is refraining from the transgressions listed in the Torah and because guarding the *Shabbos* itself endows man with the ability to grasp onto the *sefirah Kesser* which is the ultimately close connection to Hashem and diametric opposite of *kareis*.

B. *Parshas Ki Sisa* states: "For Hashem created the heavens and the earth in six days, and on the seventh, it was *Shabbos*, and He rested."

The word 'rested' in Hebrew is '*vayinafash*,' which contains the root word *nefesh*—soul. This alludes that Hashem imbued the aspect *nefesh* into the *Shabbos*, endowing it with a highly

spiritual quality, just as the soul's entrance into the body endows it with its spirituality.

C. As a Jew guards the *Shabbos* with all its laws and statutes, his spiritual level is enhanced, as is his connection to the spiritual holiness of the world—which are the two paramount factors in the quest to achieve supernatural powers.

D. *Siddur HaRashash* describes the progression of the entrance of lights into the world throughout the week: On Sunday, *Chessed* enters; on Monday, *Gevura* enters; on Tuesday, *Tiferes* enters; on Wednesday, *Netzach* enters; on Thursday, *Hod* enters; on Friday, *Yesod* enters; and on *Shabbos*, *Malchus* enters. Although on the pyramid of *sefiros*, *Malchus* is depicted on the bottom, it harbors a force that encompasses all the six other *sefiros*; and this force is especially potent on *Shabbos*.

E. There is also another type of lights that enter the Upper Worlds on *Shabbos*. Indeed, throughout the six days of the week, all the lights that enter harbor elements of *Netzach*, *Hod* and *Yesod*; yet on *Shabbos*, the spiritual rectification that arrives is with *Chessed*, *Gevura* and *Tiferes* and with *Chochmah*, *Binah*, and *Da'as*, which are much loftier levels. [A clearer portrayal of these can be found in *Divrei Yaakov*, *Sefer HaKavanos* Vol. 2 in the essay entitled, '*Seder HaTikkun L'Chol V'Shabbos V'Rosh Chodesh*.]

Man's ability to acquire supernatural powers is largely dependent on these elements, as the greater the element that he harbors, the more he can rise above the forces of nature. By avoiding sin on *Shabbos* and observing the ultimate sanctity of *Shabbos*, he connects to these lofty levels and powers. Even

though these lofty levels can only be acquired on *Shabbos*, they still have a potent effect on man's spiritual level throughout the week. [See Rabbi Chaim Vital, *Sha'ar HaKavanos* p. 70 column 3: "And this is why man must focus that he should remain with that added sanctity of *Shabbos*, and that it should accompany him throughout the coming weekdays. And through this, they will direct his path, if he perpetually focuses on this; and he is guaranteed that the Evil Inclination will not accuse him or cause him to sin throughout that entire week. All is conditional to the intensity of his desire to achieve sanctity and purity."]

F. In summary, a Jew must be extremely vigilant and refrain from all the prohibitions both listed in the Torah and instituted by the Sages, even those which Rabbinical authorities dispute whether or not they are actually forbidden. At times when it is generally accepted to rely upon a leniency, it is still preferable to be stringent in order to observe the sanctity of *Shabbos* to the maximal extent. [Obviously, the above should be done in accordance to accepted Halachic practices, as dictated by Rabbinical authorities; and there are Halachic guidelines pertaining to the extent that one should abide by a minority ruling.]

G. Furthermore, it is also important to sanctify the holy day of *Shabbos* with positive activity including increasing hours of learning Torah and praying from the bottom of the heart with utmost devotion. *Bi'ur HaGra* on *Tikkunei HaZohar* describes that the eminent powers and holiness contained within the *Shabbos* cause man's prayers on *Shabbos* to be more readily accepted than his prayers during the week; and the *Ben Ish Chai*, *Shana Shniya*, *Parshas Shmos* inscribes that the force of Torah

study on *Shabbos* likewise exceeds that of Torah study during the week.

#### **Part IV: Family Purity**

A. In addition to all that is stated in Parts I and II above, the *Zohar* in *Parshas Shmos* warns that one must be extremely vigilant in the observance of the laws of family purity, as there is no worse impurity than that which arises from stumbling in the essential *mitzvah* of *niddah*.

B. The *Zohar* presages that the *Shechina* flees from any place that one who transgresses the laws of *niddah* walks; and that the place itself plummets to a lower spiritual level.

C. Aside from the terrible outcome of the sin itself, sinning in this area also causes intense spiritual damage to all aspects of supernatural powers, as these depend upon the presence of *Shechina* in the world.

D. One who yearns to acquire supernatural powers should not only avoid transgressing the actual prohibitions, but should also endeavor to be stringent regarding the *mitzvos* in which there are Rabbinical authorities who endorse acting stringently.

#### **Part V: Stringency in Laws of Family Purity**

A. One who wishes to act stringently in order to enhance his observance of the laws of family purity must own a clear knowledge and understanding of these laws. Indeed, there are certain instances when it is actually forbidden to be stringent

since it may cause one to lapse in the fulfillment of the imperative *mitzvah* of bearing children, which is also a paramount *mitzvah* and the basis of the entire world. [See *Bi'ur HaGra* on *Tikkunei HaZohar*, *Tikkun* 43 which extols the greatness of this *mitzvah*.] Aside from the merits in fulfilling the *mitzvah* of bearing children, the *mitzvah* of family purity also endows man with a special spiritual strength. Rabbi Sulman Eliyahu in *Sefer Kerem Shlomo* on *Eitz HaChaim Sha'ar HaShvira* Ch. 1 p. 107 describes that a couple merits a unique additional spiritual bounty with the birth of each child.

B. Even in cases that do not constitute abstention from the *mitzvah* of bearing children, acting overly stringent in the laws of family purity could constitute an abstention from the *mitzvah* of *onah* if one's partner does not acquiesce with a full heart.

C. Of course, the above certainly depends on the extent of the partner's feelings, as there is definite reason to be stringent in certain cases even when an action may be permissible according to the letter of the law. In this case, it may be permissible to be stringent, even if it counters the *mitzvah* of *onah*.

D. The above is clearly discussed in *Shei'los U'Teshuvos Chasam Sofer*, *Yoreh De'ah* Ch. 149 in *Pischei Teshuva*, *Yoreh De'ah* Ch. 158:2 and *Ohr L'Zion*, *Maseches Ksubos* 22b quoting the *Mahari"l Diskin*. It is likewise mentioned in *Chazon Ish*, *Yoreh De'ah* Ch. 125:3 p. 148 column 3 and *Chazon Ish*, *Taharos* in the *Likutim* following *Maseches Mikva'os* Ch. 5 p. 204 column 2 quoting the *Mahari"l*.

The *Chazon Ish* writes regarding the *mitzvah* of family purity that the concept of stringency applies only to aspects of the

*mitzvah* that were instituted by the Sages which occasionally permit leniency. He also asserts that there are situations when one may be stringent even when it counters both the *mitzvos* of bearing children and *onah*. He concludes that one who is regularly stringent may also be stringent in his observance of this *mitzvah*.

E. *Gemara Ksubos* 22a states, “Even though she is believed with a valid excuse to retract her previous claim, Shmuel was personally stringent and did not accept this.”

The *Shulchan Aruch* rules as Rav, that the woman is believed with a valid reason; yet the *Rama* in *Yoreh De’ah* Ch. 185:3 concludes that one who wishes to be stringent and prefers not to believe her is acting on a level of piety. The *Bi’ur HaGra* states that the *Rama’s* ruling is based upon the stringency upheld by Shmuel.

F. However, there are still boundaries to the above recommendation of extra stringency in the fulfillment of *mitzvos*. Each situation must be analyzed and evaluated independently by one who possesses vast knowledge and experience in the ways of *Halacha* and Torah. Thus, one must always consult with a qualified Halachic authority, a Rabbi who is acquainted with the person posing the question, his ways of life and service of Hashem.

G. As said, Part V of this chapter refers only to aspects of the *mitzvah* that are Halachically permissible and permit leniency. However, it must be clarified that anything that is Halachically forbidden—even if it is forbidden due to doubt—cannot be

permitted or justified due to rationalizations of fulfilling *mitzvas onah*, etc.

## Part VI: *Pesach*

A. *Sefer Sha'ar HaKavanos* writes that the exalted spiritual lights that descended upon Bnei Yisrael at the time of the Exodus return to the world and are restored to the Jewish people each and every year anew during the holiday of *Pesach*.

B. The endowment of these spiritual lights is conditional to man refraining from the sin of owning and consuming *chametz* on *Pesach*. The more man strives to be meticulous in the observance of this *mitzvah*, the more spiritual lights he will merit. [Increasing one's service of Hashem during the week of *Pesach* also enhances this *mitzvah*, yet the essence is refraining from consuming any *chametz*.]

C. There are several food types that Rabbinical authorities dispute whether or not constitute as *chametz* and may or may not be eaten on *Pesach*. Moreover, there are foods that Halachically may be eaten on *Pesach*, despite a minority ruling which maintains that they are forbidden on *Pesach*.

D. In order to attain the loftiest spiritual levels, it is crucial to be extremely cautious in observing the commandments and refraining from the prohibitions related to *Pesach*, even in situations that permit leniency.

E. As *Pesach* amounts to only one week each year, one is certainly capable of adopting the maximal stringencies regarding *chametz* on *Pesach*. Moreover, in today's generation,

when there is no limit to gluten-free food products, one should certainly endeavor to enhance one's fulfillment of the *mitzvah* and wait for the seven days of *Pesach* to elapse before eating a food that is questionably *chametz*.

F. Above all, one should ensure that the *matzos* that he eats to fulfill the annual *mitzvah* are stamped with a superior *kashrus* certification and were subject to maximal *kashrus* supervision with all the desirable stringencies. One should not allow oneself to rely on any leniencies. Moreover, aside from the *matzah* itself, one should avoid purchasing any product that contains any grain; and if one requires a product containing grain for a specific purpose, it is recommended that one should prepare it oneself using the special *matzos* that he purchased. [Often, even if it is stamped with a superior *kashrus* certification, store-bought matzah-meal is of lesser *kashrus* quality than purchased *matzah*. Thus, if one requires matzah-meal, it is best to grind it oneself from one's own *matzos*.]

G. Although the prohibition of '*Bal yeira'eh u'val yimatzei*—It should not be seen, and should not be found' (i.e. the prohibition of owning *chametz* on *Pesach*) is not punished by *kareis*, it is commendable to be especially stringent in the fulfillment of this *mitzvah*, as it purifies the soul. Thus, one should endeavor to remove all traces of *chametz* from one's home and possession before *Pesach*, instead of relying on the sale of *chametz*. It is well-known that the Vilna Gaon did not rely on the custom of selling *chametz* at all. He ruled that the sale of *chametz* did not constitute an honest removal of *chametz* from one's possession since one's intention is to reacquire it

immediately after *Pesach* instead of selling it permanently to the Gentile.

Hence, although many Rabbinical authorities do endorse the custom of selling *chametz*, it would seem preferable to avoid it if possible. Certainly when the *chametz* in question does not amount to a significant monetary loss and given that the prohibition of owning *chametz* is *d'oraysa* (commanded in the Torah), it is best to avoid leniencies even if one does proclaim '*Kol chamira*' (the invalidation of *chametz*). *Psachim* 4, 10 state: "According to the Torah, it is sufficient to annul it." However, several Rabbinical authorities assert that '*Kol chamira*' does not apply to sold *chametz*, as the items are of obvious value to the owner.

### **Part VII: Spiritual Ascension on *Yom Kippur***

A. It is a *mitzvah d'oraysa* for every Jewish adult to fast on *Yom Kippur*, and there very few conditions which permit leniencies of eating and/or drinking. The only situation which calls for leniency is a serious health issue that could be life-threatening to the person fasting. Obviously, if the above is applicable, one should not attempt to be stringent and fast on *Yom Kippur*.

B. Regardless of any leniency obtained, *Yom Kippur* must be a day absolutely devoted to spiritual growth and ascension. *Yom Kippur* is an auspicious, once-a-year opportunity to elevate one's spiritual state to great heights, as the final hour of *Yom Kippur* is the moment upon which a Jew's fate for the imminent year is stamped and sealed. The writings of the Arizal and Rashash attest to the vast spiritual leaps that can occur on the day of

*Yom Kippur*. One who sincerely strives to enhance one's connection with Hashem can merit this, thus acquiring vast spiritual strengths.

**Part VIII: The Prohibition of Eating *Cheilev***

A. It is a grave prohibition to eat the *cheilev* (suet) of any kosher animal, including male and female cows, sheep and goats. Thus, part of the koshering process requires separating the *cheilev* from all the meat before eating it, as described in *Maseches Chulin* and *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah*. *Cheilev* closely resembles body fat, and it is complex to distinguish between the two. Thus, only one who has carefully studied the laws pertaining to *cheilev* and harbors expertise in the matter is qualified to remove *cheilev* from meat.

B. The animal's rear contains the greatest percentage of *cheilev* in its body, and this *cheilev* is extremely difficult to remove. Therefore, it is customary to refrain from eating the rear of even a kosher animal and to eat only from the frontal part of the animal in order to avoid the grave transgression of eating *cheilev*.

C. The frontal part of the animal also contains *cheilev* that must be removed during the koshering process; yet there is much less *cheilev* in the front than in the rear of an animal, and frontal *cheilev* is easier to remove. As such, those who aspire to avoid any possible transgression are stringent to eat only from the frontal part of the animal.

D. Rabbi Chaim Vital describes in *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* describes that he was especially meticulous to avoid the prohibition of eating *cheilev*. In fact, he did not eat any meat unless he had personally removed the *cheilev* from the animal or observed the koshering process.

E. *Halacha* mandates removing a part of the meat together with the *cheilev*, as a minute amount of *cheilev* inevitably penetrates into the permissible meat at the point of their connection, thus rendering that part forbidden as well. Rabbi Chaim Vital, however, acted stringently and removed double the amount of meat as he did *cheilev*, in order to avoid any possible transgression.

F. Throughout history, there was many a righteous sage who never tasted meat and ate only poultry, as many more complex questions and doubts arise concerning meat, including *cheilev* and *treif* (non-kosher animals), that do not apply to poultry. Similarly, the *shechita* (kosher slaughtering) of an animal is more complex than the *shechita* of a chicken.

There are individuals who are obligated to eat animal meat for health purposes. The *Gemara* even relates of several *Amora'im* who were unable to learn properly if they did not eat meat. Notwithstanding, one who eats meat should exercise caution and purchase only products that are stamped with superior *kashrus* certification. Indeed, every food product that a Jew purchases and eats should boast superior *kashrus*, yet one should be extra stringent in regard to meat, as the prohibition of eating non-kosher meat is very serious.

G. The concept underpinning the importance of eating only kosher meat and avoiding any trace of *cheilev* is that everything a person ingests enters one's body, fuses with it and becomes an indistinguishable part of him. As such, as the *Mesilas Yescharim* writes that it is vital to ensure that only strictly-kosher, permissible food products enter our bodies.

### Addendum

A. Just as it is crucial to exert maximal effort to avoid any possible transgression of an *issur kareis* (prohibition punishable by *kareis*) in order to achieve the desired spiritual heights, it is likewise essential to endeavor to fulfill all *mitzvos* to the greatest extent possible, with all stringencies. [See the *Chazon Ish, Sefer Emunah U'Bitachon* which describes the importance of absolute fulfillment of the *mitzvah* and *Halacha*, as opposed to a general or surface fulfillment of *mitzvos*. He also writes that man should not base his goals for *avodas Hashem* upon his previous efforts, but upon the absolute fulfillment of the *mitzvos*, as stipulated by the *Gemara* and Rabbinical authorities. One who does not do so, warns the Chazon Ish, is liable to stumble in actual Torah prohibitions.]

B. *Sheilos U'Teshuvos Rivash* quotes a response of the *Ran*, also cited in the *Beis Yosef* in *Orach Chaim* Ch. 690, regarding the *Rivash*, who ruled against a leniency pertaining to reading the *Megillah*. The *Ran* inscribes: "I see that your words are good and contemporary, as every wise individual can choose a secure path that protects him from all harm and stumbling blocks. And even if it is only in a case of doubt, this is how we must act in our

progression along the path of Torah and *mitzvos*, which are the furnace of the world. Indeed, how can we abandon the path upon which our holy sages walked?"

C. *Rabbeinu Yonah* inscribes in *Brachos* 1b in the *Rif*: "And the essence of fear of Hashem is avoiding any doubt and not performing the *mitzvos* by habit."

D. *Rabbeinu Yonah* also cites *Parshas Vayikra* which states that a Jew who sinned inadvertently is obligated to offer a sheep or goat as a *Korban Chatas* (sin offering), and one who is uncertain whether or not he sinned offers a ram as a *Korban Asham Taluy* (offering of one who is unsure whether or not he sinned). The *Gemara* asks why these animals were chosen as atonement for these specific offerings, as the price of a ram for the *Korban Asham Taluy* exceeds that of the sheep or goat for the *Korban Chatas*. He explains, "The reason to demand more from the individual who is unsure whether or not he sinned than from the one who certainly sinned is because the one who certainly sinned feels guilty and repents for his sin wholeheartedly, whereas the one who is uncertain often justifies himself or convinces himself that he did not truly sin instead of restoring his heart to Hashem and repenting."

CHAPTER 8

SUPPRESSING ANGER IS A PREREQUISITE TO  
ATTAINING SUPERNATURAL POWERS.

Part I

A. Rabbeinu Chaim Vital states that another primary condition toward attaining supernatural powers is controlling one's anger. *Chazal* strongly condemn the sin of anger. (See *Nedarim* 22; *Psachim* 66; Rabbeinu Chaim Vital, *Shaarei Kedusha* Vol. 2 *Sha'ar D* citing the *Zohar*.)

B. Rabbeinu Chaim Vital cites the Arizal in *Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* 10b-11a:

“The quality of anger inhibits one from total achievement, as we find in the verse that relates, ‘And Moshe grew angry at Elazar and Itamar.’ *Rashi* elucidates, ‘Any man who grows angry; if he is a prophet, the prophecy is removed from him; if he is a wise man, his wisdom is removed from him.’ (*Psachim* 66b).

C. “However, the greater evil of [anger], is as we will explain. And my teacher [the Arizal] was scrupulous to avoid the quality of anger more than any other prohibition, even if the anger was on behalf of a *mitzvah*, as in the case of Moshe. He explained that all other sins injure one limb or another, yet the sin of anger injures the soul and changes it entirely. Indeed, when a Jew becomes angry, his holy soul departs from him and is replaced by the *klipah* (outer shell of the soul referring to negative forces). And this is what the Scriptures meant when

they wrote, 'He devours his soul with his anger,' (*Iyov* 18), as he truly destroys his pure, holy soul and makes it as a corpse, killing it entirely at a time when he is angry. The *Zohar, Parshas Tetzave* 182b strongly condemns the quality of anger to the extent that it likens one who associates with an angry person to one who associates with idols.

D. "And even if a person engages in spiritual rectification and devoted repentance for his sins and performs myriad *mitzvos*, all his lost from him entirely, as his beautiful, pure soul that had fulfilled all those good deeds has already departed and was exchanged for an impure one. Thus, he must repeat all the *mitzvos* and *tikkunim* that he has done previously. Indeed, this occurs each and every time that a person grows angry; and it thus emerges that one who is an angry person will find no spiritual rectification ever...

E. "He also inflicts terrible damage upon himself. For, if he had once performed a tremendous *mitzvah* that afforded him the protection and assistance of the soul of a great *tzaddik*; his anger causes the soul of that *tzaddik* to depart, and this is another aspect of the verse, 'He devours his soul with his anger.'

F. "One who is an angry person can never attain any spiritual achievement while possessing this trait, even if he is a *tzaddik* in every other respect. Indeed, [an angry person] is constantly building and destroying all that he has built while he is angry. In contrast, other sins do not devour and uproot the soul as anger does; other sins cling to him, and his soul becomes imperfect in the realm of that specific sin. Anger, however, requires tremendous spiritual rectifications and preparations in order to

repent from it and restore the soul that he devoured. The *Zohar* in *Parshas Tetzave* even states that it is possible that there is no *takana* at all. Indeed, when I [Rav Chaim Vital] was teaching my brother, and he did not know the material sufficiently, I grew angry with him; and my master warned and rebuked me harshly for this.”

## Part II

A. The concept that the sin of anger is worse than all other sins in the Torah, since it causes man’s pure soul to depart, is relative to certain aspects.

B. From a different perspective, it is obvious that other sins are worse than anger. Indeed, if a person has the choice of growing angry or desecrating *Shabbos*, he is obviously obliged to grow angry; and there is no doubt about this.

C. The above regards not only desecrating *Shabbos*—which is a very important *mitzvah*—but all *mitzvos*, as well. Certainly, a person is forbidden to transgress any sin in the Torah into order to prevent himself from becoming angry. Although the quality of anger is truly terrible, it is encompassed in only one aspect of serving Hashem. And given that there are many other aspects of serving Hashem, it is obviously prohibited to transgress a *mitzvah* in order to avoid stumbling in the realm of anger.

D. Notwithstanding, in order to acquire supernatural powers and the loftiest spiritual levels, it is important to understand that anger is a terrible trait that prevents one from arriving at these levels. As Rav Chaim Vital teaches, it is almost impossible

for one who regularly grows angry to ever acquire supernatural abilities, as the acquisition of these strengths is dependent on intensive Torah study, prayer, repentance and the fulfillment of *mitzvos*. The *Zohar* teaches that anger, in contrast, causes man's soul to be switched for another, less pure one. As such, the moment a Jew becomes angry, he loses the hours of Torah, repentance and *mitzvos* that he amassed, as the same soul no longer exists within him after he stumbles in the sin of anger.

E. Man should beware of pitfalls to anger, as these specifically arise at those times when the heavens wish to endow him with a vast spiritual bounty. In order to prevent him from receiving this, evil forces present him with a formidable challenge in order to lead him to grow angry and steal his pure soul from him. This is especially true regarding the portion of the soul that is added to him, which is easier to remove than the soul that is intrinsic to him.

Thus, any time a Jew is presented with a challenge that may arouse him to fury, he should focus on the thought that it is possible that directly behind this challenge is his potential for vast spiritual powers, and he should battle to overcome the anger at all costs.

F. Another terrible aspect of anger is that aside from the severity of the sin itself, anger often leads to other sins as well. For example, one who is angry is liable to hurt another person verbally, which transgresses the Torah prohibition of *ona'as devarim* (harming a person verbally). (See *Pirkei Machshava, His'karvus La'Hashem* Ch. 11).

Moreover, there are times when anger leads a person to hurt not only the individual who angered him, but others as well. Thus, one who guards himself from anger not only saves himself from transgression but may also merit repaying the one who angered him with good instead of bad, which is a tremendously lofty level.

### **Part III**

A. *Sha'ar HaYichudim* p. 4 column 4 instructs one who strives for spiritual attainment to avoid anger and strict behavior against others.

B. He adds that the extent to which a person avoids anger and strict behavior against others, he will merit spiritual attainment, as these are the two foundational pillars of all positive qualities.

### **Part IV**

A. Rav Chaim Vital writes as follows, as cited in Part I above: “Anger requires tremendous spiritual rectifications and preparations in order to repent from it and restore the soul that he devoured. The *Zohar* in *Parshas Tetzave* even states that it is possible that there is no *takana* at all.”

B. However, in *Sha'ar HaYichudim* p. 37 column 4, he alters the text slightly as follows: “Yet the angry person requires many rectifications and Kabbalistic thoughts in order to repent and regain [the soul] after it is was devoured; and *it is as if* there is no possible spiritual rectification in his present angry state.”

C. The primary difference between the two statements is that the former avers that there is no spiritual rectification for anger at all, whereas the latter states “it is as if” there is no *tikkun* from this, which is a softer, gentler statement.

D. *Sefer Leshem Shvo V'Achalama* highlights this discrepancy in his comments on *Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh*, p. 203. He explains that the meaning of the *Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* is the same as that in *Sha'ar HaYichudim*, and that it is possible, albeit challenging, to atone and achieve spiritual rectification for anger.

E. The *Leshem Shvo V'Achlama* adds that the reason Rav Chaim Vital seemed to unequivocally state that there is no spiritual rectification for anger is because it is necessary to exert such an enormous amount of effort in order to acquire repentance and spiritual rectification from anger and regain his original, pure soul that it is almost impossible to attain spiritual rectification at all.

## Part V

A. Rav Chaim Vital inscribes in *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, Introduction 5 p. 8: “Occasionally, it may happen that although a person owns a pure, lofty soul, he will fall once to anger; and then the soul will exit him and another, lower soul will enter in its place.

B. “Or a person will fall ill with a terrible disease, and his soul will be switched for another one.

C. “Or he will fall ill with epilepsy or similar diseases, and his soul will be switched and will enter another man; and a different soul will enter him.

D. “And this is the reason why a person could be righteous throughout his life and fall to sin at the end of his days, or vice versa.

E. “And because this is so, it is possible that other things will result from this. [One possible result is] that, until now, a specific woman had been destined for him; but now that his soul has been switched, the woman will be given to another man, and another man will take her.”

F. Rav Chaim Vital’s statement in *Sha’ar Ruach HaKodesh* can be elucidated as follows: There are certain instances when it is impossible to reacquire one’s soul, especially if portions of it have already been bequeathed to another man.

However, according to the *Leshem Shvo V’Achlama*, which bases its statement on *Sha’ar HaYichudim*, it is always possible to achieve spiritual rectification. Indeed, even if one’s soul has already been transferred to another individual, one can still reclaim it from the other person if he engages in intense thoughts and efforts of repentance. [One way this could occur is if the person who acquired the first person’s soul also stumbles in the sin of anger and loses his soul as well. When this happens, the one who has repented could merit reacquiring it.]

## Part VI

A. *Kisvei Moreinu HaRav Chaim Vital* include a frightening tale related to anger in *Sefer Sha'ar HaGilgulim* Introduction 38. [It is important to note that although Introductions 38-39 were original manuscripts of Rav Chaim Vital that still exist today, they were not originally included in *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* or any of the eight Gates. Rather, the section was taken from *Sefer HaChezyonos*, written by Rav Chaim Vital, and later appended by his son to *Sefer Sha'ar HaGilgulim*. In the preface to Introduction 38 (p. 48b), Rav Chaim Vital's son describes that his father had wished to conceal this information, yet he took it upon himself to publish it for the benefit of the public.

B. He writes (p. 63b in old printing; p. 363-4 in new printing): "In the year of 5332, we walked to the field and passed the 1000-year-old ancient grave of a gentile. He saw my soul on his grave, and he desired to kill me and injure me; yet there were many angels and souls of *tzaddikim* on my right and left who refused to allow this; and he could not overcome me. And my master, *z"l*, instructed me that I should not walk along this route again.

C. "And then the soul of that gentile walked together with me. There, in the field, I became angry with HaRav Yehuda Mish'an; and the soul of the gentile began to overcome me and cause me to sin further.

D. "And I did not wish to heed the teachings of my master, *z"l*. [Rav Chaim Vital was known as one who sought to learn from his master at all opportunities, as described in many of his *sefarim*

and especially *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* Introduction 38 p. 52b in the old printing, p.331 in new printing.]

E. “And [the Arizal] began to weep, and he said, ‘Behold, all the souls of the *tzaddikim* and angels have absconded because of this anger, and this is why the base soul ruled over him. What should I do? If only they would harm him and leave him alive, for I can heal him; although I fear that they will kill him, and all that I believe that he can fulfill and rectify in this world will not be fulfilled, as I have been told. And I can not reveal what this is, for I do not have permission to speak of it. Have I toiled for nothing so the world shall be destroyed?’ And he did not eat that entire night due to his pain and anxiety.

F. “And I went and returned along that path alone. When I arrived at his grave, a wind lifted me, and I perceived myself running in the air at a height of twenty floors above the earth, until I reached a distant land just as the stars were beginning to shine in the heavens. And they abandoned me there, and I went to sleep until the light of morning.

G. “I wished to arise, but my limbs were weak and leaning on one another. And they aroused me and led me to the gate of my master, *z”l*. And when I finally reached there, there was no soul within me at all, as occurred with Yonah *HaNavi*.

H. “And my teacher laid me to rest on his bed, and he closed the door and he prayed. Then, he entered the same house, and he was alone; and he walked through the house and returned to my bed and bent over me. He did this for a full half-day during which I was completely dead. Then, at noon, I saw myself that my soul had been restored to me slowly, slowly, until I opened

my eyes, rose and recited the blessing, 'He Who revives the dead.' And this is all true and accurate, without any doubt."

I. To understand Rav Chaim Vital's statement regarding the soul-connection that he shared with a gentile, see *Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* p. 12a regarding the transfer of an evil soul, and the *Divrei Yaakov* in *Kisvei Ari, Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* p. 34.

J. This tale serves to underscore the terrible force of anger. Indeed, as long as he had never become angry, the angels and souls of the righteous protected him from all sides, and the soul of the gentile was unable to overcome Rav Chaim Vital, as. However, the moment he became angry, all those righteous souls and angels immediately absconded. This allowed the evil soul to overcome him and inflict severe spiritual damage upon him, to the extent that he no longer wished to heed the words of his holy master, the Arizal, and even conveyed him to the point of spiritual death. Moreover, had the Arizal been unable to revive him, his small burst of anger would have caused the entire world and all future generations to lose the wondrous Torah taught by Rav Chaim Vital. It is known that the Arizal stated that his singular purpose in this world was to teach Torah to Rav Chaim Vital, and that only he was capable of transmitting the Torah of Kabbalah to future generations of *Klal Yisrael*. How terrible to consider that all his Torah could have been lost in a single moment of foolish anger, and how great a lesson this is that every Jew must strive to avoid anger at all costs!

K. *Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* p. 45b, *Yichud* 8 describes the terrible damage caused by anger to the extent that it stole the power of speech from him. Ostensibly, the power of speech

mentioned in the *sefer* does not refer to simple speech, but a lofty spiritual speech that he lost.

L. See Rav Chaim Vital, *Sha'ar Ma'amarei Raz"al, Maseches Nedarim 22* and *Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* p. 18-19, *Yichudim* 13-15 which describe the intentions and spiritual rectifications necessary to repent from anger. This section also describes the spiritual injury created by anger. Also see *Azharos Moreinu Chaim Vital*, in his introduction to *Sefer Eitz Chaim* p. 5b.

## **Part VII**

A. A paramount rule regarding anger is that the less the amount and period of anger, the less it affects the person. Many people face tremendous challenges in the realm of overcoming anger, and not always are they successful in vanquishing anger from their heart. Thus, one who does fall prey to anger should strive to overcome it as quickly as possible in order to minimize the damage inflicted upon his soul.

B. Moreover, even if one does become angry, one should ensure never to speak angrily or argue as a result of his emotions, as this will inevitably lead him to sins in the realm of forbidden speech, hurting another person verbally or humiliating another person, etc.

C. In addition, angry words also further distance his pure soul from him. Thus, even if one did become angry in one's mind, one should never allow oneself to speak out in anger.

D. The Rashash writes in *Sefer Nahar Shalom* in his explanation of the blessings, 'Clothes the naked' and 'Who removes sleep,'

that every person has five aspects of his soul that are called *nefesh chitzona*—external soul. Deeper in the soul, loftier and more important are the *ruach*, *neschama*, *chaya* and *yechida*, respectively. The order of the levels of the souls is influenced in both ways. Thus, if one injures the outer *nefesh*, one can also destroy the other, deeper levels of his soul. [However, the Vilna Gaon in *Tikkunei HaZohar* writes that this does not necessarily occur, as there are many people who possess an evil *nefesh*, but a pure *ruach*, etc.]

E. The Rashash explains that *mitzvos* that are fulfilled through action are rooted and rectified by the *nefesh*, and sins committed through action are also rooted in the *nefesh*. Speech, in contrast, is rooted in the *ruach*. Intentions are rooted in the *neschama*; thoughts in the *chaya*. [The difference between intentions and thoughts is that thoughts are created with greater concentration, as explained by the *Bnei Aharon's* commentary on *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*.] Finally, *re'usa ila'ah*, inner passion, is experienced by the *yechida*.

F. Thus, even if a person sins with thoughts of severe anger and loses a portion of his lofty *neschama*; by guarding himself from speaking out in anger, he safeguards his *ruach* from abandoning him.

Speech, itself, encompasses three levels:

1. Man speaking to himself.
2. Man speaking to another person—which is the main essence of speech.
3. Man speaking in public to many people.

Speaking out in anger in any of these categories qualifies as angry speech, and the severity of the sin is based on the level of speech. Thus, one who sins by speaking angrily should at least guard himself from falling to the next level of angry speech in order to protect himself from greater spiritual loss.

G. Finally, one who sinned in thinking angry thoughts and speaking out in anger should still strive to guard himself from acting out in fury, which is the worst expression of anger of all. Examples of furious actions include breaking objects or hitting another person, as these terrible actions severely increase the injury to one's soul.

According to the Rashash, such actions will have terrible effect on the *nefesh* aspect of his soul, although they may not affect the other, more essential aspects. However, a person should not think that it is inconsequential if his *nefesh* is affected, since it is the least important aspect of his soul, as each and every one of the five soul aspects are vital to his whole soul. Indeed, proof that the *nefesh* is central to the essence of the soul is that the Torah delivers the most severe punishments for sins that are committed with action. Moreover, when a person injures his *nefesh*, he weakens and/or destroys the foundational pillar of the more elevated aspects of his soul—the *ruach*, *neschama*, *chaya* and *yechida*—which causes all these to falter. In contrast, by rectifying the foundation of the soul, he endows strength and force to the other, loftier aspects of his soul.

Hence, a Jew should pray constantly and wholeheartedly to Hashem to safeguard him from the challenge of anger and any occasion that may lead him to anger.

## Part VIII

A. *Chazal* teach at the end of *Maseches Uktzin*, the last of the Six Orders of the *Mishnah*: “Rabbi Shimon *ben* Chalafta said: ‘The Holy One Blessed is He did not find a better vessel to contain blessing for Yisrael than peace, as written, ‘Hashem will grant strength to His nation; Hashem will bless His nation with peace.’”

B. Sentiments of peace protect man from anger and thus act as a vessel to contain blessing. One who merits many blessings but sins in anger may not merit keeping or enjoying them if his soul is transferred to another person. Thus, only through peace, is one assured protection from anger and will merit retaining the blessing that he truly deserves.

C. The *Mishnah* inscribes the phrase ‘*machzik bracha*’—contains blessing as *mem, ches, zayin* and *kuf* (without the vowel letter *yud*). The numerical equivalent of the word *machzik* is 155, which is equal to the numerical equivalent of *ka’as*—anger; this teaches that the force to counteract anger is that which contains blessing—peace.

D. The Sages conclude the Six Orders of the *Mishnah* with this beautiful message in order to underscore that a person who merits completing all of *Shas* (Talmud)—a learning that conveys great radiance to the soul—must constantly beware of losing this vast spiritual light to his anger. He must safeguard himself against the quality of anger in order to merit enjoying the bounty of spiritual Torah light eternally.

## Part IX

A. *Sefarim* relate that a Jew encounters spiritual challenges in the form of temptation to anger specifically at those auspicious moments when he is deserving of an added portion to his *neshama*. It is easier for the forces of evil to appropriate the parts of his *neshama* that he received due to his merits than it is for them to steal the *neshama* that he was bequeathed at birth by causing him to sin in anger. Thus, when a person senses that he is about to become angry, he should realize that it is the forces of evil at work, endeavoring to steal the great spiritual gift that he is about to receive; and this understanding will help him surmount the challenge of anger.

B. This is the foremost reason why so many face challenges that lead to anger and discord on Friday afternoon, just before *Shabbos*. *Shabbos* is the auspicious day of the week upon which a Jew receives an added portion of his *neshama*, and the forces of evil wish to eliminate those portions of his soul by goading him to fury and dissension.

## Part X

A. Rav Chaim Vital's letters in *Sefer Eitz Chayim Sha'ar Ha'Akudim (Sha'ar 6)*, Ch. 2 p. 25 column 2 illustrate the importance of a Jew holding fast to the new, added portions of his *neshama* and guarding them from the forces of evil. He writes: "And you should understand and see that when a person is on the level of *nefesh*, then he is under the hold of the evil inclination which is the *klipah* of the *nefesh*... And when he is

on the level of *ruach*, he does not fall prey to sin so easily... The level of *neshama* is already far removed from sin, yet still requires protection to avoid being lured from behind; and the level of *neshama* does not permit man to sin at all.”

B. It is important to qualify the above statement that one who has achieved the higher spiritual levels will not sin with the words of the *Gemara*: “One who is greater than his friend, his evil inclination is greater than his” (*Sukkah* 52a).

The Rashash explains in his commentary on *Eitz Chayim Sha'ar* 26 Ch. 1 p. 15 column 1 that although the person who is on a lofty spiritual level has distanced himself from the evil inclination, the evil inclination itself possesses more powerful tools against him. Thus, even the greatest *tzaddikim* must beware, lest they fall prey to the clutches of the evil inclination.

C. Paragraph A above refers mainly to the concept of acquiring added portions to his own *neshama* in the order of *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshama*, *chaya* and *yechida*. However, there is also a concept of meriting a spark from the souls of the greatest *tzaddikim*, including Sages from the Talmud or even the prophets, as clarified in *Sefer Sha'ar HaGilgulim*.

D. *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* describes that one who merits a spark of the *tzaddikim* automatically merits exceedingly lofty spiritual levels. Rav Chaim Vital thus describes at length how greatly man should strive to achieve these extraordinary levels.

E. One who has merited these levels must exercise extreme caution to avoid anger at all times in order to ensure that he does not lose all he has acquired. As aforementioned, it is easier for the forces of evil to seize the added portions of his soul

which were not entrenched within the person's original soul. Thus, one who senses that he has been endowed with a vast spiritual gift must take extreme caution to guard himself from pitfalls of anger.

### Addendum

A. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* Ch. 568:12 states: "One who is fasting, whether he is fasting individually for a hardship or a dream or whether he is fasting together with the public for their hardship, should not permit himself enjoyment and should not act lightly or be glad. Rather, he should be anxious and moan, as written, "What should the living man lament?"

B. The *Mishnah Brurah* adds in Paragraph 50: "And he should guard himself from anger. And if he has business, he should do so with faith and calm, so he will never arrive at anger. {This is also included in the *Be'er Heitiv* citing the *Chessed L'Avraham*.}

C. The sages emphasize this point since a person who is hungry is automatically more inclined to anger and irritation.

D. Hence, any time a person feels hungry—whether or not he is fasting—should be extra careful to guard himself from anger, as he is extra prone to emotions of anger and distress at such times.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE RAMBAN REGARDING *DVEIKUS HAMACHSHAVA*.

A. Chapter 7 above quotes the Ramban's commentary on *Parshas Eikev* and *Parshas Va'eschanan* regarding the *mitzvah*, 'To cling to him.' Aside from presenting a clear explanation of this imperative *mitzvah*, the Ramban also teaches significant points regarding *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach.

He states: "That you shall remember Hashem and His love always, and your thoughts should not depart from Him when you are walking, when you lay down to sleep and when you rise, until one perceives one's verbal and mental interactions with other people as not with them, but before Hashem. And it is possible that people who attain this spiritual level merit that their souls are bound in eternal life even during their lifetimes, as they themselves act as a dwelling place for the *Shechina*." (See *ibid.*)

B. The Ramban inscribes similarly in his commentary on *Parshas Acharei Mos* Ch. 18:4: "And you shall know that man's life in *mitzvos* is according to his spiritual preparation.

[There are four categories of people:]

1. "One who fulfills the *mitzvos* not for the sake of heaven, but in order to acquire reward will merit many days of wealth, prosperity and honor in this world, as written 'In her left, there is wealth and honor' (*Mishlei* 3:19). *Chazal* elucidate, 'For the left-handed, riches and honor' (*Shabbos* 63a).

2. “Those who engage in *mitzvos* in order to merit the next world, those who serve Hashem out of fear, will merit with their intentions to escape evil decrees; and their souls will rest in good.

3. “And those who engage in *mitzvos* because of their love, as is the *Halacha* and proper with the matters of this world, as mentioned in the Torah in *Parshas Bechukosai* 26:5, ‘And he will acquire for you threshing and vintage...’ They will merit a good life in this world, and their merits are complete in the next world.

4. “And those who abandon all aspects of this world and pay no heed of it, as if they do not own a body, and all their thoughts and intentions are directed solely toward their Creator, like Eliyahu, whose soul cleaved to the Honored Hashem; they will live forever in their body and their soul, as explicitly written of Eliyahu and as known from the secrets of Kabbalah, and as understood from the teachings regarding those who merit being restored at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead.”

C. *Parshas Vayishlach* 35:1 states, “And Hashem said to Yaakov, ‘Get up and ascend to Beit-Kel, and settle there and build an Altar to the G-D Who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother, Eisav.’”

The Ramban writes in his commentary on this verse: “And I did not understand the meaning of ‘settle there.’ It is possible that Hashem was commanding him to settle there first before building the Altar, in order to purify himself from idols... And

perhaps Hashem commanded him to 'settle there' in order to clear his thoughts in order to cling to Hashem."

The Ramban's second explanation teaches that Hashem directly commanded Yaakov *Avinu* to clear his mind of any thoughts in order to focus his mind and heart absolutely to the goal of achieving *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach.

D. Rav Chaim Vital in *Sefer Sha'arei Kedusha* Vol. 4 and *Sefer Reishis Chochmah* cite the Ramban's *Iggeres HaKodesh* (printed in *Kisvei HaRamban*) which states that the groundwork for acquiring the ability to perform miracles and wonders is *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach. [It is necessary to delve deeper into this issue in order to discover whether the Ramban refers to all forms of miracles or only to those wonders which entail increasing the bounty in the world. However, even if the Ramban refers only to the latter, many *Rishonim* and Kabbalists clearly state the same in reference to all miracles and wonders.]

CHAPTER 10

THE *IBN EZRA'S* COMMENTS ON *DVEIKUS BA'HASHEM*  
AS GENERATING MIRACLES AND WONDERS THAT  
TRANSCEND THE FORCES OF NATURE.

Part I: Cited from the *Ibn Ezra* on *Bereishis* 1:26

A. The *Ibn Ezra's* commentary on *Parshas Bereishis* 1:26 states as follows: “The Upper Soul of man that never expires is compared to Hashem, in that it is eternal, without a body, and encompasses the whole body. Thus, man’s body is as a tiny world... And the prophet says, he perceived the Honor of Hashem in the vision of a man [(*Yechezkel* 1:28)]. Obviously, this is only a parable, as Hashem does not have a corporeal body]. And Hashem is One and He Created all. He is All.”

B. The above *Ibn Ezra* compares man’s soul relative to his body, to a certain extent to Hashem Yisborach Whose Presence fills the entire universe.

C. *Sefer Nefesh HaChaim Sha'ar C* emphasizes this concept at length, describing that there is no place in the world that is void of Hashem’s Presence.

D. The meaning of the *Ibn Ezra's* statement, “Hashem is All” is that the only absolute reality is Hashem, as nothing else in the world harbors independent force or power. Hashem is One and Only, and He causes every creation to exist at each and every moment. Nothing in the world has any substance other than

Him. [See Ch. 4 above for the *Nefesh HaChaim's* discussion of this concept.]

E. The *Ibn Ezra* does not actually mention the concept *dveikus* in the above quote; yet the knowledge and in-depth study of this concept will automatically convey one to acquire very powerful *dveikus*.

## Part II: Cited from the *Ibn Ezra* on *Shmos* 3:15

The root of acquiring supernatural powers is *dveikus* to Hashem

A. The *Ibn Ezra's* commentary on *Shmos* 3:15 states: “The Upper World is the world of the holy angels that do not possess bodies and are not encased in bodies as the soul of man is. Their lofty levels are unfathomable for minds lower than theirs. And that is the World of Honor. They are all stationary; there is no changing in spiritual status. It is all continuity; there is no one by himself. All is for Hashem.

B. “And man’s soul is of a similar nature, as it derives an Upper Force according to the system of those who serve it. And every servant represents a great army from the time that it was created. If the soul becomes wise, it will attain in the secrets of the angels and will acquire a great power from the Upper Powers that it first received from the lights of the angels. And then it will cleave to the Honored Hashem.

C. “And this is the meaning of Yaakov’s vow, ‘And Hashem will be for me a G-D’ [*Parshas Vayeitzei* 28:21]. He had secluded himself throughout his lifetime in order to cleave to Hashem

with all his heart. And this is why he said, ‘Remove the idols’ [*Vayishlach* 35:2], but did not command this previously, as only then did he begin serving Hashem as per his vow.”

D. “This is also why Yisro asserted, ‘Now I know that Hashem is Greater than all gods’ [*Yisro* 18:11]. He was a very wise man, and proof of this is ‘And each man asked his friend’ {*Yisro* 18:7) and ‘And they bowed down,’ and he did not fear him.

E. “And as he foresaw that Odom would die, he had a child in order to preserve the species; and behold, he received a force of continuity. This is why Chava said, ‘I acquired a man with Hashem’ (*Bereishis* 4:1).

F. “The *Bnei HaNevi'im* (students of prophecy) would seclude themselves, each hoping that they would acquire *dveikus*, each man according to his capacity.

G. “And with this Name, miracles and wonders will renew themselves in the world. And when the Name of Honor [most likely referring to the Name *Ha-va-ya* or *A-ki-k* (see *Ibn Ezra* above and the *Rashbam*)] was told to him [Moshe *Rabbeinu*], he requested miracles and wonders. Therefore, one will not find this Name in *Sefer Koheles*, which only discusses the eternal aspects of the world that cannot be increased or diminished, as there is never anything new to them except for the Upper Wisdom.

**Part III: Explanation of *Ibn Ezra's* Commentary on *Shmos* 3:15**

A. In his discussion of the concept of *dveikus*, the *Ibn Ezra* writes that *dveikus* endows man with the power to perform miracles and wonders that transcend the forces of nature.

B. He explains further that people receive their spiritual bounty from a special lofty place in the heavens where Hashem establishes the forces of nature. Angels, who exist on a higher spiritual plane than men of flesh and blood, receive their spiritual bounty from a higher place in the heavens, a place that is not limited by the laws of nature.

C. When a person merits a lofty level of *dveikus*, he obtains his bounty from the place where the angels derive their bounty. This bounty that they draw transcends the forces of nature and empowers them with supernatural abilities, similar to the angels.

D. As long as man continues receiving his bounty from the place that is designated for human bounty, it is difficult, if not totally impossible, to attain total and constant *dveikus*. Indeed the bounty intended for human beings is not a completely spiritual bounty, but mixed with other elements, which is why the *dveikus* that a person who derives bounty from the lower levels can attain is limited, combined with periods and aspects that lack *dveikus*. Indeed, only one who merits receiving the spiritual bounty from the lofty plane usually designated for the angels can merit cleaving to Hashem constantly and fully, just as the heavenly angels do.

E. The primary method of achieving the loftier spiritual bounty is striving. Man must exert all physical and spiritual energies at his disposal to complete the aspects of his *dveikus* that are lacking, by investing both additional hours and thoughts to achieving his goal. These endeavors will ultimately be rewarded with a gift of spiritual bounty from the loftiest level, one that will augment his capacity to reinforce his *dveikus* to Hashem.

**Part IV: *Ibn Ezra* on *Va'eirah* 6:3**

**The Root of Acquiring Supernatural Powers is *Dveikus* to Hashem**

A. See the *Ibn Ezra's* commentary on *Bereishis* 6:3 regarding the verse, “And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov with the Name *Kel Shakaï*; and I did not appear to them with the name *Hava-ya*. He writes, “We know that Hashem created three worlds, as I mentioned [in his commentary on 3:6, some of which is cited in different parts of this booklet.] The lower world receives all aspects from the intermediate world, each aspect of the world receiving from the world above it.

B. “And as man’s soul is loftier than the intermediate world; if the soul would become wise and recognize that Hashem’s doings are without an intermediary and abandon the desires of this lower world and isolate itself to cleave to Hashem. Then, if the heavenly constellations have decreed evil upon him on a specific day, Hashem—to Whom he cleaves—will instigate occurrences that will rescue him from evil. And if the constellations decree that he will be childless, Hashem will rectify this, and he will bear a child.

- C. “Thus, the Sages taught that Hashem commanded Avraham, “Leave your stargazing,” [*Shabbos* 156a].
- D. “Similar to this is the concept, ‘There is no *mazal* for Yisrael; and I will explain this later in *Parshas Ki Sisa* (33:21).
- E. “Thus, Hashem told Avraham first, ‘And I will make your descendants many; I am *Kel Shakai*’ (*Bereishis* 17:1). This is explained as, ‘through the powers of the constellations (upper world).’
- F. “It is not that the constellations destroy. But one who cleaves to Hashem shall know that it is good that he is not subject to the powers of the constellations them.
- G. “This is why Yaakov said, ‘The angel who redeems me from all evil,’ [*Vayechi* 48:16], as there was an angel prepared to come upon him.
- H. “And this is the secret of the Torah, as I will explain there.
- I. “And the forefathers did not attain the lofty level of cleaving totally to Hashem, as Moshe *Rabbeinu* who saw Hashem face to face, did. This is why Moshe was able to transform the laws of the lower world and enact miracles and wonders that surpassed the abilities of the forefathers.
- J. “Moshe said two things. The first is, ‘Why did You send me?’ and the second is, ‘And rescue, You did not rescue Your nation.’
- K. “And [Hashem] answered [Moshe] on the latter, ‘Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh,’ and on the former, ‘And He said to him, “I am Hashem.”’ The reason for this is Hashem appeared to the forefathers with the Name ‘*Kel Shakai*,’ yet He appeared to Moshe with the Name Hashem, as written, ‘Thus, tell *Bnei*

*Yisrael*, “I am Hashem” and, behold, I have sent you to announce that Hashem” will redeem them.

**Part V: Explanation of *Ibn Ezra’s* Commentary on *Va’eira* 6:3**

A. The *Ibn Ezra* above clearly alludes to the fact that the ability to perform supernatural miracles and wonders is largely contingent on the level of *dveikus* that a person attains. In order to achieve *dveikus*, one must totally abandon the physical reality of this world; and to the extent that one succeeds in attaining *dveikus*, he will likewise acquire the capacity for supernatural strengths and powers.

B. The *Ibn Ezra* asserts strongly, “And this is the secret of the entire Torah.” Indeed, why does he state that the achievement of *dveikus* represents the entire Torah when there are 613 *mitzvos*?

It is possible that his statement is actually a general reference to all aspects pertaining to fulfilling the Will of Hashem, rather than a specific reference to *dveikus* alone. In essence, he could be stating that the key to Torah is myriad spiritual connections to Hashem that surpasses everything natural and instigates miracles and wonders that transcend the forces of nature.

However, the words of the *Ibn Ezra* can also be taken literally in order to grasp the tremendous weight and importance *dveikus*, which surpasses all other *mitzvos* in the Torah. [See *Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim* Vol. 3 Ch. 51-2 which highlights the importance of *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach and

states that the achievement of *dveikus* is the ultimate goal of all other *mitzvos*, although other sages do differ. *Kisvei Ha'Ar"*i describes that every *mitzvah* and the specific aspects and particulars of every *mitzvah* harbor special keys to spiritually rectify the Upper Worlds and the soul.]

C. See the *Ramban* in *Parshas Va'eira* which cites the *Ibn Ezra* above. He writes: “[Hashem] appeared to the forefathers with this Name [*Kel Shaka*], as He was conquering the decrees of the constellations in order to perform great miracles, as the forces of nature had power over them. He rescued them from hunger, from death, from war and the sword; and He granted them riches and honor and all goodness. And this is as all the fated decrees described in the Torah, both in the blessings and the curses. Man does not merit goodness as reward for a *mitzvah* or evil as punishment for sin. Rather, it is all a miracle. If Hashem would abandon man to the forces of nature or his fate, his actions would not affect him at all—either positively or negatively. However, the reward and punishments for observing and transgressing the Torah are in this world; and it is all hidden miracles. One who looks with the naked eye will think that this is just the custom of the world.”

D. The *Ramban* writes further, following in the *Ibn Ezra's* theme: “And, behold, Hashem said to Moshe, ‘I appeared to the forefathers with the Force of My Hand that I take from the constellations and mold to benefit My chosen ones. However, I did not appear to them with the Name *Yud-Key*, the Name that conjured everything into existence in order to create new or change the laws of nature. Therefore, tell *Bnei Yisrael*, ‘I am Hashem,’ and teach them the Great Name a different time,

because it is with this Name that I create them so perfectly. And then they will know that I am Hashem who fashions all.

E. The *Ramban* concludes “And all that Rabbi Avraham [Ibn Ezra] said regarding this topic is true, yet he is a prophet but doesn’t know it.”

F. See *Nefesh HaChaim Sha’ar C* regarding the miracles that Hashem performed on behalf of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and those that Hashem performed for Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Following the *Ibn Ezra’s* theme, he explains the root of the difference between these two. He also adds an explanation of the roots of each and their essences. (See Ch. 4 above) which elucidates segments of the *Nefesh HaChaim*.

### **Part VI: *Ibn Ezra* on *Ki Sisa* 33:21**

A. The *Ibn Ezra on Parshas Ki Sisa* 33:21 states: “And, behold, Moshe was able to know and see with his heart how the creations clung to the Creator of the universe.”

B. This topic is discussed at length by the *Nefesh HaChaim* (see there).

### **Part VII: *Ibn Ezra* on *Chukas* 20:8**

#### **Dveikus to Hashem Grants the Ability to Perform Miracles**

A. The *Ibn Ezra* states in his commentary on *Chukas* 20:8: “I will only hint to what I believe is the true explanation. You should

know that when the part knows the Whole, it will cleave to the Whole and then acquire the ability to perform new wonders.”

B. The ‘part’ is a reference to man [specifically a Jew, as written, “For a portion of Hashem is with him.”] And the Whole is the Creator and Master of the world, as explained in the *Ibn Ezra’s* commentary on *Bereishis*, as cited above.

C. The *Ibn Ezra’s* overall message is that the aspects that pertain to *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem endow man with the ability to enact miracles and wonders that transcend the forces of nature.

D. Even Moshe *Rabbeinu*, whose capacity to perform miracles and wonders surpassed that of all human beings in history, garnered his awesome powers from the tremendous level of *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem that he achieved.

## **Part VIII: Explanation of the *Ibn Ezra* on *Parshas Chukas***

A. The *Ibn Ezra’s* statement indicates that there is an added dimension to *dveikus* which leads to the capacity to perform miracles, specifically as those enacted by Moshe *Rabbeinu*.

B. The *Ibn Ezra’s* commentary on *Bereishis* 1:26 inspires better understanding of this concept: “The Upper Soul of man that never expires is compared to Hashem; in that it is eternal, without a body, and encompasses the whole body ... And Hashem is One and He Created all. He is all, and I cannot be properly explained.” [See Part I above for the *Ibn Ezra’s* complete

commentary on this verse and its explanation which is critical to the understanding of this section.]

C. Returning to the quote from the *Ibn Ezra*, as cited above in Part VII A “When the part knows the Whole.” The word ‘know’ refers to *Yedi’as Hashem* (knowing Hashem), which is the foundation of all belief and faith in Hashem.

D. The *Ibn Ezra* calls Hashem the ‘Whole’ and ‘All,’ as it is insufficient for man to merely know that Hashem exists. Rather, man must appreciate that Hashem Yisborach is everywhere, that He encompasses everything, and that He causes everything to exist, as He is the Only True Reality in the universe. Indeed, it is this patent knowledge that inspires tremendous *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach, the type of *dveikus* in which man’s thoughts are constantly cleaving to the idea that Hashem is All.

E. Chapter 4 above presents a clear description of this type of *dveikus*, as expressed by the *Nefesh HaChaim* in *Sha’ar C*. The *Ibn Ezra* writes that it is this form of *dveikus* that grants man the ability to enact supernatural events. He also explains that this *dveikus* was the source of Moshe *Rabbeinu’s* spiritual strength and ability to perform the miracles that he did on behalf of Bnei Yisrael.

F. The *Ibn Ezra* writes, “And he will perform miracles in all.” This alludes to his commentary in *Parshas Bereishis*, when he writes that Hashem Yisborach is “Present in all.” Indeed, as A Jew focuses on his *dveikus*, he should simultaneously focus on Hashem’s Strength which causes the existence of everything or upon the miracle that he wishes to enact. However, according

to the *Nefesh HaChaim*, it appears that the loftier spiritual level that allows one to perform miracles is achieved by removing any thought from one's mind that is connected to the physical aspects of this world. Based on the content of Chapter 4, it is possible to resolve this apparent contradiction by man focusing both on the miracle that he wishes to enact together with the truth that there is nothing in the world other than Hashem.

G. The *Ibn Ezra* refers to man as the 'part,' and to Hashem as the 'Whole.' This would seem to hint that it is insufficient for man to focus on the Greatness of Hashem as One and All. Man is only a part, whereas Hashem is the Whole. As such, man must also focus on his goal to fuse all five aspects of his soul (*nefesh, ruach, neshama, chaya, yechida*) to the spiritual Unity that is Hashem and to draw the desired bounty from Hashem into the world and his own soul. Indeed, this is the intention and utmost desire that grants man the awesome powers that he desires.

#### Part IX: *Ibn Ezra* on *Chukas* 20:8

##### Explaining the Incident at Mei Meriva

A. The *Ibn Ezra* on *Parshas Chukas* 20:8 expounds upon the underpinnings of *Bnei Yisrael's* sin at Mei Meriva. He challenges the explanations of other commentaries and then concludes, "I will only hint to what I believe is the true explanation. You should know that when the part knows the Whole, it will cleave to the Whole and then acquire the ability to perform new wonders and miracles. And the truth is that Hashem told Moshe and Aharon, 'And you will speak,' but they didn't speak because the nation was fighting with Moshe. And behold the part separated, and he hit the rock; and water did not emerge until

he hit it a second time. And, behold, they did not sanctify the Name of Hashem, and they defied Him and rebelled accidentally.”

B. Indeed, Moshe *Rabbeinu's* capacity for miracles derived from his perpetual *dveikus* to Hashem, and specifically his *dveikus hamachshava*. [See the *Nefesh HaChaim* which describes Moshe's fantastic ability to perform miracles.] At that time, however, something was lacking in Moshe's *dveikus* (due to his friction with *Bnei Yisrael*), which inhibited his ability to perform miracles properly and caused a lessening of *Kiddush Hashem* in the world. Thus, it would seem that the *Ibn Ezra's* usage of the word 'separated' referred to a separation from *dveikus*.

C. The *Ibn Ezra's* statement, 'Inhibited his ability to perform miracles properly would seem to follow *Rashi's* commentary, which explains that Moshe was supposed to have drawn the water from the rock with words as opposed to hitting it. Had he ordered the rock to release water, water would have flown from it. However, the *Ibn Ezra's* message harbors a deeper element in that he seems to say that, at the time, Moshe's level of *dveikus* was on a lower level which made him incapable of performing the miracle through his speech alone. As such, Moshe had no choice but to hit the rock in order to release its water, which is a lesser miracle requiring a lower level of *dveikus* to Hashem.

D. The *Ohr HaChaim* elucidates the event similar to the *Ibn Ezra*, stating that due to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* temporarily diminished level of *dveikus*, the water emerged only after he hit the rock twice, whereas had his *dveikus* been on its normal lofty level, the water would have certainly flowed after his first strike.

E. According to the *Ohr HaChaim's* explanation of the incident, it is unclear whether Moshe automatically regained his regular level of absolute *dveikus* after his first strike did not yield a miracle, which was how he was thus able to enact the miracle of Mei Meriva; or if the miracle that he performed by hitting the rock twice was simply a lesser miracle that did not require such a lofty level of *dveikus*. However, it would seem that Moshe *Rabbeinu* did return to his absolute level of *dveikus* before hitting the rock a second time and drawing the water from it.

F. See the *Ohr HaChaim* to better understand the incident of Mei Meriva, when *Bnei Yisrael* challenged Moshe *Rabbeinu* about the lack of water.

G. The *Ibn Ezra's* commentary on Mei Meriva teaches a powerful lesson about the awesome responsibility of *Kiddush Hashem* and the grave sin of failing to sanctify Hashem's Name properly. Indeed, the lack of *Kiddush Hashem* that occurred at Mei Meriva derived from a miracle itself—something that most human beings could never fathom doing! Because Moshe *Rabbeinu's* spiritual level at the time did not allow him to perform the miracle immediately, he was punished severely for failing to ascend to the spiritual level expected of him. Moshe *Rabbeinu* performed a tremendous miracle that transcended all forces of nature; he drew enough water from a rock to quench the thirst of millions of people and their livestock. Yet, he was still censured for failing to perform an even greater miracle that would have increased *Kiddush Hashem* in the world. (*Rashi* adds that, moreover, had Moshe caused the miracle by commanding the rock to spew water, then *Bnei Yisrael* would have

internalized a deep lesson regarding their obligation to heed the words of Hashem; and this was the essence of his failure.)

H. Regardless of the Sages' critique of Moshe *Rabbeinu* for causing a lapse in *Kiddush Hashem*, it must be emphasized that Moshe *Rabbeinu* was the greatest of all prophets and the human being who achieved the greatest level of *dveikus* in all of history. Indeed, he was capable of performing miracles and wonders on behalf of millions of people, supernatural events that surpassed all others since the beginning of time. No human being has ever been able to perform miracles of the likes of Moshe *Rabbeinu's* miracles—even the one for which he was censured! Indeed, *Parshas V'Zos HaBracha* asserts, "No prophet arose in Yisrael as Moshe who knew Hashem face-to-face..." *Parshas Be'ha'aloscha* likewise describes Moshe *Rabbeinu's* spiritual magnitude as surpassing that of every other prophet.

I. Notwithstanding, *Nefesh HaChaim Sha'ar C* describes at length that the essential elements of Moshe *Rabbeinu's* *dveikus* can be achieved by every person in every generation on his own individual level. He adds that these elements are fantastic *segulos* for achieving supernatural powers—those that eliminate evil from the world and those that convey positive tidings.

J. The *Bi'ur HaGr"a* in *Sifra D'Tzniusa* Ch. 5 p. 34 column 1 explains that everything that applied to Moshe *Rabbeinu* in his generation exists in each and every generation within each and every man, in an inner, spiritual sense (as not every person actually faces the threats that existed at the time of the Splitting of the Sea.) However, each person harbors the potential to

achieve absolute *dveikus* and perform miracles on his own level and in his own situation.

## **Part X: Ibn Ezra on Parshas Ha'azinu**

### **Regarding the Tree of Life**

A. The *Ibn Ezra* states in his commentary on *Parshas Ha'azinu* 32:39: "The reward of the World to Come is dependent on the soul's service of Hashem and his obligation to reflect upon the workings of Hashem, as this is the ladder that leads him to ascend to the level of knowing Hashem, which is the absolute goal. And the Torah describes the concept of the Tree of Life for the one who is wise; and there was a certain power that existed to overcoming *Kruvim* (angels guarding the entrance to *Gan Eden*) and the fruit of the Tree of Life which grants man eternal life, just as the heavenly angels...as occurred to Chanoch and Eliyahu."

B. The *Ibn Ezra* states that the Torah grants man the ability and means to fully understand the concept of the Tree of Life and how to achieve this.

C. Although the *Kruvim* were placed in front of the Tree of Life to prevent humans from reaching it, as described in *Parshas Bereishis*, there is a special power that allows one to vanquish the *Kruvim* and reach the fruit of the Tree of Life in order to attain eternal life.

D. He alludes that this is what occurred to Eliyahu and Chanoch, who ascended to the heavens alive, as they were able to grasp the conceptual Tree of Life.

E. Attaining the conceptual Tree of Life is totally dependent on man's thoughts and intentions.

F. See *Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* which describes the pathways toward achieving love of Hashem and fear of Hashem by reflecting upon the wonders of Creation. The *Ibn Ezra* above likewise discusses pondering the miracles of Hashem's Hand as a rung on the ladder, whose top is Knowledge of Hashem.

G. See the *Tanna Divrei Eliyahu* on *Parshas Bereishis* regarding *Eliyahu HaNavi's* ascent to the heavens.

## CHAPTER 11

### THE VILNA GA'ON'S DISCUSSION OF THE WONDERS OF THE TORAH DURING THE EXILE.

#### Part I

A. *Bi'ur HaGr" a* on *Tikkunei HaZohar*, *Tikkun 21* p. 61 column 3 states: "In the final exile, all the wonders mentioned in the Torah will be realized; the sea of the Torah will split, and all of the miracles. These will follow the example of the miracles that occurred in Egypt. And exile of mortar and bricks will be found in the Torah; and all toil will be in Torah, as written in the *Ra'aya Me'hemna*." (See there for complete discussion of this subject and the Vilna Gaon's notes regarding the *Tikkunei HaZohar* p. 52.)

B. The Vilna Gaon's choice of words seems to indicate that wonders that will befall those who study Torah will be supernatural occurrences, as opposed to a reward for those who study Torah.

C. Still, there is also an aspect of reward to those who invest in the study of Torah. As one merits succeeding in the study of Torah, he automatically connects to the roots of these miracles; and this grants him excess strength to perform miracles in other realms of life as well.

D. The *Tikkunei Zohar HaChadash* (p. 26 in *Sha'am* edition) states: "Come and see, every miracle and wonder that occur in this world are drawn from the letters of the Torah which are

encompassed within the *Shechina*. The Vilna Gaon explains that all wonders that transpire in this world are drawn from Torah. The Hebrew word *os* has two meanings: Wonders and letters. This is as written, “Show of the wonders to come in the future,” (*Yeshaya* 41:23). [In this verse, the word ‘wonders’ is written as *osios*, with the extra letter *yud* that usually connotes the word letters. (See the Vilna Gaon’s essay on this topic, as this possibly expands upon our subject.)

## Part II

A. It is important to explain why the force of learning Torah stimulates the power to perform miracles and wonders that transcend the forces of nature.

In the final portion of the Torah, *Parshas Zos HaBracha* 34:9-12 relate: “(9) And Yehoshua bin Nun was filled with a spirit of wisdom, for Moshe placed his hands upon him; and Bnei Yisrael heeded him as Hashem commanded Moshe. (10) And there never arose a prophet in Yisrael as Moshe, who knew Hashem face to face. (11) For all the miracles and wonders that Hashem commanded him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land. (12) And for all the strong hand and for all the great fears that Moshe did before the eyes of all of Yisrael.”

B. These final verses in the Torah praise Moshe Rabbeinu for the extraordinary miracles and wonders that he merited performing on behalf of our nation. Commentaries teach that the source of Moshe’s unnatural powers stemmed from his unwavering closeness to Hashem Yisborach that allowed him to

merit, 'Knowing Hashem face to face.' The juxtaposition and grammar of verses 11 and 12, which discuss the miracles that Moshe enacted and directly follow verse 10 which describes Moshe's singular relationship with Hashem Yisborach, indicate a strong connection between the two concepts. Indeed, both verses 11 and 12 state, 'For all the miracles... For all the strong hand,' as opposed to a seemingly more grammatically-correct, 'All the miracles...All the strong hand.' This clearly alludes to a connection between these verses and the previous one which describes the source of these strengths. [Several commentaries do point out that Moshe's relationship with Hashem in Egypt had not reached the level of face-to face (see *Ibn Ezra, Parshas Ki Sisa*); yet, Hashem's revelation to Moshe was certainly on an extraordinary level even then, and it was this level that eventually allowed him to attain the pinnacle of seeing Hashem face-to-face and accomplishing these extraordinary miracles.]

C. Verse 9 relates: "And Yehoshua bin Nun was filled with a spirit of wisdom, for Moshe placed his hands upon him." This is the source of *Pirkei Avos* 1:1, "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and relayed it to Yehoshua."

The continuation of Verse 9 states: "And Bnei Yisrael heeded [Yehoshua] as Hashem commanded Moshe." This was the expression of Yehoshua transmitting the intense spiritual light from him to all of Yisrael.

### Part III

A. Each and every Jew harbors a spark of Moshe *Rabbeinu* inside his soul, as stated in many holy *sefarim* including *Bi'ur HaGr" a l'Sifra d'Tzniusa* Ch. 6 page 34 column A.

B. As one engages in the study of Torah, which was given to us directly from Hashem Yisborach through Moshe *Rabbeinu*, one arouses that sacred spark of Moshe that exists within his soul—a spark that harbors infinite connection and closeness to Hashem Yisborach and harbors the potential to perform miracles and wonders. Thus, through the study of Torah, one draws oneself ever nearer to attaining supernatural powers.

### Part IV

A. An additional aspect regarding learning Torah as a means to attaining supernatural forces is the power that it has to overcome the evil inclination. *Sukkah* 52b and *Kiddushin* 30b state: “Rabbi Yishmael taught: ‘My son, if the evil inclination strikes you, pull him toward the *Beis Midrash*. If he is a stone, it will dissolve; and if it is iron, it will explode. If it is stone, it will dissolve, as written: “Stones were smoothed by water,” and water is Torah, as written, “All who are thirsty, go to the water.” And if it is iron, it will explode, as written, “Behold My words are as fire, said Hashem, and as a hammer, it will smash rock.””

B. There are many who challenge this *Gemara*, arguing that they spent many a long hour in the *Beis Midrash*, but are remote from conquering their evil inclination. The answer to their argument, however, is clear: Had they kept away from the *Beis*

*Midrash* and failed to invest their hours and efforts into learning Torah, the evil inclination would possess a much stronger hold upon their souls. Thus, even if they have not yet fully escaped the clutches of the evil inclination, they should increase their hours and efforts of Torah study, which will ultimately lead them to vanquish the evil inclination totally.

C. There are special messages to be gleaned from the specific verses that *Chazal* employed to describe how one must conquer the evil inclination. *Chazal* advise us to 'soften' the *yetzer hara* with water, as written, 'All who are thirsty, go to the water.' Indeed, a Jew must approach Torah with a powerful thirst and yearning, learning with the intensity and craving as one would drink after being stranded in the powerful desert heat without water.

D. The *Rashash* writes that the soul of every Jew is encased both in layers of *chitzoniyus* (externality) and *pnimiyus* (pure, internal layers). When a person learns Torah or serves Hashem without fierce desire for connectin to Hashem, only minute rays of light penetrate into these pure, internal layers—which are the most important layers of the soul. However, when a person learns Torah and serves Hashem with intense desire for spiritual closeness, a radiant, powerful light penetrates into the deepest recesses of his soul.

The same, unfortunately, is true of evil. When a person sins purposefully, with lust for evil, a dark impurity penetrates his heart deep into his soul. Tragically, there are times when the evil inclination causes man to sin with lust, and this impurity does penetrate; and man aspires to banish this impurity through

the study of Torah. The only way to truly cleanse the heart of impurity is to learn Torah with a desire and love that surpasses the lust that he had for evil. If he does not learn Torah with that same craving, the radiance will fail to penetrate as deeply as the impurity, which is why the person will believe that *Chazal's* advice failed him. Hence, *Chazal* emphasize that one must learn Torah with the desperate yearning of one thirsting for water. (*Sefer Nahar Shalom*, printed in the back of *Sefer Eitz Chaim* p.22 column 4)

E. *Chazal* also taught, "If it is as iron..." If the evil inclination is stronger than stone, and the above counsel is ineffective, then one must smash it, as written, "Behold, My word are as fire, said Hashem, and as a hammer that will smash rock."

The *Ba"ch* in *Orach Chaim* Ch. 47 in *Hilchos Birkas HaTorah* explains that the Torah is a spiritual conduit connecting man to Hashem and drawing the light of Hashem into man's soul. If man truly aspires to connect his soul to Hashem and benefit from His heavenly light through his study of Torah, then the light that he will merit will be an intensely powerful light that will obliterate the evil inclination from his heart and allow him to merit an even greater light of Torah directly from Hashem.

F. These two messages from *Chazal* are not only useful in man's quest to eliminate the evil inclination from his heart, but they also elevate man's capacity to absorb and learn Torah, as well.

## Part V

A. It is interesting that the *Gemara* cites the verse, “Behold, My word are as fire, said Hashem, and as a hammer that will smash rock,” to prove its point of the unimaginable force of Torah, when *Rashi* manifestly states that this verse in *Sefer Yirmiyahu* is a clear reference to the power of prophecy.

B. *Sefer Yirmiyahu* relates that there were many sinners in Yirmiyahu’s era whom the prophet rebuked and warned with the message that if they would fail to repent, the king of Bavel would conquer the land and destroy the *Beis HaMikdash*, as ultimately occurred. His rebuke seems to allude that had *Bnei Yisrael* heeded his warnings and repented to Hashem, they would have been spared this terrible decree.

C. Yet unfortunately, there was many a false prophet in that generation, as well, who feigned being prophets of Hashem and reported that they had received a prophecy that nothing would happen to the nation, even if they failed to repent. As such, Yirmiyahu’s words did not have the desired effect on the nation, and there were many who spurned him and his efforts to inspire their repentance.

D. Yirmiyahu then rebuked the false prophets for their lies, asserting that they could not even pretend to claim that they had dreamed and mistook the dream for a prophecy. He explained that there is a marked difference between a dream and a prophecy; prophecies arrive as a burning fire, as written, “Behold, My word are as fire, said Hashem, and as a hammer that will smash rock.” It thus emerges that the above verse is a

certain reference to prophecy, as opposed to Torah, which leads us to question why the *Gemara* employed this verse to portray the force of Torah over the evil inclination.

E. The answer is embedded in *Gemara Shabbos* 146a which relates that the soul of every Jew—present and future—stood at the foot of Mount Sinai at the time of the Revelation and the giving of the Torah. (Also see *Shvu'os* 39a).

F. Why was it necessary for every soul to attend the Revelation? Certainly the vast majority has no recollection of the Revelation and giving of the Torah, especially if they do learn of it. [The *Yismach Moshe* relates that he does recall the historical event, and even those who stood beside him!]

There are many responses to this question. The *Chafetz Chaim* answers that, at the time of the Revelation, the soul of every Jew—both present and future—received his portion of Torah; and throughout man's sojourn in the physical world, he is obliged to realize the potential for Torah that exists within his soul. (*Shem Olam*, Vol. 2 Ch. 6)

G. *Parshas Va'eschanan* 5:4 states in regard to the Revelation: "Face to face was the word of Hashem with you on the mountain from within the fire."

The commentaries ask how the Torah can state this in reference to the entire nation when the final verses in the Torah assert, "And there never arose a prophet in Yisrael as Moshe who knew Hashem face to face." The *Divrei Yaakov* presents a list of answers (see there for complete responses), all of which attest to the point that every member of *Klal Yisrael* merited an intense moment of prophecy at the time of the Revelation. The *Rashba*

likewise asserts that not only did every Jew merit prophecy at that moment, but that the prophecy that they merited was of the loftiest form possible.

H. Indeed, each and every Jew from every generation received his unique portion in the Torah at the time of the Revelation through this moment of intense prophecy. The soul of each and every Jew harbors the greatest spiritual prophetic lights that encompass his vast portion in Torah. Hence, when a person engages in Torah study, he draws upon this latent potential in Torah and makes it into a reality; and this Torah reality ignites the prophetic lights in his soul, thus granting his soul immense supernatural strengths.

I. The above serves to clarify the discrepancy in *Sukkah* 52b and *Kiddushin* 30b that quote the verse in *Yirmiyahu*, “Behold, My word are as fire, said Hashem, and as a hammer that will smash rock,” in reference to the study of Torah. Indeed, the study of Torah calls upon the latent prophetic powers that dwell in the soul of every Jew, especially when he learns with an intense desire to draw close to his Creator.

J. The type of prophecy dormant within the soul that can be aroused and activated through the study of Torah is a very lofty level of prophecy, as alluded to within the verse, “Face to face were the words of Hashem with you on the mountain from within the fire.” It is this tremendous level of prophecy that serves as the root of one’s potential to acquire the capacity for miracles and wonders.

Impassioned study of Torah is the primary tool to activating the latent potential for prophecy, and obviously the more a

person cleaves to Torah, the greater his capacity for realizing his latent abilities.

There are two primary means of cleaving to Torah:

1. Invest the maximal hours into learning by exploiting every second for Torah study, and intensify one's concentration and focus while learning.
2. Increasing one's desire and yearning to grasp, understand, absorb and remember each and every word that one learns with the ultimate goal of drawing ever closer to Hashem.

## Part VI

A. There is another essential lesson to be learned from the fact that *Chazal* equated Torah to prophecy. Dovid *HaMelech* inscribed in *Tehillim*, "Forever, Hashem, Your Words are stationed in the heavens" (119). The meaning of this verse is that every Word spoken by Hashem exists and must be upheld forever.

B. When a person studies Torah, he connects to these Words spoken by Hashem at Mount Sinai.

C. *Brachos* 5a states that the Oral Torah was also relayed by Hashem at Mount Sinai.

D. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* and *Midrash Rabba* likewise teach that even the Torah thoughts conceived by scholars in latter generations were relayed to Moshe *Rabbeinu* at Mount Sinai. (See commentaries on *Brachos* 5a.)

E. The “words of Hashem” that were spoken to Moshe were prophecy. Thus, whenever a Jew studies Torah, he connects to the G-dly light intrinsic in the ‘words of Hashem’ relayed to Moshe at Mount Sinai. See commentaries on *Parshas Pekudei* for expanded explanation on this subject.

F. This concept is closely intertwined with the acquisition of supernatural forces through the study of Torah. Indeed, many a miracle transpired at the time of the Revelation. *Chazal* teach that all who were sick or disabled were cured at the time of *Matan Torah* and of many other miraculous events that transpired when Hashem revealed Himself to his nation. Thus, every time a person engages in the study of Torah, he arouses a similar potential for miracles; and the more intense his study of Torah, the more he stirs that potential for miracle.

## Part VII

A. *Shabbos* 104a and *Megilla* 2b relate: “Rav Chisda said, ‘The *mem* and *samech* of the Tablets stood through a miracle.’” The writing on the Tablets, upon which were written the Ten Commandments, was engraved from both sides. All the letters, except the end *mem* and *samech*, touched the Tablets; however the inner circle and square of the *mem* and *samech*, which had nothing on which to grasp, were supported through a miracle.

B. The Tablets, in general, were beyond the forces of nature as they were fashioned and handwritten by the Hand of Hashem as opposed to a human hand. (Even the second set of Tablets was written by the Hand of Hashem.)

C. Aside from the two letters, once the Tablets were completely fashioned, their existence became natural, as anything constant—whether or not it was originally considered a supernatural entity—is considered “natural,” a product of the “forces of nature.” (This subject is explained at length in Chapter 4 above, which quotes the *Nefesh HaChaim*.)

D. However the letters *mem* and the *samech* in the Tablets continued to be a manifest miracle, as the inner parts of the letter continued to stand.

E. The *mem* and *samech* in the Tablets teach a fundamental lesson in Judaism. There are letters in the Torah that are completely surrounded, without any breaks, interruptions or connection to the part of the stone Tablets. This hints to the message that with continuous, uninterrupted connection to Torah, a Jew can rise spiritually until he overcomes the forces of nature and merits the capacity for miracles and wonders.

F. There are times when a person is deeply connected to the Torah, but still harbors aspects of his personality that have yet to complete that perfect link. Thus, he feels shaky, insecure and feels that he should stabilize himself in the lower world in order to ensure his security. In the parable of the *mem* and *samech*, this would translate into the letters breaking their continuity, their perfect circle/square in order to maintain their hold onto the stone. However, it is the exact opposite that is true. Only if one completes the circle of his link to Torah—an absolute connection, without interruption, without any break, like the *mem* and the *samech*—will he acquire the capacity to transcend the forces of nature and stand alone through a miracle.

G. It is vital to emphasize that all the above must be fulfilled with clear regard to the mandates of *Halacha*. A Jew is obligated to adhere to physical laws and preserve his health, as well as to abide by the directives and Halachic guidance of our spiritual leaders and mentors. Still, one should bear in mind that, oftentimes, it is through this complete connection to Torah that matters in life resolve themselves miraculously to one's benefit.

This connects to the following chapter, which quotes the *Maggid Meisharim* who taught the *Beis Yosef* that by directing one's thoughts to Hashem Yisborach and His holy Torah without interruption one can acquire a vast capacity for miracles and wonders that transcend the forces of nature. This is similar to the *mem* and *samech* which stand, despite—or more accurately—only as a result of the continuous connection in Torah.

CHAPTER 12

***SEFER MAGGID MEISHARIM* REGARDING ATTAINING  
SUPERNATURAL POWERS.**

**Part I**

A. The soul of every Jew is a magnificent Upper Light that shines directly from Hashem Yisborach and enters the body. The Jewish soul harbors immense spiritual capacities and powers.

B. The soul, however, is limited, as it is encased within a corporeal body. Aside from the soul, the physical body also possesses its own element of spirituality which limits the powers of the soul.

Man must do two things in order to merit attaining supernatural powers: The first is strengthening the powers of the soul beyond its original capacity, which endows it with the power to overcome the force of the body. The second is striving to purify the body in order to diminish the grasp that it has on the soul.

C. Observing the *mitzvos* and learning Torah are two aspects that empower the *neschama* and weaken the strength of the body. Hashem, Who created the universe and bequeathed the Torah to His people, molded the world in the sense that the fulfillment of *mitzvos* and study of Torah draw a spiritual light from Hashem down to the world, increasing the power of the soul and purifying the body. The Torah states in *Parshas Va'eschanan*, "And for you, who cleave to Hashem your G-D,

there is life always.” Indeed, man’s soul-connection with Hashem endows life and vigor to the *neshama*.

D. For every moment that a Jew learns Torah, prays, fulfills a *mitzvah* and refrains from *aveirah*, he merits an indescribable spiritual light from Hashem, which fuses with his *neshama* and further enhances its original light. The added spiritual radiance remains with him always; and it is with this enormity of spiritual radiance that a Jew merits attaining the supernatural powers for which he strives.

## Part II

A. In order to understand the concept of the spiritual lights that lead a Jew to attain supernatural powers and the means of acquiring them, it is necessary to emphasize two important points:

1. There are many forms of supernatural powers, and not always is one able to choose which specific power(s) he will merit due to the spiritual light of his *neshama*.

2. There are many levels and intensities of supernatural powers; and a Jew’s capacity to achieve the loftier levels is dependent on the extent of his spiritual endeavor. Moreover, even if one does achieve a strong power, there will be time when this power will be stronger and weaker within him.

B. One example of supernatural powers is as described by *Chazal* in *Midrash Shmuel Parsha 22* elucidating *Shmuel A 19:18*. The *Midrash* relates that Dovid *HaMelech* learned from Shmuel *HaNavi* in a single night more than a disciple can learn from his

teacher in 100 years. [This is also cited in *Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel 24*. The *Chid"ra* writes in *Shem HaGedolim, Ma'areches Gedolim* Letter 10: "The only hindrance is sullied material; and Dovid *HaMelech a"h*, using the spiritual strength of Shmuel *HaNavi*, successfully removed all materialism, and his soul absorbed all."]

One hundred years is a tremendous amount of time, encompassing tens of thousands of nights! It is thus clear that the combined learning that Shmuel and Dovid acquired upon that night transcended the forces of nature. Indeed, there are times when a person is capable of learning something that would normally take him much longer, but it is physically impossible to condense 100 years—36,500 times the amount of hours that he learned—into a single night! The only possible explanation is that their learning contained an obviously supernatural element to it. Indeed, even if a person was able to condense 500 nights of learning into a single night, it would be a clear sign of a supernatural occurrence; and the same would be true for 200 nights, 100 nights, or even 50 nights. The only difference between these manifest miracles is the intensity of the supernatural force itself.

C. When a Jew merits experiencing a supernatural occurrence, as the one mentioned above; the greatness of the actual event is accompanied by vast spiritual lights that settle upon his *neschama*. (See *Ohr HaChaim al HaTorah, Parshas Acharei Mos* which alludes that the root is the spiritual light; and the miraculous event (i.e. ability to absorb a vast amount of Torah in a short time) is merely the outgrowth. Regardless, however, man does merit both simultaneously.

D. A Jew who acquires these intense spiritual lights derives enormous pleasure, a gratification that cannot be encapsulated in words. Notwithstanding, his motive for acquiring these lights and supernatural forces cannot be to derive enjoyment, but to endow spiritual pleasure to his Creator, a goal which, in itself, bestows absolute pleasure to man's soul. It is well-known that all the combined pleasures of the universe are as nothing compared to a fleeting moment of pleasure in the world of Truth.

### Part III

A. The first prerequisites toward acquiring supernatural powers is increasing Torah study, prayer, *mitzvah* observance, and avoiding sin.

B. Aside from enhancing one's meticulous observance of *mitzvos* that are fulfilled with action and words, albeit these are actually the weightiest as demonstrated by the severity of the punishments for sins perpetrated through activity (i.e. desecrating Shabbos); it is also vital to enhance one's service of Hashem in thought in order to acquire supernatural powers.

C. Serving Hashem in thought can be divided into two main categories:

1. Establishing set times for intense *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem and yearning for Him.
2. Connecting one's thoughts to Hashem at all hours of the day to the greatest possible extent.

D. Hence, a Jew should endeavor to avoid binding his thoughts to the material aspects of this world, even when he is obliged to engage in physical activities and needs. Rather, he should strive to direct his mind and heart with *dveikus* to Hashem and immerse his thoughts in Torah at all times.

#### **Part IV**

A. *Sefer Maggid Meisharim* is one of many sources which emphasize that *dveikus hamachshava* is the first prerequisite to acquiring supernatural powers. A heavenly angel once appeared to Rabbi Yosef Karo, *zt"l*, author of the *Beis Yosef* and *Shulchan Aruch*, and taught him Torah and the foundations of achieving levels of tremendous piety. Rabbi Yosef Karo then compiled many of these teachings into a *sefer* entitled *Maggid Meisharim*. This work has become one of the main reliable sources discussing the concept of attaining supernatural forces as it was relayed to Rabbi Yosef Karo directly by an angel, and Rabbi Yosef himself merited many miracles, including the wondrous appearance of this angel. Exploiting the vast spiritual powers that he acquired at this auspicious hour, he merited transmitting Torah to the entire nation.

B. *Maggid Meisharim, Parshas Bereishis* states: "That you shall cleave to Me only, and not as you do only occasionally. For if you only knew how many worlds you build and how many worlds you separate when you separate your thoughts, you would not separate your thoughts for even one hour. Thus, strengthen yourself to unite all your thoughts toward Me; and if you do this, you will merit that miracles will be performed through you, just as they were done by the *Tanna'im*, and the

whole world knew that there is G-D among Yisrael. And do not be swayed by the Satan and his legions who imbue thoughts in your mind to distract you from uniting your thoughts toward Hashem.”

C. *Maggid Meisharim, Parshas Vayeitze* states similarly: “That you shall cleave to Me only, for with fear of Me and with learning, you will rise and merit performing miracles with your hand, as in the days of the Talmudic Sages; and the Name of Hashem will be sanctified in the world through you, for they will know that there is G-D among Yisrael. The key to the miracles performed by the Sages is that their thoughts always cleaved to the Congregation of Yisrael, as their thoughts were constantly immersed in Torah and fear of heaven without interruption. And when she ascends to a level of *binah* (understanding), all those who cleave to her rise together with her to the level of *binah*. As their souls cleave to it, they all harbor a power to obtain all that they desire.”

D. In *Parshas Mikeitz*, he adds: “If you affix your thoughts always to me without even a moment’s interruption, then I will grant you the merit of performing miracles and wonders, as in the days of old. For, presently, the greater world does not appreciate Torah scholars, as they do not own the power of miracles and wonders as in previous eras. Indeed, the reason that they were once capable of enacting miracles and wonders is because their thoughts clung to Me, to My Torah and to fear of heaven, always; and it did not depart from Me for even a moment. And because of this, they would ascend to great heights, and they clung to the Heavenly Qualities... And I will do the same for you, if you shall only bind yourself to Me and never move from me for even a moment.”

E. In *Parshas Shmos*, he says: “Hashem is with you. Only that you shall cleave to Me with fear of Me and love of Me, and you shall not detach your thoughts for even a moment... And you will be destined to perform miracles, following the example of the Talmudic Sages, so that the generation will know that there is G-D among Yisrael. For just as you merited speaking mouth to mouth as I am speaking to you, which is something that you never dreamed nor fancied, so I will grant you the merit of performing actual miracles.”

F. The above quotes from the *Maggid Meisharim* refer to the extraordinary miracles experienced by the Sages of the *Mishnah* and *Gemara*, many of which are described in the *Gemara* and *Midrash*, specifically in *Maseches Ta’anis*. [The Steipler’s *Sefer Chayei Olam* also includes a partial list of these miracles.]

G. In his message to Rav Yosef Karo, the *Maggid Meisharim* teaches that all the supernatural miracles and wonders that human beings merit experiencing are dependent on their level of uninterrupted *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach. [See *Nefesh HaChaim Sha’ar C* regarding the above and the *dveikus* achieved by the forefathers and Moshe *Rabbeinu*, as well as the miracles that they personally and collectively merited as a nation as a result of their superlative service of Hashem.

The goal of *dveikus hamachshava* and the means of attaining it, which can impel a Jew to acquire supernatural powers, are concepts that require a great deal of in-depth study and concerted effort. Several of the previous chapters in this booklet described these concepts at length; and one who studies them carefully and endeavors to fulfill all that is written here will be able to sense as his spiritual powers acquire greater strength and vigor.

## CHAPTER 13

*GEMARA KSUBOS 111B* DEFINES THE *MITZVAH* OF *DVEIKUS* AS CLEAVING TO TORAH SCHOLARS; VERSES IN THE TORAH THAT MENTION THE *MITZVAH* OF *DVEIKUS*; THE *MESILAS YESHARIM'S* EXPLANATION OF THE *MITZVAH*; *GEMARA SOTAH 14A*; AN OVERVIEW OF *RASHI* AND THE *RISHONIM'S* OPINIONS ON THE SUBJECT.

### Part I: The Mitzvah of *Dveikus* as Elucidated by *Gemara Ksubos*

A. *Ksubos* 111b cites the renowned verse in *Parshas Va'eschanan* 4:4: "You, who cleave to Hashem your G-D, you are all alive today." The *Gemara* posits the famous question: "Is it possible to cleave to the *Shechina*? It is written, 'For Hashem your G-D is a consuming Fire.' However, one who marries his daughter off to a Torah scholar and one who does business with a Torah scholar and who allows a Torah scholar to benefit from his assets; the Torah credits him as if he cleaved to the *Shechina*."

B. The *Gemara* also quotes a verse in *Parshas Netzavim* 30:20: "To Love Hashem your G-D, to heed His Voice and to cleave to Him." *Chazal* queried, "Is it possible for a man to cleave to the *Shechina*? However, one who marries his daughter off to a Torah scholar and does business with a Torah scholar and who allows a Torah scholar to benefit from his assets; the Torah credits him as if he cleaved to the *Shechina*."

**Part II: Additional Verses in the Torah that Refer to the *Mitzvah* of *Dveikus***

A. The concept of *dveikus* is mentioned in five places in the Torah, all in *Sefer Devarim*:

1. *Parshas Va'eschanan* 4:4: "You, who cleave to Hashem your G-D, you are all alive today."

2. *Parshas Eikev* 1:20: "Hashem, your G-D, you shall fear; you shall serve Him; and to Him you shall cleave; and in His Name you shall vow."

3. *Parshas Eikev* 11:22: "For if you shall guard all this *mitzvah* that I am commanding you to do, to love Hashem your G-D, to follow in His ways, and to cleave to Him."

4. *Parshas Re'eh* 13:5: "After Hashem your G-D you shall walk; and Him you shall fear; and His *mitzvos* you shall guard; and His voice you shall heed; and Him you shall serve; and to Him you shall cleave."

5. *Parshas Nitzavim* 30:20: "To Love Hashem your G-D, to heed His Voice, and to cleave to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days, in order that you shall dwell on the land that Hashem pledged to your forefathers, to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov, to give to them."

B. The *Gemara* in *Ksubos* cites the first and the last of these five verses in its discussion of the *mitzvah* of *dveikus*. Since *Chazal* define the '*dveikus*' mentioned in these two verses as 'cleaving to Torah scholars,' it would seem logical that this applies to the other three verses as well.

C. Why did the *Gemara* specifically cite the two verses in *Parshas Va'eschanan* and *Eikev* as opposed to all or another one of those five verses? The simplest reason would be that the first and last verses encompass all five verses, and *Chazal* thereby implied that cleaving to Torah scholars is the fulfillment of all five verses.

*Rashi* on *Eikev* 11:22, "And to cleave to Him," likewise quotes the explanation in *Gemara Ksubos* above, which indicate that the definition would apply to all verses that discuss cleaving to Hashem. *Rashi*, however, does not cite the *Gemara's* explanation in his elucidation of the other verses. (See Part IV below explaining that *Rashi* apparently elucidates the verse in *Parshas Re'eh* differently.)

D. It is unclear why *Rashi* did not quote *Gemara Ksubos* in reference to *Parshas Va'eschanan* and *Parshas Nitzavim*, as cited by the *Gemara*, and instead chose to apply it to *Eikev* 11:22 which is preceded both by *Va'eschanan* and *Eikev* 1:20 in the Torah.

E. See *Yehoshua* 22:5, 23:8; *Melachim* B 18:6; and *Tehillim* 63:9, 119:31.

### Part III: Gemara Sotah 14a on Parshas Re'eh

#### A Discussion of *Dveikus* as Gleaned from *Gemaros Ksubos* and *Sotah*

A. *Gemara Sotah* 14a quotes *Parshas Re'eh* 13:5: "After Hashem your G-D you shall walk; and Him you shall fear; and His *mitzvos*

you shall guard; and His voice you shall heed; and Him you shall serve; and to Him you shall cleave.”

Rabbi Chama *ben* Chanina taught: “Is it possible for man to walk after the *Shechina*? Behold, it is written, ‘For Hashem your G-D is a consuming Fire.’ Yet, you shall follow Hashem’s Qualities. Just as he clothes the undressed, as written, ‘And Hashem made for Odom and his wife leather garments, and He dressed them;’ so you shall clothe the undressed. He visited the sick, as written, ‘And Hashem appeared to him in Eilonei Mamrei;’ so you shall visit the ill. The Holy One comforted mourners, as written, ‘And it was after Avraham passed away, and Hashem blessed Yitzchak his son;’ so you shall comfort mourners. Hashem buried the dead, as written, ‘And He buried them in the valley;’ so you shall bury the dead.”

B. The *Gemaras* in *Ksubos* 111b and *Sotah* 14a pose similar queries, yet respond differently. There is no reason to question the difference in their answers however, as their questions actually regard two different concepts. *Ksubos* 111a refers to the *mitzvah* of cleaving to Hashem, whereas *Sotah* 14a regards following in Hashem’s ways, which *Chazal* defined as emulating His superlative qualities.

C. Still, the conclusion of the verse in *Re’eh* does mention the *mitzvah* of *dveikus*, as written, “After Hashem your G-D you shall walk; and Him you shall fear; and His *mitzvos* you shall guard; and His voice you shall heed; and Him you shall serve; *and to Him you shall cleave.*” It emerges that *Chazal* should have asked the same question on two parts of a single verse. Yet, because *Chazal* already presented their answer in reference to the verses

in *Va'eschanan* and *Nitzavim*, it stands to reason that the same applies to the verse in *Re'eh*.

D. It emerges that *Re'eh* 13:5 encompasses two vital messages: The beginning of the verse is the commandment to emulate Hashem in all His qualities, and the conclusion of the verse is the commandment to cleave to Torah scholars.

#### Part IV: *Rashi's* Commentary on the Above

A. In his commentary on the Torah, *Rashi* does not elucidate the beginning of the verse in *Re'eh* 13:5 at all, whereas he does expand upon the words, "And to Him you shall cleave," as follows: "Cleave to His ways, perform acts of loving-kindness, busy the dead, visit the ill as *Hakaddosh Baruch Hu* did."

B. *Rashi* teaches that one is obliged to emulate the qualities of Hashem from the words, "And to Him you shall cleave."

C. This requires further explication, as *Gemara Sotah* 14a derives the *mitzvah* of emulating the qualities of Hashem from the beginning of the verse in *Re'eh*, "After Hashem you shall walk," whereas *Rashi* states the same in reference to the end of the verse, albeit there is no mention of this in the *Gemara*.

D. Moreover, following the basic explanation of *Gemara Ksubos* 111a, it is apt to explain the final words of the verse in *Re'eh* as an obligation to cleave to Torah scholars.

## Part V: The Mitzvah of Dveikus is Dveikus Hamachshava

A. *Mesilas Yesharim* Ch. 19 defines the *mitzvah* of *dveikus* to Hashem differently than the surface explanation of *Ksubos* 111a. He writes, “*Dveikus* is that man’s heart should so cleave to Hashem Yisborach that he will not think or consider anything other than Him.... And the Torah commanded us with the *mitzvah* of *dveikus* numerous times, ‘To love Hashem your G-D...and to cleave to Him;’ ‘And to cleave to Him;’ ‘To Him you (singular) shall cleave;’ ‘To Him you (plural) shall cleave.’ And Dovid *HaMelech* wrote, ‘My heart cleaves after You.’ The point in all these verses...is that the *dveikus* with which a person cleaves to Hashem does not allow him to separate or even move from Him.” [He cites this in reference to four verses: *Nitzavim* 30:20, *Eikev* 10:20; *Re’eh* 13:5, *Tehillim* 63:9.]

B. It would seem that the above contradicts *Chazal’s* statement in *Gemara Ksubos* 111a, which defines *dveikus* as ‘cleaving to Torah scholars.’

C. One explanation is that the Torah contains *pshat* (surface explanation), *remez* (allusion), *drash* (deeper explanation), and *sod* (secrets of the Torah)—four levels of understanding, and these are simply two different levels. *Chazal* likewise taught, “There are seventy faces to the Torah,” meaning that there are seventy ways of explaining the Torah.

D. However, the difficulty in resolving the contradiction according to the above is that it appears that the *Gemara*

negated the possibility of elucidating the verse according to its surface explanation as Hashem is a “Consuming Fire.”

E. Indeed, the word ‘*dveikus*’ can be defined in several ways, and all are correct. One possible definition would have been a physical connection, not just a connection of thought. The *Gemara* thus negates the possibility of cleaving physically to the *Shechina* and clarifies that any physical connection must refer to Torah scholars.

F. *Targum Unkelus* translates *Va’eschanan* 4:4: “And, you, who cleave to Hashem your G-D,” as “And, you who cleave with fear to Hashem your G-D.” In *Parshas Eikev*, he translates, ‘And to Him you shall cleave as “Draw close to fear of Him.” He translates, “And to cleave to Him” as “To draw near to fear.” In *Parshas Re’eh*, he translates, “And to Him, you shall cleave,” as “To the fear, you shall draw near.” In *Parshas Nitzavim*, “And to cleave to Him,” as “To draw near to the fear.” It is necessary to study this in greater depth to learn if *Unkelus’s* translation corresponds with the *Mesillas Yesharim’s* explanation, or whether it is a different perspective. (See commentaries from the *Rishonim* who discuss this issue.)

G. See the sections below that cite the *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban* in *Parshas Eikev* and the *Ramban, Sefer HaMitzvos Imperative Mitzvah 7* and the *Sforno’s* commentary on this.

H. The *Ramban’s* comments correspond to the teachings of the *Mesillas Yesharim*.

I. The reason that this section quotes the *Mesillas Yesharim* as opposed to the *Ramban* is because the *Ramban* defines *dveikus* in several ways, noting that *dveikus hamachshava* is

encompassed within the concept; whereas the *Mesillas Yesharim* defines *dveikus* in terms of *dveikus hamachashava* only.

J. However, see Chapter 14 below which cites the *Rambam* in *Sefer HaMitzvos* who abides by the explanation of *Gemara Ksubos* and defines the *mitzvah* of *dveikus* only in terms of cleaving to Torah scholars.

### Part VI : *Ramban's* Commentary on "And to cleave to Him" (*Eikev* 11:22)

A. *Parshas Eikev* 11:22 states, "For if you shall guard all this *mitzvah* that I am commanding you to do, to love Hashem your G-D, to follow in His ways, and to cleave to Him."

The *Ramban* comments, "And to cleave to Him.' Rabbi Avraham [Ibn Ezra] said, 'It is a great secret at the end.' But the secret is not from here. Perhaps he is saying, 'To love Hashem and follow in His ways until you are worthy of cleaving to Him at the end.

B. "It says in *Yehoshua* [32:7-8]: 'And in the Name of Hashem your G-D, you shall not mention, and you shall not vow, and you shall not serve and not bow down to them; but only to Hashem your G-D you shall cleave, as you have done until this day.' This is one of the warnings against idol-worship, that their thoughts should not depart from Hashem to other gods, that they shall not believe that idols have any essence, but that all is nothing and non-existent.

C. "And this is as written above, [*Parshas Re'eh* 13:5]: 'And Him you shall serve, and to Him you shall cleave.' The point is to warn them that they shall not serve both Hashem and another

god; but rather that they shall serve Hashem Alone in his heart and actions.

D. “And it is possible that *dveikus* also encompasses remembering Hashem and loving Him always, that one’s thoughts should not depart from Him ‘When you are going on your way, when you lie down and when you rise,’ until one’s physical and verbal interactions with other people are not even with them, but before Hashem. And it is possible that people who exist on this spiritual level, their lives in this world are bound in the eternity of life, for they themselves are dwelling places for the *Shechina*, as the *Kuzari* hints and as I mentioned previously regarding forbidden relationships [*Acharei Mos* 18:4]. As Yehoshua said, ‘As you’ve done until today, for when you were in the Desert and Hashem’s Cloud was upon you and the manna descended from the heavens and the quail rose and the Well was before you always, and all their actions were in the hands of the heavens with miracle,’ behold, their thoughts and actions were constantly with Hashem. Thus, Yehoshua commanded them that once they reached the Land, and these wondrous miracles would depart, they would still be obligated to cleave to the Honored, Awesome Hashem in thought, and that their focus should never leave Hashem.”

E. The *Ramban* explains the *Ibn Ezra’s* words as the soul cleaving to Hashem after death, and the essence of this concept is a deep secret. Indeed, relative to Hashem Yisroch, even the soul is a material entity, and it is thus impossible to link the soul to Hashem Yisroch. Nonetheless, there still is a type of connection that can be forged, and it is an intensely powerful

connection that surpasses any connection that can be found in this world.

F. The *Ramban* then cites Yehoshua's commandment to the nation. On the surface, it appears that this is a basic commandment to believe solely in Hashem and not other gods, and the *Ramban* connects the concept of *dveikus* here as well. The reason the *Ramban* discusses this at greater length in *Parshas Re'eh* is because *Parshas Re'eh* mentions the concept of a prophet who commands the nation to worship idols, which is an obvious prohibition; but the *Ramban* also indicates that it connects to the *mitzvah* of *dveikus* listed in *Eikev* 11:22., as well.

G. The *Ramban* defines the *mitzvah* of *dveikus* in *Eikev* 11:22 as the constant *mitzvah* of *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach, as quoted in Paragraph 4 above.

H. The *Ramban* also wrote that the *dveikus* mentioned in *Sefer Yehoshua* can also be defined as the constant *mitzvah* of *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach. It is important to note that, despite his lengthy discussion of the subject and his three explanation of the verse mentioning *dveikus*, he does not once mention *Gemara Ksubos* 111a which defines *dveikus* to Hashem as cleaving to Torah scholars. Even if this is a *drash* explanation of the verse, it is logical that he should have mentioned it and preempted his statement with the point that the *mitzvah* of "cleaving to Hashem" has yet to be defined according to a surface explanation.

I. See *Ramban Parshas Va'eschanan* 6:13 on the words, 'And in His Name you shall vow.' The *Ramban* cites the *Midrash Tanchuma* which mentions the concept of *dveikus* in its

explanation of this topic and defines *dveikus* as cleaving to Torah scholars. There, the *Ramban* does clearly note that *dveikus* could also refer to cleaving to Torah scholars.

J. See *Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos Imperative Mitzvah 7* regarding the *mitzvah*, “And to Him you shall cleave.” Chapter Nine below also cites the *Ramban* in several places regarding *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach.

K. The *Sforno* in *Parshas Eikev* 11:12 states: “And to cleave to Him—that all your actions should be directed to fulfill His Will, as written, ‘Know Him in all your ways.’” Also see *Sforno, Parshas Re’eh* 13:5.

## Part VII: Unanimous Consensus that *Dveikus Hamachshava* Is an Essential *Mitzvah*

A. In spite of any source that defines the *mitzvah* of *dveikus* according to the explanation of *Ksubos* 111b, it is clear that *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem is one of the foundations of the Torah and an essential *mitzvah*. The *Gemara* in *Ksubos* does not negate this in any way. Thus, every Jew is obligated to strive to his maximal abilities to achieve *dveikus*, and the primary means of attaining this desired level of *dveikus* is toiling in Torah and heartfelt prayer.

B. Even the *Rambam*, who in both *Sefer Hamitzvos* and *Hilchos De’os* clearly defines the *mitzvah* of *dveikus* as the obligation to cleave to Torah scholars (see below in Chapter 14), emphasized at length in *Moreh Nevuchim* Vol. 3 Ch. 51-2 that *dveikus* to Hashem is one of the fundamentals of the Torah and our religion.

C. The *Rambam* himself stated that it is not recommended for everyone to study certain sections *Moreh Nevuchim*. Still, all the Rabbinical authorities quoted by the *Rama* in *Orach Chaim* Ch. 1:1 concur with the above point; and the *Rama* even copied the foremost words of the *Rambam*, “I place Hashem before me, always. This is an essential rule in the spiritual levels of the righteous.”

D. However, whereas the *Rambam* wrote in *Moreh Nevuchim* that *dveikus* “Is the ultimate purpose of the *mitzvos*,” there are many other authorities who disagreed. The *Kisvei Ar”i* discusses this issue at length, explaining that every *mitzvah* effects vast *tikkunim* in the Upper Worlds; and many other sources describe the motive of the *mitzvos*. Notwithstanding, the *Rambam’s* underlying message is that *dveikus* is an essential, paramount aspect in Judaism and a very fundament of the Torah; and there is no one who argues this point.

E. *Bi’ur HaGr”a* in the *Shulchan Aruch* 1:1 comments on the *Rama’s* quote of the *Rambam*, “I place Hashem before me always; this is an essential rule in the spiritual levels of the righteous.” The Vilna Gaon adds that the act of “Placing Hashem before me always,”—*dveikus* is essentially the lofty spiritual level of the righteous. He cites several verses in order to prove his point. [See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 1:1 *Bi’ur HaGr”a* regarding ‘*Kedoshim*—holy people,’ whom the *Gr”a* defines as “Who stand constantly before Hashem.” Similarly, in his *Sefer Toras HaKabbalah*, the *Gr”a* also vividly describes the importance of *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach.

F. Chapter Nine above cites the *Ramban's* writings regarding the magnitude of *dveikus*.

G. *Nefesh HaChaim Sha'ar C* writes lengthily of the unparalleled significance of *dveikus*. "This was the service of the holy forefathers throughout the days of their lives." He also adds that this is what *Chazal* intended when they stated: "Reish Lakish said, 'The forefathers were the chariot, and so was the service of Moshe *Rabbeinu*' (*Bereishis Rabba Parsha 47*, as quoted by *Rashi* in *Bereishis 11:22*). The *Nefesh HaChaim* expands upon this subject, distinguishing between the *dveikus* exhibited in the *Avos's* service of Hashem and Moshe *Rabbeinu's* service of Hashem.

## Addendum

A. Later, I saw that is cited in *Sefer Da'as Noteh* Vol. A in the *Biu'rim* that the *Sefer HaChareidim* Ch. 9 Letter 10 quotes the *Ramban al HaTorah* in *Devarim 11:22*.

B. The beginning of the *Chayei Odom* states that this *mitzvah* of *dveikus* refers to *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach.

C. The *Pnei Yehoshua, Ksubos 111b* cites the *Gemara's* query, "How can one cleave to Hashem?" and its reply, which is "Cleave to Torah scholars." He explains that the reason for this is that the verse must be applicable to every Jew, and not every individual is capable of achieving *dveikus hamachshava*.

D. The *Haflo'ah* on *Ksubos 96a* also writes similarly. [The above is all cited in *Sefer Da'as Noteh* p. 19.]

E. If the fulfillment of *dveikus* is to cleave to Torah scholars, how do the scholars fulfill this *mitzvah*?

F. The *Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim* Vol. 3 Ch. 51-2 cited above explains that the *seichel* (intellect) is that which binds the Creator to His creations. [This is also stated in *Chazon Ish, Kilayim* Ch. 1:1 and *Yoreh De'ah* 150:8 and in the *Ibn Ezra*.] The *Rambam* adds that the amount of this connection depends largely on the amount of time and extent to which the *seichel* is occupied with thoughts of Hashem and His Torah. (See there for complete essay.)

## CHAPTER 14

THE *RAMBAM* IN *SEFER HAMITZVOS* AND *HALACHOS* WHICH DEFINES THE *MITZVAH* OF *DVEIKUS* ACCORDING TO *GEMARA KSUBOS* AS CLEAVING TO TORAH SCHOLARS; HIS DISCUSSION OF THE *MITZVAH*, 'AND YOU SHALL FOLLOW IN HIS WAYS' AND OTHER EXPLANATIONS OF *GEMARA KSUBOS*; CLEAVING IN THOUGHT TO HASHEM AND DESIRING A SOUL-CONNECTION WITH HIM IS AN IMPERATIVE TORAH-BASED COMMANDMENT ENCOMPASSED IN THE *MITZVAH* OF LOVING HASHEM.

**Part I: The Rambam's in Sefer HaMitzvos, Imperative Mitzvah 6 and other sources regarding the mitzvah of dveikus which state that the elucidation of this mitzvah as presented by Gemara Ksubos 111—cleaving to Torah scholars--constitutes its basic definition**

A. The Rambam inscribes in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Imperative *Mitzvah* 6, 'And you shall cleave to Him': "The sixth *mitzvah* is that He commanded us to connect to the sages and to unite with them and to spend time in their presence in every means of serving Hashem. And one should remain in their company while eating and drinking and all engagements so we will strive to emulate their ways and believe the truth of their words. This is what Hashem said, 'And you shall cleave to Him.' And this commandment was doubled with the later commandment, 'And

to cleave to Him.’ It states in the *Sifri*, ‘And to cleave to him—Cleave to the sages and their disciples.’ They present proof of this through man’s obligation to marry the daughter of a scholar and to feed Torah scholars and support them in business. These are [all fulfillments of] ‘And you shall cleave.’ [The Sages query,] ‘Is it possible for man to cleave to the *Shechina*? Behold, it is written, “For Hashem your G-D is a consuming fire.” Indeed, one who marries his daughter to a Torah scholar or marries the daughter of a Torah scholar and grants the scholar pleasure from his assets, the Torah credits him as if he cleaved to the *Shechina*.”

B. The Rambam writes further in *Hilchos De’os* Ch. 6:2: “It is an imperative *mitzvah* to cleave to scholars and their disciples, in order to learn from their actions as written, “And you shall cleave to Him.’ [The Sages query,] ‘Is it possible for man to cleave to the *Shechina*?’” The Sages taught in the clarification of this *mitzvah*, “Cleave to the sages and their disciples.” Thus, man is obligated to endeavor to marry the daughter of a Torah scholar and marry his daughter off to a Torah scholar and to provide food and drink to scholars and to support a scholar’s business and to join in their company in every possible way, as written, ‘And you shall cleave to Him.’ And the sages also instructed, ‘And you shall become dusty with the dust of their feet and drink their words thirstily.’”

C. The Rambam also writes in his list of *mitzvos* in *Hilchos De’os*, “And you shall cleave to those who know Him.”

D. The Rambam likewise inscribes in his General List of *Mitzvos* in the beginning of *Yad HaChazakah*, Imperative *Mitzvah* 6: “To

cleave to Him,' as written, 'And to Him, you shall cleave.'" Here, the Rambam did not elaborate as he did elsewhere in the sources listed above. However, it is clear that this is what he gleaned from the text, and he wrote this in brief while basing his writings on his lengthier explanation in *Hilchos De'os*, *Sefer HaMitzvos* and the List of *Mitzvos* commencing *Hilchos De'os*. In this case, however, he simply wrote, 'Cleave to those who know Him,' as he apparently wished to expand as per the actual text in the verse.

E. Hence, it is clear that the Rambam regards the words of *Gemara Ksubos* 111b as the basic definition of the *mitzvah*, and not as the deeper one. As such, he counts the above rules pertaining to remaining in the company of a Torah scholar as actual *Halacha* and the fulfillment of the *mitzvos d'oraysa* "And to Him you shall cleave" and "To cleave to Him." He did not include other *Halachos* as the fulfillment of these verses.

## Part II: Some Commentaries Include *Dveikus HaMachshava* within the *Mitzvah* 'And To Cleave To Him;

### The Rambam Cites These as Imperative *Mitzvos* Based on the *Mitzvah* of Loving Hashem

A. As stated above in Part I, the Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Imperative *Mitzvah* 6 and *Hilchos De'os* defines the *mitzvah*, 'And to Him you shall cleave,' as the commandment to cleave to Torah scholars, as per *Gemara Ksubos* 111b. The Rambam does not mention the concept of *dveikus hamachshava* in regard to

the *mitzvah* of cleaving to Hashem, albeit other sages do state that the *mitzvah* to cleave to Hashem encompasses *dveikus hamachshava* as well.

B. Although he does not include *dveikus* in cleaving to Hashem, the Rambam does use very compelling language when stating that the *mitzvah* ‘To love Hashem’ encompasses *dveikus hamachshava*.

C. The Rambam inscribes in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* Ch. 2:1: “It is a *mitzvah* to love and fear our Exalted G-D, as written, ‘And you shall love Hashem your G-D,’ and it is said, ‘And Hashem, your G-D, you shall fear.’” In *Halacha 2*, he wrote in regard to loving Hashem: “Immediately, he loves and praises and exalts and yearns with a powerful yearning to know the Great Hashem, as Dovid said, ‘My soul thirsts for G-D, for a living G-D.’”

D. The essence of the Rambam’s words regarding the details of the *mitzvah* to love Hashem is inscribed in *Hilchos Teshuva* Ch. 10: “One who serves Hashem with love, engages in Torah and *mitzvos* and walks along the path of wisdom not because of anything in the world, not because he fears evil and not because he wishes to be rewarded, but acts for the sake of truth because it is truth and the good will emerge regardless. This level is an extremely lofty level, and not every scholar merits attaining it. It is the attribute of Avraham *Avinu*, whom Hashem called, ‘My beloved,’ as he served Hashem totally with love. And this is the level that Hashem commanded us through Moshe *Rabbeinu* to attain, as written, “And you shall love Hashem your G-D with all your heart, and all your soul and all your means.’ When man

loves Hashem with this ideal level of love, then he will automatically fulfill all the *mitzvos* with love.

E. “And what is the ideal love with which man must love Hashem totally? With a great, powerful love, to the extent that his soul is bound in the love of Hashem, and his soul flourishes with it... When he sits and when he rises; when he eats and when he drinks, love of Hashem should flourish in his heart, as commanded, ‘With all your soul, and all your soul and all your means.’ (It is unclear why the Rambam wrote this here instead of in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, where he described the essence of the *mitzvah*.)

F. He adds in *Halacha* 6: “It is clearly known that love of Hashem does not bind itself to the heart of man until he flourishes in it always and abandons everything in the world except for [the love], as He commanded and said, ‘With all your heart and all your soul.’”

G. The Rambam writes In *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Imperative *Mitzvah* 3: “The commandment ‘To love Him’ is that we must reflect upon and become wise in his *mitzvos* and actions until we can grasp His wisdom. And we will revel in this attainment that is the greatest pleasure; and this is the required love.”

The meaning of the Rambam’s words is that this love of Hashem—this ultimate connection of man’s soul to Hashem—is the pinnacle pleasure that can be achieved in the world. The Rambam concludes that this is the level of love that man is obligated to attain.

H. From where did the Rambam learn that the ultimate pleasure of man is an imperative *mitzvah*?

The Torah states, “And you shall love Hashem your G-D with all your heart and all your soul and all your means.” The ninth chapter in *Gemara Brachos* defines ‘*With all your heart*—with your two inclinations; *with all your soul*—even if He takes your soul; *with all your means*—with every measurement that they measure for you, you should thank Him very much.’ This elucidation is certainly a deeper explanation of the text, as *Gemara Pesachim* 24 and *Sanhedrin* 74 teach that one is obligated to sacrifice one’s life rather than transgress the cardinal sin of idol worship.

Still, the Rambam’s writings adhere to the rule that a verse can always be defined according to its simple explanation; and thus these phrases of ‘with all your heart and all your soul and all your means’ must indicate a complete and absolute love of Hashem. Thus, the Rambam asserts that in order to fulfill these three conditions of the *mitzvah* of loving Hashem, a Jew is actually *obligated* to achieve that unadulterated connection to Hashem and the pleasure that accompanies it.

I. The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Teshuva* that the definition of the verse “And you shall love Hashem your G-D with all your heart and all your soul and all your means,” obligates a Jew to focus on this *mitzvah* constantly, that his mind must not stray from it during any hour of the day or night, to the extent that this *mitzvah* encompasses his very being. This, he writes, is the *ideal* fulfillment of the ‘love’ that man is expected to achieve.

In *Sefer HaMitzvos*, however, the Rambam defines loving Hashem as 'It is the epitome of pleasure...this is the *required* love.' Perhaps specifically because love of Hashem is the greatest pleasure that man can possibly attain, the Rambam asserted that man is obligated to achieve it. In contrast, he did not state similarly in reference to the lofty spiritual levels that he mentions in *Hilchos Teshuva*, which he notes that "not even all Torah scholar merit."

J. Despite the discrepancy in the texts, it is not certain that the above should be derived from the words of the Rambam, since both are gleaned from the same verse, 'With all your heart and all your soul and all your means.' (See *Rambam Hilchos Teshuva* Ch. 10:6)

K. Furthermore, since the *Sefer HaMitzvos* that we have today is actually a translation of the Rambam's original text in Arabic, it is also possible that the actual translation would have been 'the ideal love.'

L. See the end of Chapter 13 above regarding the Rambam in *Sefer Moreh Nevuchim* regarding the significance of *dveikus* to Hashem.

### Part III: Details of the Imperative *Mitzvah* of Cleaving to Torah Scholars

A. There is an interesting discussion regarding the imperative Torah commandment of *dveikus* to Torah scholars, as explained above according to the Rambam. If this is an actual commandment, how do scholars themselves fulfill this *mitzvah*?

B. One possible answer is that every Torah scholar is obligated to cleave to one who is greater than he. The Rambam's wording is, "It is a *mitzvah* to cleave to the Torah scholars and their disciples." Laypeople learn from the sages by cleaving to them; a student learns and grows in service of Hashem when he cleaves to his teacher.

C. So how do the venerable Torah sages and leaders of the nation fulfill this imperative *mitzvah*? Perhaps the answer is just as the simple person's fulfillment of the *mitzvah* is to cleave to a Torah sage in order to learn from his righteous ways and follow them, so too the Torah scholar's fulfillment of the *mitzvah* is to strive to act as a spiritual model for others.

One could argue this point, as the *Gemara* does stipulate, 'cleave to Torah scholars,' as opposed to 'follow in the ways of serving Hashem.' Yet, perhaps as the Torah scholar fulfills both the source and purpose of the *mitzvah*, it is considered as if he fulfilled the *mitzvah* itself.

D. Still, the Rambam did present many specifications of this *mitzvah*, both in *Sefer HaMitzvos* and *Hilchos De'os*, and he did not note that the *mitzvah* encompasses following in the ways of Hashem and serving Hashem. Only when he wrote, 'cleave to Torah scholars' did he expand, 'as he learns from them, he fulfills this *mitzvah*.' It thus emerges that he can only fulfill the *mitzvah* as such.

**Part IV: Cited from the Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos* Regarding**

**The Imperative Commandment ‘*V’halachta B’drachav*—And You Shall Follow In His Ways’**

**& ‘*Acharei Hashem Telchu*—After Hashem You Shall Go’**

**& Gemara Sotah 14**

A. The Rambam writes in *Sefer HaMitzvos* Imperative *Mitzvah* 8: “It is that He commanded us to emulate Him according to the best of our abilities, and this is as it says, ‘And you shall follow in His ways.’ This commandment was doubled, as written ‘To follow in all His ways.’ And it is explained, ‘Just as Hashem is called Merciful, also you shall be merciful. Just as Hashem is called Compassionate; also you shall be compassionate. Just as Hashem is called Righteous; so you shall be righteous’ [*Sotah* 14]. This concept is repeated twice, as written ‘After Hashem you shall go.’ The explanation is that you shall emulate His benevolent actions and the honorable qualities and parables used to describe Hashem.”

B. The Rambam also writes in *Hilchos De’os* Ch. 1 *Halacha* 5-6: “And we are commanded to traverse the middle path, which are the good, straight paths, as written, ‘And you shall follow in His ways.’ *Chazal* explained, ‘Just as Hashem is called Merciful, so you shall be merciful. Just as Hashem is called Compassionate; so you shall be compassionate. Just as Hashem is called Holy; so you shall be holy.’ The Prophets employed these terms to

describe Hashem, ‘Slow to Anger, Master of Great Kindnesses, Righteous, Straight, Pure, Valiant, Strong,’ etc. in order to teach that these are the positive, straight paths, and that man is obligated to direct himself along these paths and emulate Hashem to the best of his abilities.” (The above does not mean that one should not strive to serve Hashem beyond the middle path. Indeed, the Rambam wrote in *Halacha* 5 that ‘The way of the pious is to go beyond the middle road; and this is called *lifnim mi’shuras hadin*—going beyond the letter of the law. His emphasis on the middle road is to prevent one from falling to the improper path.]

C. The Rambam inscribed in the General List of the *Mitzvos* that commences the *Yad HaChazakah*: “The eighth *mitzvah* is to emulate His benevolent, straight Ways, as written, ‘And you shall follow in His ways.’”

D. In his List of *Mitzvos* commencing *Hilchos De’os*, the Rambam likewise asserts that the first imperative *mitzvah* is to “Emulate His ways.”

E. Note the difference in the Rambam’s texts in *Hilchos De’os* and *Sefer HaMitzvos*: “Just as He is called Holy; so you shall be holy” and in *Sotah* 14a. Indeed, all these qualities pertain to behavior between man and his fellow man.

**Part V: *Gemara Ksubos* & the Rambam**

**Regarding Spending Time in the Company of and Benefiting a Torah Scholar**

***Sanhedrin* 52 Regarding the Concern that the Above Degrades the Status of a Torah Scholar in the Eyes of the Layman**

A. *Ksubos* 111b quotes the verse from *Parshas Va'eschanan* 4:4, "And you, who cleave to Hashem your G-D, you have life always." The *Gemara* asks, "Is it possible to cleave to the *Shechina*, as written, 'For Hashem, your G-D, is a consuming Fire.' Hence, one who marries off his daughter to a Torah scholar; does business with Torah scholars; and grants pleasure to Torah scholars from his assets; it is considered as if he cleaves to the *Shechina*."

B. The *Gemara* also cites *Parshas Nitzavim* 30:20, "To love Hashem your G-D and to listen to His Voice and to cleave to Him." *Chazal* ask here as well, "Is it possible for man to cleave to the *Shechina*? Hence, one who marries off his daughter to a Torah scholar; does business with Torah scholars; and grants pleasure to Torah scholars from his assets; it is considered as if he cleaves to the *Shechina*."

F. Part I above cites the Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Imperative *Mitzvah* 6—"The sixth *mitzvah* is that He commanded us to connect to the sages and to unite with them and to spend time in their presence in every means of serving Hashem. And one should remain in their company while eating and drinking and all engagements so we will strive to emulate

their ways and believe the truth of their words. This is what Hashem said, 'And you shall cleave to Him.' And this commandment was doubled with the later commandment, 'And to cleave to Him.' It states in the *Sifri*, 'And to cleave to him—Cleave to the sages and their disciples.' They present proof of this through a man's obligation to marry the daughter of a scholar and to feed Torah scholars and support them in business. These are [all fulfillments of] 'And you shall cleave.' Indeed, [the Sages] query, 'Is it possible for man to cleave to the *Shechina*? Behold, it is written, "For Hashem your G-D is a consuming fire." Indeed, one who marries his daughter to a Torah scholar or marries the daughter of a Torah scholar and grants the scholar pleasure from his assets, the Torah credits him as if he cleaved to the *Shechina*.'"

G. The Rambam writes further in *Hilchos De'os* Ch. 6:2: "It is an imperative *mitzvah* to cleave to scholars and their disciples, in order to learn from their actions as written, "And you shall cleave to Him.' [The Sages ask,] 'Is it possible for man to cleave to the *Shechina*?' " Rather, the Sages taught in the clarification of this *mitzvah*, "Cleave to the sages and their disciples." Thus, man is obligated to endeavor to marry the daughter of a Torah scholar and marry his daughter off to a Torah scholar and to provide food and drink to scholars and to support a scholar's business and to join in their company in every possible way, as written, 'And you shall cleave to Him.' And the sages also instructed, 'And you shall become dusty with the dust of their feet and drink their words thirstily.'"

C. *Sanhedrin* 52a states: "Rabbi Elazar said: How does a Torah scholar appear to the layman? At first as a golden vessel. Once

[the scholar] speaks to him, he appears as a silver vessel. Once [the scholar] benefits from him, he appears as an earthenware vessel, which if it breaks, is impossible to fix.”

D. According to the above, it would seem that by man fulfilling the *mitzvah* of granting the scholar pleasure from his assets and spending too much time in his company, his appreciation of the spiritual status of the Torah scholar plummets until it is no more valuable than an earthenware jug, as illustrated by the *Gemara* and Rambam.

E. It is implausible to claim that there is a dispute here. Indeed, the *Gemara* states the rules of cleaving to Torah scholars twice without attributing them to any particular sage, thus indicating that this is the unanimous opinion and certain *Halacha*. (*Gemara Ksubos* does explain that the speaker was Rav Elazar, student of Rav Yochanan; and in *Sanhedrin*, when it states that the speaker was Rav Eliezer, the *Mesores HaShas* notes that it should really say Rav Elazar, disciple of Rav Yochanan.)

F. It would seem that there are potential positive and negative outcomes to remaining in the constant presence of Torah scholars; yet it is unclear whether this debate be resolved as such. Indeed, the Rambam clarifies that the primary purpose of remaining in the company of Torah scholars is to learn from their ways. Yet, if man's respect for the scholar wanes through constant time in his proximity, how can one expect to learn from the scholars?

One explanation is that the positive outcome simply outweighs the negative, as a layman has so much to learn from

the Torah scholar that he will inevitably benefit from the time spent in his presence.

G. However, the above seems to disagree with *Gemara Ksubos* 111b, which describes a Torah scholar who benefits from material items as an earthenware jug. Thus, based on the Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos* and *Hilchos De'os*, it appears that it is still ultimately to man's benefit to grant the scholar pleasure from his belongings, eat and drink with him and spend the maximal time in his company.

H. The Rambam's apparent disagreement with the *Gemara* can perhaps be resolved if one defines the Rambam's statement as referring to a regular person who is not necessarily a Torah scholar, but is not a total layman either. Indeed, the *Gemara's* statement only regarded a complete ignoramus; yet the author did not delve into this point conclusively, and it is questionable whether one should resolve this matter as such.

*Ksubos* 111b states: "Rabbi Elazar said, 'Ignoramuses are not revived during the Resurrection of the Dead.' And Rabbi Yochanan answers, 'Hashem does not want people to speak as such.' When Rav Elazar saw that Rav Yochanan was displeased, he said, 'Rebbi, I found a rectification for them; they should fulfill the *mitzvah*, 'And, you, who grasp...'" This is how the *Gemara* develops this concept of 'And you who cleave.' This emphasizes that the Torah is certainly referring to the layman. However, it is possible to still say that there are two types of ignoramuses—those who detest Torah scholars, as stated in *Pesachim* 49b and those who admire and connect to Torah scholars; but this is suspect.

I. One could also say that the statement in *Sanhedrin* 52b is not necessarily a rule; however, one must be cautious to avoid degrading the Torah and its scholars. The *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin* instructs a Jew to fulfill the *mitzvah* in a way that is not degrading to Torah; however, if one is unable to be cautious, one should avoid it totally. *Gemara Ksubos*, in contrast, refers to a person who is able to exert caution in the fulfillment of this *mitzvah*.

CHAPTER 15

LIST OF THE MIRACLES ENACTED BY ELIJAHU AND  
ELISHA.

Preface

One of the most effective means of acquiring supernatural powers is to study the sections of the Torah that relate of past miracles and wonders and learn about the saintly people in the Torah who owned these abilities. The mere act of studying these topics inevitably endows a person with intense spiritual bounty and a holy spark from the souls of these lofty individuals, or at least a radiance from their souls, which are invaluable tools to achieving these powers.

This concept is discussed at length in the Torah regarding our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and Moshe; and we have already presented this in the *Ibn Ezra's* commentary on *Parshas Va'era*, where he wrote that the principal secret of Torah study is attaining supernatural powers. (See *Sefer Chayei Olam, Kehillos Yaakov* Vol. 1 regarding the list of miracles recorded in the Torah.)

This chapter will list the miracles and wonders performed in *Sefer Melachim* by Eliyahu *HaNavi* and Elisha *HaNavi*, who are celebrated amongst the prophets as having acquired the loftiest spiritual levels and ability to perform miracles that transcended all forces of nature.

## Part I

A. *Melachim* B 5:1 relates: “And Na’aman, army general of the King of Aram, etc.” This chapter details the wondrous miracle enacted by Elisha *HaNavi* in healing Na’aman of leprosy by immersing seven times in the Jordan River.

*Rashi* expounds upon this verse as follows: “*And Na’aman, army general*; [these are] the miracles performed by Elisha...”

B. *Rashi’s* commentary seems to indicate that the miraculous tales related in *Melachim* B—beginning with Eliyahu’s ascent to the heavens in a tempest in Ch. 2 and concluding with the demise of Elisha *HaNavi* in Ch. 13:20—were recorded in order to teach of the many miracles that Elisha merited performing.

Since is it important to understand the extent of these miracles, the author has presented them in a list format. (*Sefer Shoftim* emphasizes the importance of appreciating miracles through its juxtaposition of the demise of the Elders, who merited witnessing the wondrous miracles enacted during the Exodus, and following statement that *Bnei Yisrael* began to sin. *Kiddushin* 33a also relates: “Rabbi Yochanan would stand before the elders of the gentiles as he said, ‘How many miracles they have endured!’”

C. *Melachim* A 19:16 first mentions the prophet Elisha *ben Shafat* when Hashem commanded Eliyahu to anoint him as a prophet in his stead. Chapter 19:20-21 portrays the forging of a teacher-disciple relationship between Eliyahu and Elisha; and

*Melachim B 2:1-12* describes Elisha escorting Eliyahu to the place where he ascended to the heavens.

D. This chapter will also cite the list of miracles that happened to Eliyahu *HaNavi*. With the exception of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, there were no prophets in all of Tanach who experienced more miracles than Eliyahu and Elisha.

Paragraph C above indicates that Elisha's powers were drawn from his mentor, Eliyahu *HaNavi*, and, thus, from Moshe *Rabbeinu* as well, with the majority of these powers derived from Moshe *Rabbeinu* (see *Melachim B Ch. 2, Rashí*). Indeed, from the day that Eliyahu *HaNavi* ascended to the heavens, *ruach hakodesh* was diminished in the world; whereas during his lifetime, his vast spiritual powers inspired a prevalence of prophecy in the world, even amongst other prophets.

E. The above praise refers only to the number of miracles enacted by Eliyahu and Elisha; however, it is impossible to quantify the quality of a miracle. For example, Yehoshua bin Nun halted the sun and moon; and the verses describing this historic event contain tremendous lessons. *Rashi* adds that the miracle was so extraordinary that Yehoshua's burial site was stamped with the image of the sun in order to commemorate the event.

F. The importance of acknowledging and learning about miracles is exceedingly important, as indicated in *Sefer Yehoshua* and *Shoftim* which relate that *Bnei Yisrael* continued serving Hashem faithfully as long as the Elders who witnessed the miracles of the Exodus were still alive. However, when the

last of the Elders restored his soul to his Maker, the nation ceased serving only Hashem and turned to sin.

G. The *Ramban* notes at length that Moshe *Rabbeinu* possessed a gift of miracles that surpassed both Eliyahu's and Elisha's (see *Parshas Zos HaBracha* 34:11, *Ramban*). This is obvious as the capacity for miracles that Eliyahu and Elisha possessed was drawn from the bounty of Torah by Moshe *Rabbeinu*.

## Part II: List of Miracles Enacted by Eliyahu HaNavi As Described in *Melachim A* Ch. 17 – *Melachim B* Ch. 2

- A. *Melachim A* 17:1: Elisha stops the rain from falling.
- B. *Melachim A* 17:4, 17:6: Eliyahu is sustained by the ravens.
- C. *Melachim A* 17:14: The contents of the widow's flour pitcher and oil flask never diminishes.
- D. *Melachim A* 17:19: The widow's son is resurrected from the dead.
- E. *Melachim A* 18:34-35, *ibid Rashí*: The water swells during the debate between Eliyahu and the Prophets of the Ba'al on Mount Carmel. (*Chazal* relate of additional miracles that occurred during this episode, including the cow speaking to Eliyahu and the cow's refusal to budge until Eliyahu spoke to it. Also see *Yalkut Shimoni* regarding the snake that killed Chiel Beis Ha'Eli, who hid beneath the altar of the Ba'al.)

- F. *Melachim A* Ch. 18:35: The fire descends from the heavens (and consumes the water).
- G. *Melachim A* Ch. 18:1: Eliyahu's certainty that it would begin raining and the fulfillment of his knowledge.
- H. *Melachim A* Ch. 18:41: Torrents of rain pelt from the heavens immediately after Eliyahu begins praying.
- I. *Melachim A* Ch. 19:5-9: The story of the angel with the broiled cake and water flask. (It is likely that several other miracles occurred simultaneously.)
- J. *Melachim A* Ch. 19:5: The above sustains him throughout a forty-day and night trek without food or water.
- K. *Melachim A* 19:9-18: The revelation and future prophecies on Mount Chorev, both in and out of the cave.
- L. *Melachim A* Ch. 21:19: Eliyahu's knowledge of Achav and Izevel's clandestine activities regarding Navos HaYizraeli.
- M. *Melachim A* Ch. 2:19; *Melachim B* Ch. 9-10: The future prophecies that Eliyahu prophesies to Achav and his family and the fulfillment of these prophecies.
- N. *Melachim B* 1:6, 16, 17: The prophecy of Achaziyahu son of King Achav and its fulfillment. (It is likely that his knowledge that they went to serve idols was also drawn from his prophetic abilities.)
- O. *Melachim B* Ch. 2:6, 12: The heavenly fire that destroys both officers and their fifty soldiers.
- P. *Melachim B* Ch. 2:8: Crossing the Jordan River.

Q. *Melachim* B 2:11: Eliyahu's ascent to the heavens and the miracle of the fiery horses and chariot.

R. *Melachim* B Ch. 2:14: Elisha's miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. This miracle occurred with Eliyahu *HaNavi's* cloak, which is perhaps reason to include it under the category of miracles enacted by Eliyahu *HaNavi*. (In any case, all miracles performed by Elisha derived from the powers that he received from Eliyahu when their relationship was first forged in *Melachim* A Ch. 19 when Eliyahu was commanded to anoint Elisha as a prophet in his stead. The supernatural strengths that he received from Eliyahu at the time of his ascent to the heavens resulted from his request, 'May a double portion of your spirit be upon me.'")

### Part III: List of Miracles Enacted by Elisha

A. *Melachim* B Ch. 2:3,5: Elisha's knowledge that Eliyahu is destined to leave him.

B. *Melachim* B Ch. 2:12: Elisha's vision of Eliyahu ascending to the heavens in a tempest. *Chazal* debate whether this was actually a miracle, or if anyone present at the time would have witnessed the astounding event. However, Ch. 6:17 relates that Elisha's servant-boy could not have witnessed the scene of the fiery chariot and horses without Elisha's prayers.

The *Malbim* expounds that the vision was an actual miracle, an instance of *yesh me'ayin* (creating something from nothing), as it is the only recorded instance in history that a person who was not a prophet witnessed such an event. Hence, it would

seem that Elisha's witnessing of the event was also a miracle. However, it is possible that the fiery horses and chariot that carried Eliyahu to the heavens were concrete enough to be manifest to the naked eye.

C. *Melachim* B Ch. 2:14: The splitting of the Jordan River with Eliyahu's cloak.

D. *Melachim* B Ch. 2:18-22: The healing of the evil waters of Jericho with salt.

E. *Melachim* B Ch. 2:23-25: The story of the two bears and forty-two boys.

F. *Melachim* B Ch. 3: 16, 20: The rising of the river with neither wind nor rain to quench the thirst of the masses.

G. *Melachim* B Ch. 18, 22: The victory against Moav and the prophecy.

H. *Melachim* B Ch. 4: Ovadya's wife receives extra oil.

I. *Melachim* B Ch. 4:15: The Shunamis is blessed with a son.

J. *Melachim* B CH. 4:33-34: The revival of the Shunamis's son.

K. *Melachim* B Ch. 4:38-41: Repairing the broken fields by placing flour in a pot.

L. *Melachim* B Ch. 4:42: Many people were sustained from a small quantity of bread.

M. *Melachim* B Ch. 5:10: Healing Na'aman from leprosy by immersing seven times in the Jordan River.

N. *Melachim* B Ch. 5:26: His knowledge of Geichazi's activities.

- O. *Melachim* B Ch. Ch. 5: 27: The transfer of Na'aman's leprosy to Geichazi.
- P. *Melachim* B Ch. 6:6: Raising the metal from the water by throwing a tree atop it.
- Q. *Melachim* B Ch. 6:8: His warning to the king of Yisrael regarding the Aram ambush.
- R. *Melachim* B Ch. 6:17: Opening the eyes of the servant-boy to allow him to witness the scene of the fiery horses and chariot.
- S. *Melachim* B Ch. 6:18: Blinding the army of Aram, taking them into captivity and opening their eyes.
- T. *Melachim* B Ch. 6:32-33: His knowledge of the King of Yisrael's intention to slay him.
- U. *Melachim* B Ch. 7:1: Elisha prophesying the end of the hunger in the Shomron, and its fulfillment. (The actual conclusion of the hunger also itself a miracle, see *Melachim* B 7:6-7: "And Hashem sounded in the camp of Aram the voice of a chariot; the voice of a horse; a giant army. And they said... and they fled." It is questionable whether this miracle can be attributed to Elisha or whether it would have occurred without him as well. In this case, the miracle was Elisha's certain knowledge of a miraculous future.)
- V. *Melachim* B Ch. 8:1: Forewarning the Shunamis of the imminent hunger.
- W. Several other prophecies regarding the future. (See *Melachim* B Ch. 8:7 and onward regarding the King of Aram; Ch. 13:14 and onward.)

X. *Melachim B* Ch. 13:20-21: Reviving the corpse who touched Elisha after his death.

#### Part IV: Eliyahu *HaNavi's* Letter to Yehoram *ben* Yehoshafat in *Divrei HaYamim*

#### Commentaries State That It Arrived After His Ascent to the Heavens

A. *Divrei HaYamim* Ch. 2:12-15 describes an incident that occurred in the era of Yehoram *ben* Yeshoshfat, King of Yehuda: “And a letter arrived for him from Eliyahu *HaNavi* saying, ‘So said Hashem, G-D of your father Dovid...’” (see *ibid*).

B. *Rashi* comments, “*And a letter arrived for him from Eliyahu HaNavi.*’ This letter of prophecy arrived after [Eliyahu] ascended to the heavens.” Commentaries including the *Metzudas Dovid* and Malbim concur, indicating that this event was a miracle.

C. How is it known that the letter arrived after Eliyahu’s ascent to the heavens?

*Melachim B* 3:11 relates that when they sought a prophet in the times of King Yehoshafat (Yehoram’s father), Elisha *HaNavi* appeared. This indicates that both Yehoshafat and Yehoram must have lived in the period after Eliyahu’s ascent to the heavens, since they would have certainly brought Eliyahu—the teacher—as opposed to Elisha, his disciple, had Eliyahu still been in the world. Moreover, the story of Eliyahu’s ascent to the heavens was recorded several chapters earlier in *Sefer Melachim*.

D. Although the above does seem to indicate that Eliyahu was no longer present during the era of Yehoram, not all commentaries concur. Eliyahu's ascent to the heavens ostensibly transpired during the reign of Yoram *ben* Achav, King of Yisrael, who ruled after the death of his brother Achaziyahu *ben* Achav whose death was prophesied by Eliyahu in *Melachim* B Ch. 1. (See *Melachim* B Ch. 1-3, which seems to indicate that Eliyahu ascended to the heavens during Yoram's reign.)

E. The verses seem to indicate that the entire reign of Yehoram *ben* Yehoshafat, King of Yehuda, transpired during the reign of Yoram *ben* Achav, King of Yisrael (see *Melachim* B Ch. 8:16 describing the reign of Yehoram *ben* Yehoshafat, King of Yehuda, simultaneous to Yoram *ben* Achav, King of Yisrael.

F. *Melachim* B Ch. 8:25 likewise relates that the start of Achaziyahu *ben* Yehoram, King of Yehuda's reign also transpired in the times of Yoram *ben* Achav, King of Yisrael. If this is the case, then certainly the entire reign of Yehoram *ben* Yehoshafat occurred during the reign of Yoram *ben* Achav. Hence, as Eliyahu ascended to the heavens in Yoram's times, it must still be proven that there was no period at all during the reign of Yehoram *ben* Yehoshafat that Eliyahu was still on the earth.

G. The most concrete proof is as stated in Paragraph 2, which describes the appearance of Elisha before Yehoshafat King of Yehuda in *Melachim* B Ch. 3.

**Part V: Miracles Enacted by the *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im***

**In the Talmudic Era**

A. The *Kehillos Yaakov*, in *Sefer Chayei Olam* Vol. 1 Ch. 30, presents a long list of over 100 acts of miracles and wonders performed by the righteous *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im*, as described in the *Talmud Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*.

B. The original printing of the *Kehillos Yaakov* listed only the sources or the miracles in brief. The recent 5766 expanded edition, however, includes the actual tales of the miracles as originally recorded by the Sages of the *Gemara*.

## CHAPTER 16

### THE POWER OF PRAYER SURPASSES THE FORCES OF NATURE AND INSTIGATES SALVATION.

#### Preface

This book has discussed the means of acquiring supernatural powers through methods that require intensive study and effort. However, there is also one very simple method to generate wondrous salvation and miracles, as described in the Torah, Prophets and Scriptures, and this is the power of Prayer.

#### Part I :The Extraordinary Power of Prayer Can Transform Man and Life Situations

&

#### A List of Miracles That *Bnei Yisrael* Merited through Prayer

A. Prayer harbors inordinate power to instigate boundless salvations, both on a personal and national level. Chapters in Jewish history and generation-old miracles attest to the potent force of prayer which successfully transformed dire, formidable situations of despair and certain death to wondrous instances of salvation and joy.

*Shmos* Ch. 2:23-24 states that the Exodus from Egypt itself was initiated with prayer: "And they cried; and their shouts ascended

to Hashem from the labor; and Hashem heard their wailing, and Hashem recalled his covenant, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.”

*Shmos* Ch. 3:7: “And I heard their cries from their oppressors.”

*Shmos* Ch. 6:5: “And also I heard *Bnei Yisrael's* groaning, as Egypt oppresses them, and I recalled My covenant.”

*Devarim* 26:7: “And we cried out to Hashem, the G-D of our fathers; and Hashem heard our voice, and He saw our suffering and our toil and our terrible pressures.”

*Shmuel* A 12:8: “When Yaakov descended to Egypt, *Bnei Yisrael* cried out to Hashem; and Hashem sent Moshe and Aharon; and they redeemed your fathers from Egypt and settled you in this place.”

B. The above verses all indicate that *Bnei Yisrael's* sincere prayers to Hashem heralded their redemption from Egypt. (Several of these verses are also mentioned in the *Mussaf* prayer of *Rosh Hashanah*.)

Hashem pledged to Avraham that He would redeem his children from a 400-year exile, yet *Bnei Yisrael's* heartrending cries and entreaties instigated an early, swift redemption. The original decree ordained that *Bnei Yisrael* would suffer under Egyptian exile for 400 years, yet the nation's poignant prayers caused Hashem to count the 400 years from the time of Yitzchak's birth; and *Bnei Yisrael* remained exiled in Egypt for but 210 years (see *Shmos* 12:40, *Rashi*).

C. The Exodus from Egypt featured astonishing miracles, including the Ten Plagues, which contradicted the very forces of nature; and all these resulted from *Bnei Yisrael's* tearful prayers.

D. *Shmos* 14:10 vividly describes the miraculous event of the Splitting of the Sea: “And Pharaoh approached; and *Bnei Yisrael* raised their eyes; and behold, Egypt is pursuing them. And *Bnei Yisrael* were very afraid; and *Bnei Yisrael* cried out to Hashem.”

At this historic moment, an entire nation faced the threat of imminent death. Locked between the sea and a furious enemy nation, their only choice was prayer. *Bnei Yisrael* turned in desperate plea to their Father, and their heartfelt cries rent the heavens. It was at that moment that *Bnei Yisrael* witnessed one of the greatest miracles of all times, as the Red Sea split before them, manifestly contradicting the very laws of nature.

E. *Shmuel* A 12:8 states that it was only in the merit of prayer that *Bnei Yisrael* merited redemption from Egypt and settling in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The subsequent verses relate: “And they forgot Hashem their G-D; and He sold them into the hands of Sisra, army general of Chatzor, and into the hands of the Philistines and into the hand of the King of Moav; and they fought against them. And they cried out to Hashem and said, ‘We sinned as we abandoned Hashem, and we worshipped idols. And now, Hashem, deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve You!’ And Hashem sent Yeruba’al (Gideon) and Bedan (Shimshon) and Yiftach and Shmuel; and He delivered you from the enemies surrounding you, and you sat in security, and you feared Him...”

F. The above verses reveal that the many miracles that *Bnei Yisrael* merited throughout history, including those which transpired during the wars in *Sefer Shoftim* and *Sefer Shmuel*, resulted from their heartfelt prayers. (These prayers were linked

with a deep-seated commitment to repent fully and return to Hashem, as quoted above, ‘We sinned... And now, save us from the hands of our enemies and we will serve You.’)

## **Part II: Meriting Personal Salvation through Prayer**

A. Many a tale in *Tanach* relates of individuals who merited extraordinary miracles and salvation in the merit of heartfelt, tearful prayer.

Perhaps the most famous example is the prophetess Chana, mother of Shmuel *HaNavi*, who spilled her heart in poignant prayer in what became known as *Tefillas Chana* (Chana’s {Prayer}). It was this hour of earnest supplication that rent the heavens and blessed her with a son as remarkable as Shmuel *HaNavi*, whose spiritual stature and prophetic powers earned him the status of *Rabban shel Nevi'im* (Teacher of the Prophets). Indeed, the only prophet in history to surpass him was Moshe *Rabbeinu* who merited speaking face-to-face with Hashem. (See *Kisvei Ha'Ari*, *Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* 1b; *Sha'ar Hagilgulim*, Preface 22 36a; beginning of *Shmuel A*, discussing that Shmuel *HaNavi* was of the greatest of all prophets, second only to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and the prophetic powers of all the prophets who followed him were drawn from his spiritual strength. Prior to the era of Shmuel *HaNavi*, heavenly barriers blocked the bestowal of prophecy to the lower world; yet Shmuel overcame these barriers and unleashed a bounty of prophecy. Thus, with her prayers, Chana not only merited a son as spiritually great as Shmuel *HaNavi*, but she also indirectly restored prophecy to the world.

B. In *Shmuel A* 1:15, Chana describes her prayer to Eli HaKohein: “And I spilled my soul before Hashem.”

Chana’s prayers rose passionately from the depths of her heart until they burst out in tearful entreaty. Her prayer, by definition, was a ‘spilling of the heart.’

The Jewish soul derives from an exceedingly lofty, holy place, directly beneath Hashem’s Throne of Honor. When the soul descends to the lower world and fuses with the corporeal body, it still maintains its spiritual connection to Hashem, albeit in a far weaker form than the intense connection that previously existed. During times of prayer—direct communication with Hashem—the soul regains this connection to Hashem as it overflows in its craving to cleave to its Upper Source—Hashem.

C. *Midrash Rabba* in *Parshas Vayeitzei* underscores the untold power of tearful prayer through the story of Leah *Imeinu*, who was intended as a bride for Eisav *HaRasha*, while her sister Rachel was betrothed to marry Yaakov. Leah’s incessant prayers and bitter tears compelled Hashem to annul the decree and, moreover, altered destiny in allowing her to wed Yaakov before Rachel.

D. The story of Leah highlights the awesome potential and inconceivable power of heartfelt prayer, to the point that Leah merited giving birth to six of the twelve Tribes (in addition to the two Tribes born to her maidservant Zilpah, who drew her spiritual strength from Leah.) Leah was the ancestress of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who delivered the Torah to *Bnei Yisrael* and was the greatest prophet of all times; of Aharon *HaKohein* and all the

Priests; and also of Dovid *HaMelech* and our future *Mashiach*. All this, she merited through heartfelt prayer.

E. Leah's prayers were replete with endless supplication and entreaties. The Torah's foremost description of Leah is, "And Leah's eyes were sensitive." The Sages elucidate that Leah's eyes were sensitive due to her constant weeping and tearful prayers.

F. Rationally, the basic explanation of this verse indicates that Leah's unending flow of tears and her raw, sensitive eyes detracted from her physical beauty, a factor that should have diminished her marriage prospects. Yet, in this case, Leah's unremitting prayers and tears caused the direct opposite to occur; and she merited linking her destiny with Yaakov *Avinu*, greatest of our forefathers.

### **Part III: The Miracles Enacted by Elisha HaNavi Were Instigated by Prayer**

A. *Melachim B* relates of the myriad wonders and miracles performed by Elisha *HaNavi*, which ranged from splitting the Jordan River to increasing the quantity of oil in the flask, granting a child to a barren woman, reviving the dead, and blinding an entire army (see Ch. 15 Part III for complete list.)

B. *Megilla 27a* states that the force of Elisha's prayers generated all these miracles.

C. The above *Gemara* cites *Melachim B* Ch. 25 in its description of the Babylonian destruction of Yerushalayim: "And he burned the House of Hashem and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem; and the Great House he burned in fire."

D. The Sages dispute the exact meaning of the phrase 'And the Great House.'

"Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua *ben* Levi both taught, 'A place where Torah is made great.' One said, 'A place where prayer is made great.' Torah, as written: 'Hashem desires for his righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorify it.' Prayer, as written, 'Relate of the great things that Elisha did; and Elisha toiled in prayer'" (*Melachim* B 8:4).

E. The above exemplifies the untold power of prayer, to the extent that it can reverse the very laws of nature.

F. The words of the *Gemara* are vague, seeming to indicate that the adjective 'great' refers to the miracles and wonders enacted by Elisha, albeit in this case, the word 'great' should describe prayer (as it was the force of Elisha's prayer that instigated these miracles.)

This question is resolved based on the quote from the *Ohr HaChaim* in Ch. 2 above regarding the miracles enacted by the righteous men of all generations. He explains that miracles are actually by-products of an absolute goal, which is *dveikus*. Thus, when Elisha immersed himself in heartfelt prayer to Hashem and achieved the coveted *dveikus*, the miracles occurred almost on their own. This message is a poignant reminder of the unlimited potential of prayer.

## Part IV: Elisha's Request to Eliyahu, "May A Double Portion of Your Spirit Be Upon Me"

### & Its Fulfillment

#### The Double Power of Miracles & Its Connection to Prayer

A. *Melachim B* Ch. 2:9-10, which relates of the events preceding Eliyahu *HaNavi's* ascent to the heavens, states: "And it was when they passed, and Eliyahu said to Elisha: 'Ask what I may do to you before I am taken from you.' And Elisha said, 'Please, may a double portion of your spirit be upon me.' And he said, 'You have requested a hard thing, nevertheless if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so upon you. And if not, it will not be so.'" The next verses relate that Elisha did, indeed, remain with Eliyahu until he ascended to the heavens, which indicates that his request was fulfilled.

B. *Sanhedrin* 47a states: "Eliyahu revived the son of the widow from the dead [*Yerushalmi Sukkah* adds that the child was Yonah *HaNavi*]; and Eliyahu revived the son of the Shunamis from the dead [*Zohar in Parshas Beshalach* states that this was Chavakuk *HaNavi*]. It would seem that Elisha should have been able to revive another person in order to aptly fulfill the blessing, 'May a double portion of your spirit be upon me.'"

C. However, the 'double portion' that Elisha requested was fulfilled in other miracles and wonders that he performed, as opposed to this miracle alone. Moreover, the 'double portion' was not necessarily the actual blessing, but a result of it. In any

case, it would seem that the above miracle was encompassed within that blessing.

D. *Megilla 27a* lists the many miracles that Elisha performed through prayer; and his request for a 'double portion' specifically with regard to miracles. This teaches that, following Eliyahu's ascent to the heavens, Elisha's power of prayer surpassed that of even his mentor, Eliyahu *HaNavi*. (*Likutei Muharan* Vol. 1 Ch. 66)

E. Elisha's exceptional power of prayer, which surpassed Eliyahu *HaNavi's*, was expressed in his capacity to focus more intently on his prayers. (ibid)

F. Other opinions dispute that although Elisha's prayers instigated greater miracles than Eliyahu *HaNavi's*, it is not necessarily a reflection of Elisha's extraordinary intensity or concentration during prayer. On the contrary, it is quite possible that the prayers of both prophets harbored equal intensity; but since Elisha acquired a spirit that was double Eliyahu *HaNavi's* before his ascent, his prayers soared to a loftier place in the heavens and instigated greater miracles on earth.

*Tehillim 30* states: "To you, Hashem, I cry; and to Hashem, I beseech." The first name of Hashem in the verse is *Y-K-V-K*, while the second is *Adnus*. This verse teaches that a heartfelt supplication that reaches the *Adnus* level of Hashem's Throne equals that which a regular cry of prayer can activate by reaching the *Y-K-V-K* level of Hashem's Throne. (Obviously, a supplication that attains the *Y-K-V-K* level of Hashem's Throne will produce even greater miracles.)

Indeed, the greater and more spiritual a person is, the greater and more intense are the concentration and spiritual thoughts that he can achieve during prayer. Obviously, this does not refer to differences in thoughts between prophets and laymen, but rather in regard to a vast spiritual understanding regarding the power of prayer that transcends the forces of nature.

G. Every Jew must appreciate the untold significance of focusing and achieving utmost concentration in prayer, as the spiritual outcomes and miracles that he can instigate through powerful prayer are truly boundless.

## Part V

A. In *Sefer Ma'ase Ish Toldos* Vol. 7 p. 19, the *Chazon Ish* emphasizes that focused prayer harbors the potential to annul any evil decree. He would often comfort the brokenhearted with the assurance, "Hashem awaits your prayers!" [Although in most cases, it is also necessary to take physical action to bring about results; one must, first and foremost, place his belief and trust in Hashem and pray from the bottom of one's heart.

B. *Igros Chazon Ish* states that a Jew's most powerful tool is prayer, and he is obliged to utilize it in order to transform his path in life. Whenever man feels that he is drowning in troubles and tribulations, he should recall that his heartfelt prayers and supplications to Hashem harbor the force to extricate him from it all.

C. The *Chazon Ish* uses the phrase *matte oz*—staff of strength to describe this marvelous spiritual ‘tool’. It is possible that this term alludes to the Splitting of the Red Sea, a miracle which resulted from Bnei *Yisrael*’s desperate pleas and which was activated through Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s staff.

*Parshas Beshalach* 14:15 states: “And, you, lift your staff and stretch out your hand upon the sea and split it.

Verse 19 describes: “And Moshe stretched out his hand upon the sea...”

Verse 26 relates of the waters being tossed upon the Egyptians. “And Hashem said to Moshe, stretch out your hand upon the sea; and the waters will return.” The next verse describes this event in detail.

D. The Sages elucidate these verses in two ways:

Yonasan *ben* Uziel and *Zohar, Tikkun 21* translate ‘*Nette yadcha*—Stretch out your hand’ (verses 16, 21) as explained above: Hashem commanded Moshe to miraculously split the sea with his staff.

*Kli Yakar* quoting *Midrash Rabba, Parsha 21, Ch. 9*, elucidates phrase, ‘*Nette yadcha*—Stretch out your hand,’ as commanding Moshe to perform the miracle only with his hand, without the staff.

## Part VI: Inspiring Oneself to Focus on Prayer

A. *Brachos* 6b states: “They said to Rav Bibi *bar* Abayei; and Rav Bibi said to Rav Nachman and Rav Yitzchak, ‘What is the

meaning of the verse, *'Krum zulus l'vnei odom? (Tehillim 12)*. They answered him, 'These are the things that stand in the upper levels, but which people disgrace.'

*Rashi* elucidates, "*Things that stand in the upper levels,*' as prayer which ascends heavenward."

Sadly, few truly appreciate the inestimable worth of sincere prayer. A Jew must endeavor to appreciate prayer, esteem it, and view it as an absolute goal in life, a means through which he can draw close to Hashem. One of the most effective means of arriving at this recognition is studying about the essence of prayer, as will be explained shortly.

B. Prayer is divided into three sections: Praise, entreaty, thanks.

*Brachos 34a* states in regard to *Shemone Esrei* (silent prayer): "Rabbi Chanina said, the first [blessings of *Shemone Esrei*] resemble [the words] of a servant praising his Master; the middle ones resemble [the words] of a servant requesting a gift from his Master; the last resemble [the words] of a servant who has received a gift from his Master and is now taking leave of Him."

C. A Jew's service of Hashem and his feelings during prayer mirror the above division. The first section is devoted to sensing feelings of *dveikus* to Hashem Yisborach. The middle section implores Hashem to direct all of man's entreaties to positive results; and the third section thanks Hashem for fulfilling this request. The very act of beseeching Hashem for these requests solidifies one's knowledge that everything in the world, and all that one possesses, is an absolute gift from Hashem and there is no Source of goodness Who can grant his request except Hashem.

## Part VII: *Dveikus HaMachshava* to Hashem during Prayers & All Other Times

A. The concept of *dveikus hamachshava* is a great *mitzvah* and exceedingly lofty level of serving Hashem, as emphasized by numerous *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*. It is also a constant *mitzvah*, one that applies to a Jew at all times, as opposed to only applying during times of prayer. (See *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar C* Ch. 13-14 regarding the *Avos* and Moshe *Rabbeinu* who clung to Hashem in thought every moment of their lives).

B. Although constant *dveikus hamachshava* is a very lofty level of serving Hashem and, thus, unattainable to most; every Jew must strive to cleave to Hashem whenever possible. For many people, the easiest time to achieve this connection is during prayer, as it is an hour when one is already 'conversing' with Hashem. One who cannot maintain *dveikus hamachshava* throughout the entire duration of prayers should still strive to achieve and retain it to his maximal abilities and for as long as possible.

In general, a Jew's capacity to reach and remain on the level of *dveikus hamachshava* is largely contingent upon the spiritual roots of his soul and present spiritual state. Hence, if a person is unable to attain this goal, he should not despair or surrender his efforts, as he can still arrive at extremely lofty levels of serving Hashem and will ultimately realize his goal of *dveikus hamachshava*.

Regardless of a person's spiritual state and the physical and spiritual circumstances into which Hashem placed him in this

world; with concerted effort, devotion and willpower, he can certainly attain exceptionally lofty spiritual levels and merit serving Hashem with his complete soul.

C. Many people erroneously believe that *dveikus hamachshava* is a sentiment that washes over a person's heart. However, although *dveikus* may *express* itself as feelings of closeness to Hashem, noted *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* explain that *dveikus* is an actual entity (see *Shaarei Kedusha* of Rabbeinu Chaim Vital Vol. 3 Shaar E). It is a reality that increases man's soul-connection to Hashem, thereby strengthening the bond between them and conveying an added bounty of spiritual radiance from Hashem onto man.

D. It is difficult to explain exactly how *dveikus hamachshava* occurs, as the concept is rooted in esoteric Kabbalistic thought; yet eminent *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* present the parable of two wooden slats to clarify this point.

Physical objects, as two wooden slats, can be physically joined with nails and a hammer. Similarly, man can bind his soul spiritually to Hashem via *dveikus hamachshava*. Although mankind is unable to conceive of Hashem's essence, we are aware that the expression and result of our spiritual binding to Hashem is that He will, henceforth, rain a sacred, spiritual bounty upon the soul of the one who cleaves to Him in thought.

Indeed, the proof that *dveikus hamachshava* is so much more than a thought or feeling is the existential evidence of it—a firmer, more intense spiritual connection between Hashem and man throughout the time that *dveikus* is achieved.

E. While the *dveikus* connection is an entirely spiritual entity, there is also a physical reality to it that surpasses any feeling. The physical reality of this connection can be compared to the existence of heavenly angels, who are intangible beings, but who undeniably exist in the world.

F. It is important to remember that even if one does not attain *dveikus*, his Jewish soul is still intensely connected to Hashem, and he perpetually benefits from the spiritual radiance that Hashem showers upon him at all times. *Dveikus* serves to intensify that connection, deepen it, and increases the shower of spiritual radiance, but it is not the essence of the connection itself.

G. Each *mitzvah* and every hour of Torah study bolsters the soul-connection between Hashem and a Jew, albeit man is not always aware of it. (This lack of awareness and sense of the connection was discussed at length in Ch. 10 above.) The *dveikus hamachshava* described in this chapter contains both that element of feeling and also the lofty spiritual connection that cannot be normally sensed.

## Part VIII: Dveikus HaMachshava

A. Although many people desperately seek to achieve *dveikus*, few achieve it. Instead of investing one's energies and thoughts into attaining *dveikus*, one should rather pray from the depths of one's heart and focus on the meaning of the sacred words of prayer, which will ultimately cause the *dveikus* to wash over him on its own.

Appreciating the magnitude of *dveikus* inspires one to concentrate more intensely upon the inherent meaning of prayer—which ultimately leads one to attain the *dveikus* that he so desires. Moreover, when one actually merits that *dveikus*, he should ensure that he does not lose it.

B. In *Sefer Adir Ba'Marom*, the *Ramchal* writes that *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem atones for all sins, as this infinitely-close soul-connection to Hashem cleanses the Jewish soul of all impurities. Obviously, the ability to achieve *dveikus* does not absolve one of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of repentance or condone transgression of sin. However, every Jew—even those who are meticulous in their observance of *mitzvos* and scrupulously avoid sin—still require vast spiritual rectification; and this spiritual rectification can be achieved through *dveikus*.

C. The *mitzvah* of *dveikus* is exceedingly precious, to the point that it cannot be fathomed. Thus, one who attains a level of *dveikus* even on rare occasion should clutch onto that invaluable moment with all his might. All the more so, one who merits arriving at *dveikus* more frequently, either during prayers or at any point during the day, should endeavor to maintain it and never allow it to depart.

D. *Nefesh HaChaim Sha'ar D* teaches that one who is immersed in learning Torah need not reflect upon his goal of achieving *dveikus hamachshava*, as he is already cleaving to the Torah, which is an aspect of cleaving to Hashem Yisborach, as Torah is the Word of Hashem. Notwithstanding, the loftiest, most coveted spiritual level is achieving both *dveikus* in learning and *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem simultaneously (see *ibid* Sha'ar

C Ch. 14). Indeed, there are those who actually arrive at *dveikus* via learning the holy Torah, as the words of Torah elevates their souls and draws them ever nearer to Hashem.

### Part IX: Personal Entreaties during Prayer

A. One of the basic foundations of prayer is the knowledge that Hashem is a Compassionate, Merciful Father Who heeds the requests of those who beseech Him and endows man with all his needs. Sacred *sefarim* affirm that no prayer is unheard, and that every prayer engenders salvation in the world, albeit there are times when Hashem employs a prayer for a purpose other than that which the person who offered it desired. Still, a Jew is obligated to know and believe that his sincere prayers do instigate the salvation for which he prays.

B. Man should solidify this faith in his heart, until he is aware that the fulfillment of his prayer is entirely dependent upon Hashem's Will. It is written that this belief, while a lofty goal, is an indistinguishable aspect of the *mitzvah* of prayer, testimony to the fact that everything in the world—all our aspirations and desires—can only be fulfilled by Hashem. These two convictions—that only Hashem can fulfill one's desires, and that prayer, itself, can render salvation—are the two most fundamental, essential aspects of prayer.

## Part X: Pleading with Heart & Soul

A. Man must entreat Hashem for his personal needs with emotion and fervor. Prayer rising from a supplicating heart is accepted swiftly in the heavens.

B. Tearful prayer is especially beloved to Hashem and exceedingly desirable in the heavens, as written, ‘The gates of tears were not locked.’

C. *Kisvei Ha’Ari* describes that tears harbor a special power that cause man’s prayers to be accepted.

D. The *Zohar* explains that genuine, heartfelt prayer causes tears to well in man’s eyes and emotions to churn in his soul; and it is this deep-seated emotion which causes the prayer to be accepted.

E. *Igros HaChazon Ish* advises one to arouse himself to tearful prayer on behalf of success in Torah study by contemplating the negligible amount of Torah that he has acquired. The painful realization of his lowly spiritual state will reduce him to tears and spark genuine sorrow that will provoke inspired, tearful prayer.

F. Some people are naturally emotional and quick to conjure deep-seated prayers from the bottom of their hearts. It is Halachically permissible to communicate a personal prayer to Hashem at the end of *Shemone Esrei* prior to the final “*Yehi ratzon.*” Likewise, one is always welcome to turn to his Master and entreat Hashem for his needs and desires at any hour. (One should never request anything that could potentially cause harm

to befall another, even if one is suffering deeply. Prayer to Hashem should only focus upon positive needs.)

G. Above all, prayer should primarily focus upon success in Torah and service of Hashem. *Sefer HaChassidim* describes that although every prayer is accepted in the heavens; a prayer rendered on behalf of success in Torah and service of Hashem is accepted swifter, as the prayer, itself, is a reflection of the Will of Hashem Yisborach. (See *Pri Chadash on Yoreh De'ah* which indicates that lofty spiritual levels in Torah and wisdom result mainly from heartfelt prayer.)

<i>Amora'im</i>	Talmudic Sages
<i>Atzilus</i>	Lofty level of Odom that surpasses the ten <i>sefirot</i>
<i>Aveirah/aveiros</i>	Sin(s)
<i>Avinu/Avos</i>	Patriarch(s)
<i>Avodas Hashem</i>	Service of Hashem
<i>Beis Din</i>	Halachic Court
<i>Beis HaMikdash</i>	Holy Temple
<i>Beis Midrash</i>	House of Study
<i>Bnei HaNevi'im</i>	Students of prophecy
<i>Bria, Yetzira and Asiya</i>	Lofty spiritual worlds
<i>Chametz</i>	Leavened bread
<i>Chazal</i>	Sages
<i>Cheilev</i>	Suet

## IN THE WAYS OF ASCENT

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<i>D'oraysa</i>	Commanded by the Torah
<i>Dveikus</i>	Cleaving to Hashem
<i>Dveikus hamachshava</i>	Cleaving to Hashem in thought
<i>Eretz Yisrael</i>	Land of Israel
<i>Erev Shabbos</i>	Sabbath Eve
<i>Gemara</i>	Talmud
<i>Hakaddosh Baruch Hu</i>	The Holy One Blessed Is He
<i>HaKohein</i>	The Priest
<i>HaMelech</i>	The King
<i>HaNavi</i>	The Prophet
<i>Har Sinai</i>	Mount Sinai
<i>HaRasha</i>	The Wicked
<i>Hashem</i>	G-D
<i>Hashem Yisborach</i>	Blessed G-D
<i>Imeinu</i>	Matriarch
<i>Issur kareis</i>	Prohibition punishable by being cut-off in the world-to-come
<i>Kareis</i>	Cut-off in the world-to-come
<i>Kashrus</i>	Kosher laws
<i>Kedusha</i>	Holiness
<i>Kiddush Hashem</i>	Sanctifying the Name of Hashem
<i>Klal Yisrael</i>	Nation of Israel
<i>Klipah</i>	Outer shell of the soul referring to negative forces

<i>Korban Asham Taluy</i>	Offering of one who is unsure whether or not he sinned
<i>Korban Chatas</i>	Sin offering
<i>Lav d'oraysa</i>	Prohibition listed in the Torah
<i>Lishmah</i>	For the sake of heaven
<i>Mashiach</i>	Messiah
<i>Matan Torah</i>	Giving of Torah
<i>Megillah</i>	Scroll
<i>Mesirus nefesh</i>	Sacrificing oneself for the sake of heaven
<i>Mitzvah/mitzvos</i>	Commandment(s)
<i>Mitzvah d'oraysa</i>	Commandment listed in the Torah
<i>Mussaf</i>	Additional prayer (recited on Shabbos, holidays)
<i>Nefesh</i>	Soul
<i>nefesh chitzona</i>	External soul
<i>Nefesh, ruach, neshama, chaya &amp; yechida</i>	Five levels of the soul
<i>Neshama/neshamos</i>	Soul(s)
<i>Niddah</i>	Menstruational impurity
<i>Ona'as devarim</i>	Harming a person verbally
<i>Onah</i>	Mitzvah of physical relations
<i>Parsha</i>	Torah portion
<i>Pesach</i>	Passover
<i>Pilpul</i>	Sophisticated Torah debates
<i>Rabbeinu</i>	Our Teacher

## IN THE WAYS OF ASCENT

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<i>Rishonim</i>	Early Sages
<i>Ruach hakodesh</i>	Spirit of holiness
<i>Sefer/sefarim</i>	Holy book(s)
<i>Sefirah/sefiros</i>	Sphere(s) of holiness
<i>Segula</i>	Auspicious (action/time)
<i>Shechina</i>	Divine Presence
<i>Shabbos</i>	Sabbath
<i>Shechita</i>	Kosher slaughtering
<i>Shemone Esrei</i>	Silent prayer
<i>Takana</i>	Rabbinical institution
<i>Tikkun/Tikkunim</i>	Spiritual rectification(s)
<i>Tanach</i>	Holy Scriptures
<i>Tanna'im</i>	Sages of the Mishnah
<i>Treif</i>	Non-kosher
<i>Tzaddikim</i>	Righteous sages
<i>Yedi'as Hashem</i>	Spiritual level of knowing Hashem
<i>Yezter hara</i>	Evil inclination
<i>Yiras hacheit</i>	Fearing sin
<i>Yiras Hashem</i>	Fear of G-D
<i>Yisrael</i>	Israel
<i>z"l</i>	Of blessed memory

## THE PRE-EMINENCE OF HOLINESS

### CHAPTER 1

#### THE ADVANTAGES IN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT OF BEING CAREFUL ABOUT MATTERS CONCERNING HOLINESS AND THE HARM DONE BY DISREGARDING THEM

##### Section one

1. Everyone wants to feel that he has a personal connection with Hashem. David Hamelech (Tehillim 42) said צמא נפשי לה לקל 'My soul thirsts for Hashem, The Living G-d. When will I come and see Hashem's Presence?' To be close to Hashem is a tremendously important mitzva, and also the greatest pleasure that there is. However, in order to reach this exalted state, positive action alone is not sufficient; one also has to be wary of anything that might make you lose it.
2. Disregard for modesty and holiness is the worst hindrance to feeling close to Hashem. In פרשת כי תצא it says: כי ה' אלקיך מתהלך בקרב מחניך להצילך ולתת אויביך לפניך והיה מחניך קדוש ולא יראה בך ערות מאחריך. 'For Hashem your G-d walks within your camp in order to save you and give your enemies over to you. Your encampment should be holy and He shall not see a shameful thing amongst you and turn away from you.' The possuk teaches us that the strength of a Jew's bond with Hashem is determined

by how careful he is about holiness and modesty. Vigilance in these matters will result in Hashem's exalted light and spiritual bounty shining forth and saturating his soul.

3. The Gemara - in more than one place - mentions that the lack of modesty we are cautioned about in this possuk refers even to aspects of modesty which might not seem very significant to some people, e.g. not paying attention to what you look at or think about. The Gemara says that it is not so; these matters are very important and prevent Hashem's exalted light from reaching a person.

4. We have mentioned that spiritual loss is incurred by a lack of modesty and holiness - a person will find himself further away from Hashem. From the same possuk we can infer that there is also physical harm involved - if בני ישראל Bnei Yisroel are not as careful as they ought to be, Hashem says that He will not look after them and they will lose their battles.

The Chofetz Chaim observes that even if the possuk speaks about the Bnei Yisroel going to war, at the same time it refers to everything else in the world as well. The success of what a person does is determined by how much Divine inspiration he receives; and that in turn is determined by how much attention he pays to matters of holiness and modesty.

The Chofetz Chaim writes that most of the troubles and misfortunes that happen in the world are because of insufficient holiness and modesty. When a person realizes how true these words of the Chofetz Chaim are, he will understand how important it is to be extremely careful about these matters. Even if it appears to be very difficult, he should nevertheless be aware

that there is much more to gain by exercising caution in these matters than by neglecting them. Know too that the results of his actions affect not only himself personally but the whole of Klal Yisroel as well (as will be explained in chapter 6).

5. The obvious question is: Do we not see that there are good and righteous people who are extremely vigilant about these matters, yet some appear to be successful in life, and others to have difficult lives? Similarly, there are sinful people who totally disregard anything to do with modesty or holiness and amongst them too we see that some seem to do well in life and some not.

The Chofetz Chaim's comment - that indifference to the interests of holiness and modesty is the root of a person's troubles in life - need not be a contradiction to what we see of the fortunes of men in the world.

The קהילות יעקב explains it. He says that when a person is born, his general role in life has already been fixed. For reasons connected the root-source of his soul and gilgulim etc. and which are not for us to delve into, each person is given a specific role to play in life. Some people seem to have been put into a better position in life, whilst others appear to be more unfortunate. Nevertheless, although his circumstances in general have been predetermined and are unchangeable, within the overall situation variations are possible. Those changes are influenced by his behavior, and to them the Chofetz Chaim is referring. It is those areas which are subject to modification, that will be determined, for better or worse, by a person's holiness and modesty.

6. Just as the punishment for being lax is so severe and far-reaching, so too is the reward. There is nothing in the world that links a person's soul to his Creator as effectively as being careful about matters concerning holiness and modesty. It earns him the wonderful proximity to Hashem's holy Presence, and affords him the best possible protection from his enemies and from misfortunes in life.

7. It goes without saying that in the world-to-come too, the reward for someone who cares about holiness and modesty - likewise the punishment for one who disregards these matters - will be extremely great.

## Section Two

1. We can't imagine how much there is to gain by caution about anything to do with holiness; most particularly when learning Torah is concerned. It gives an automatic advantage to someone who wants to learn Torah successfully.

2. It is also an asset when it comes to remembering what you have learnt. There is an allusion to this idea in פרשת ציצית, where למען תזכרו ועשיתם את כל מצותי - 'in order that you should remember and do all My mitzvos,' follows on from ולא תתורו ואחרי עיניכם - 'do not turn aside to follow your hearts or your eyes,' From the juxtaposition of the two subjects our rabbis deduced that exercising control over your eyes and what they see, helps you remember the Torah you learn.

3. One should not ח"ו infer from this that if someone feels that holiness is among his weaker points, he should not try to learn

Torah. On the contrary, it is precisely through learning Torah diligently that he will, with time, become more attuned to holiness.

The Gemara says that learning Torah is the most powerful force for counteracting the evil inclination. The Gemara quotes Rabbi Yishmael: "If you meet 'the despicable one' (- the evil inclination) draw him into the House of Learning. If he is of iron, he will be crushed, as it says: הלא כה דברי כאש נאום ה' - 'Are My words not like fire? says Hashem, and like a hammer that crushes rock?' And if he is of stone, he will dissolve, as it says, הוי כל צמא לכו למים - 'All who are thirsty should go to the water.'"

4. If you follow this advice, you can be sure that you will come to feel that you can identify more easily with the idea of holiness. Moreover, you will also find that because of the extra merit you have earned, the Torah you now learn is of a higher standard than it was before.

5. The same advice holds true with regard to being close to Hashem. If one doesn't succeed in always being concerned about holiness, he should not use it as an excuse to give up working on strengthening his contact with Hashem. Instead, he should make every effort to draw himself closer to Hashem, and in time the same efforts will help him become stronger in matters concerning holiness too

**CHAPTER 2**

**THE NATURE OF THE EVIL INCLINATION, AND PEOPLE  
WHO THINK THEY HAVE A STRONGER EVIL  
INCLINATION THAN OTHERS**

1. To hope to be victorious in the ongoing battle with the evil inclination, it would be wise to try and explain something of the essence of the Yetzer Hora.

Mankind's first sin was when Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge; from the Torah it would appear that the force driving him to sin – the snake – was external, and not within himself. Yet nowadays we feel that the Yetzer Hora is inside us.

In the Nefesh Hachaim it says that in fact the evil inclination is not an integral part of a person now either. It is an external spiritual force struggling with man. However, a result of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge is that the concepts of good and bad are mixed up together ever since. Even though it feels to us as if the evil inclination is within us, it is in fact a delusion.

2. The fact that a person thinks that the Yetzer Hora is inside him and an essential part of him, is very harmful. If he would know that it is an external evil force, one which dislikes him and wants to hurt him, it would be much easier for him to counter-attack. It is far more difficult to do battle with a force that seems to be part of you, than with one which is obviously working against you.

3. It is the same as in all other kinds of battles: the most dangerous situation is when the enemy disguises himself and looks like one of your men, and you are not aware that have to be on your guard.

4. R. Chaim Volozhin (quoting the Arizal) explains why the forces of evil are so determined to make people sin. He says that every man has his share of spiritual plenty - שפע רוחני - set apart for him in heaven, and that shapes the success of what he does in this world and in the next.

However, he says that there are also forces of evil which are desirous of stealing whatever they can of that spiritual bounty. When they ח"ו cause a man to sin, they have successfully taken away some of his שפע רוחני.

The words שפע (plenty) and פשע (sin) are spelt with the same letters, although the order is different; the forces of evil trying to bring a man to sin, are in fact seeking to rearrange the שפע, so that it should pass to them instead of to the man for whom it was intended.

5. For the same reason our Sages say: כל הגדול מחברו יצרו גדול – a man who is greater than others, has a greater Yetzer Hora too. Since he has a generous share of the שפע רוחני, the forces of evil are more interested in stealing it. Just as the richer a person is the more likely it is that thieves will want to steal from him.

6. Therefore if a person sees that he has a greater Yetzer Hora than other people, there is no call for despair. Rather, he should realize that it means that Hashem has assigned to him a more

elevated role in life, and to reach the lofty spiritual levels that can be his, he will have to withstand greater pressure.

This is true not only regarding different people with different situations in life, but also within the life-time of each individual. There will be times when he feels that he is faced with greater temptations than at others. This too is no reason for despair ח"ו. It means that he is in a phase of life with great potential for spiritual growth. He should realize that it is at such times that greater spiritual forces of holiness are available to him than otherwise. He is offered extra assistance to counterbalance the stronger forces of evil he has to deal with. With them he will be able to overcome the Yetzer Hora and, with Hashem's help, go further than he would be capable of at other times.

A student once complained to the Steipler Gaon (the קהלות יעקב) that he gets distracted from learning more than any of his friends. He was answered that if it is indeed so, it just proves that he has greater potential and is capable of achieving more than the others.

A very important rule is to always try to avoid temptation. The Yetzer Hora is constantly seeking new ways to ensnare people. He presents them with difficult temptations and uses all his powers of persuasion to lure them to sin. A man has to know that the safest course of action is to avoid the conflict altogether. He should put himself in a position where he won't be even faced with temptation.

Every morning we pray ואל תביאנו... ולא לידי נסיון, that we should not be brought into head-on confrontation with the Yetzer Hora. The Gemara says that a Nazir should "take the

circuitous route and not approach a vineyard." Eating grapes is one of the things which a Nazir is forbidden to do. Therefore he is cautioned that when traveling from one town to another and the most direct route would take him through a vineyard, he should prefer the longer way round which circumvents the vineyard, even though it greatly inconveniences him.

Although the Torah only forbids a Nazir to eat grapes; there is no mention of not being allowed to enter a vineyard. Nevertheless the Gemara says that he may not put himself into position where he is likely to be tempted, and therefore should not go into a vineyard either.

There are many other circumstances where a person is advised to erect protective barriers between himself and an actual prohibition. In Pirkei Avoth our Sages tell us עשו סיג לתורה – make a 'fence' round the Torah. The Chazon Ish (in אמונה ובטחון) writes that it does not refer only to precautionary measures mentioned explicitly in the Gemara, like those for a Nazir: To 'make a fence round the Torah' is a general rule of conduct. From the example of the Nazir and the vineyard, we should learn how important it is to avoid direct confrontation with the Yetzer Hora whenever at all feasible.

If, in spite of his precautions, a man finds that he is faced with temptation, he must, of course, use every means at his disposal to stand firm and not yield. Then, when he triumphs over the evil inclination, he has won a spiritual victory and he becomes a better and more refined person.

**CHAPTER 3**

**HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO AVOID EVEN KNOWING  
ABOUT FORBIDDEN MATTERS**

1. There are people who mistakenly believe that, although they would not like to do anything which involves a lack of holiness or modesty, they do like to know what is going on in the world. Their interests include subjects and ideas which might be inappropriate or improper, and they think nothing wrong of it. Yet the truth is such an attitude is based on a misconception. In more than one place in the Gemara it says that it is forbidden to even think about things one may not do.

2. The Vilna Gaon speaks about the severity of the prohibition. In Kabbalistic terms he writes that, to a certain degree, every member of Klal Yisroel lives through all the events related in the Chumash. We all experience some measure of what happened to the ancestors of our people: - Adam HaRishon, the Patriarchs, Moshe Rabbeinu and the People of Israel. Obviously the Vilna Gaon does not mean that everyone will do all the sins mentioned in the Torah; what he wants to tell us is that everyone will have to deal with temptations in life which are in some way similar to those which our forefathers faced.

3. One conclusion we should draw from these words of the Vilna Gaon is that we ought to find out what was involved in the sin of the Tree of Knowledge; Adam's sin exemplifies the cardinal idea of sin as perceived by the Torah. We need to know how to safeguard ourselves from it, since during our lives we too will meet it in some form or other.

4. The Vilna Gaon, in his commentary to the Zohar on פרשת פקודי, writes that the essence of Adam's sin was that, through eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, he lowered himself in his thoughts in the direction that leads to evil. For that reason the punishment had to be so extreme that it altered the very nature of the world.

5. If we consider these two ideas discussed by the Vilna Gaon in conjunction with one another the inference is clear: The sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge - with which every Jew is tempted at some time in life - is the desire to let one's mind dwell on sinful subjects. People are inclined to believe that there can be nothing wrong with thinking, and something which is only in one's mind is permissible - just as Adam thought he was permitted to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Yet it proved to be the primary cause of the downfall of mankind - and also the primary cause that can lead to the downfall of each man in his own life.

6. Therefore a person must be extremely careful not to let himself enquire, or even think about, sinful and evil subjects. How can a person control his thoughts? There is only one way; to strive to keep your mind constantly occupied with positive thoughts - Torah and learning and being close to Hashem. Only thus can you improve yourself and achieve spiritual greatness.

Similarly, if anyone has been remiss in the past, he should make every effort to correct the fault. He must try to the very best of his ability to distance himself from the possibility of getting familiar with any of the negative aspects of what is going on in the world.

**CHAPTER 4**

**UNCERTAINTIES ABOUT HOW TO ACT IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

1. Many people are confused when it comes to application of the above concepts to everyday life. They don't know how to decide whether or not a particular course of action is forbidden because of unsatisfactory standards of holiness and modesty. A common example involves participation in family celebrations: Relatives invite you, and assure you that the code of tzniuth there will be acceptable. You yourself are unsure whether it will indeed conform with all the demands of Halacha, and are unable to decide whether you may accept the invitation. A person comes across many situations in his daily life where he is unsure of how to act, whether similar to the above example or not.
2. Know that in such matters there are two types of sin. The first includes deeds which our Sages forbade because they contradict holiness – seeing or hearing anything that is clearly detrimental to being holy. The second forbidden category is forbidden thoughts. Included in that category is even an action which in itself the Halacha might permit, yet if you know that it will lead you to think about things you ought not to, for you it would be forbidden. Because even when a person sits in a closed room and merely thinks about forbidden matters he is doing wrong.
3. Only when you are convinced that a course of action will not lead you to any injurious thoughts, can you begin to consider the practical application of all the Halachic details of your circumstances. Even then, you should exercise extreme caution before listening to the voices of all manner of people;

unfortunately there are many who try to allow things which are in fact severe transgressions. They claim that they are quoting Halachic decisions, whilst the truth is that the Halacha explicitly forbids those matters which they would allow.

4. We mentioned earlier that even something which might be totally permissible as far as Halacha is concerned, may be forbidden for a particular individual if he knows it could bring him to think about forbidden matters.

Sometimes the Yetzer Hora tries to argue with you: 'If you were perfect anyway, and your thoughts were always pure and holy at other times, there might be some point in avoiding problematic places or circumstances. Since you are no paragon of virtue and frequently fall short in many areas, why pretend to be a Tzadik in this particular instance?'

Be on your guard and recognize the voice of the evil inclination trying to entice you to sin. Even if you may not always succeed in being as perfect as you would like to be, nevertheless each time and every detail about which you are careful is very significant to Hashem. You will be richly rewarded for every single success, however small, and you will be granted extra Heavenly assistance - סייעתא דשמיא - for all your spiritual goals in life.

5. Furthermore, there is an enormous difference between a person who tries his utmost to avoid sinning and, in spite of all his precautions, is still unsuccessful, and someone else who knowingly puts himself into a position where temptation is inevitable, e.g. by going to a place where merely being there is problematic.

**CHAPTER 5**

**AN AWE-INSPIRING STORY ABOUT BEING CAREFUL OF  
WHAT ONE SEES AND THE LESSON TO BE LEARNT FROM  
IT**

1. The Yalkut Shimoni in פרשת ויחי tells a story about Rabbi Mathia ben Charash:

He was sitting in the Beth Hamedrash learning Torah. His countenance shone like the sun and the features of his face were like the heavenly angels, for he had never in his life looked at a woman.

The Satan once passed by and could not tolerate it. He said: 'Is it possible that this man has never sinned?' He went to Hashem and asked Him: 'What is the nature of Rabbi Mathia ben Charash?' Hashem answered that he is a flawless Tzadik, whereupon the Satan asked permission to lure him to sin. Hashem replied that he would not succeed, yet the Satan insisted that he would still like to try. Hashem agreed, and gave the evil inclination permission to go to him in the guise of a beautiful woman.

The evil inclination went and stood before Rabbi Mathia. As soon as he saw him he turned his face to the other direction. The evil inclination went and stood to his left; he turned to the right. He came to him from every direction until the Tzadik said: 'I am afraid the Yetzer Hora is stronger than I am, and will make me sin.' What did the Tzadik do? He called his disciple and sent him to bring him fire and a nail. The disciple brought the nails and Rabbi Mathia stuck them into his eyes. When the Satan saw

what Rabbi Mathia had done, he was so shocked that he fell over backwards.

Then Hashem called the angel Rafael and told him to go and heal Rabbi Mathia ben Charash. Rafael stood in front of Rabbi Mathia who asked who he was. He answered that he was the angel Rafael sent by Hashem to heal his eyes. Rabbi Mathia asked Rafael to leave him and let things remain as they are. Rafael went back to Hashem and told Him what Rabbi Mathia had said. Hashem told Rafael: 'Go back and tell him that I will guarantee that the Yetzer Hora will have no power over him.' Rafael went without delay and cured Rabbi Mathia's eyes.

2. This story is related in the Medrash and the Yalkut Shimoni, quoted in a number of other seforim, and there are also references to it in many places in the words of our Sages.

3. We see how far one of our Sages was prepared to go to avoid seeing what he shouldn't. There must be a lesson for us to learn from this Medrash, and it is not ח"ו to tell us that we are expected to put out our eyes in similar circumstances. Rabbi Mathia lived on such a lofty spiritual level that he understood that, for him, it was the correct thing to do. Yet there is still a great deal for us to learn from the general concept, even at our own level.

There are, for instance, people who frequent unsuitable shopping malls because of lower prices or similar considerations, totally ignoring the spiritual risks involved. Do they not realize that any monetary loss, or whatever they think they lose by buying elsewhere, is negligible compared to the tremendous spiritual cost of not caring about what their eyes see?

Similarly, it happens that people go to celebrations or family events where they know that the standard of tzniuth may well be problematic - maybe because they feel awkward refusing the invitation or maybe there are other reasons. If they would know what is truly involved, they would realize how mistaken they are. Would they weigh up the gains and losses of the eternal spiritual harm they would suffer if they go, and compare it with the temporary discomfort involved in declining the invitation, they would soon see that it is no comparison at all in terms of true gain and loss.

4. The **בן איש חי** (פרשת ואתחנן in) wrote that a man has to be more careful with his eyes than with any other part of his body. Every limb or organ of a person has its counterpart in the spiritual make-up of his soul. Since the wonderful reward one earns in the world-to-come is **ליהנות מזיו השכינה** – to bask in the glory of Hashem's holy Presence, it follows that the quality of your Olam-HaBo depends on the well-being of your spiritual eyes. Damaged spiritual eyes are, therefore, the worst possible handicap, since they detract from your ability to receive or to enjoy your reward.

5. A person who is careful about what he sees will reach very great spiritual heights. Additionally, when he learns Torah, he will find that his success is beyond anything he could have hoped for in the normal way.

6. It is also a proven asset for remembering what you learn. About the psukim, **למען תזכרו... עיניכם ואחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם**.... – 'do not turn aside to follow your hearts and your eyes.... so that you should remember....', our Sages comment: 'If you do not let yourself follow where your heart and eyes want to lead you, you will remember what you learn.'

## CHAPTER 6

### HOLINESS AND MODESTY AND HOW ALL KLAL YISROEL GAINS FROM EACH INDIVIDUAL'S EFFORTS

#### Part 1

1. The Halachic details of what is permitted and what is forbidden in matters pertaining to holiness and modesty are adequately covered in the relevant compilations of Halacha and ethics. The importance of being conscientious about these matters and how great is the merit and reward, - and ח"ו the converse as well – has been discussed earlier. In this chapter we shall attempt to explore the idea that the community at large benefits from the efforts of each one of its members in these fields.

2. There is a possuk (in Tehilim) about קריעת ים סוף - the Splitting of the Sea. It says הים ראה וינוס - 'the sea saw and it fled.' The Medrash asks: What did the sea observe that caused it to flee? and answers that it saw 'the coffin of Yosef.'

Since the word וינס - to flee - is used both about the sea which fled, and Yosef who fled from the blandishments of his master's wife - 'וינס ויצא החוצה' - he fled and ran out,' our Sages connect the two incidents. They say that the z'chus, the merit, that was Yosef's for withstanding temptation and not sinning, was the one in which the sea split. The Zohar takes the idea further and says that if Yosef would not have withstood the temptation, the whole of Klal Yisroel would have drowned in the Red Sea.

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(As regards the questions this raises about the promise to Avraham Avinu; there are ways to resolve them but this is not the place for it.)

3. Yosef's tremendous z'chus was because he overcame the Yetzer Hora and did not sin. It was in matters of holiness and modesty such as we have been discussing here, that the evil inclination tried to bring him to sin.

Although greatly tempted - he was a young lad who had been stolen away from his parents home, in a distant land far from anyone he knew. Furthermore, our Sages say that Potiphar's wife threatened him that if he did not yield, she would have him jailed for the rest of his life. As indeed she almost did. He was imprisoned for 12 years - 12 years of suffering in an Egyptian prison. Yet even worse was knowing that under normal circumstances there was no way for him to ever escape from there.

As it appeared to him at the time, refusing to give in to her meant that he would spend the rest of his life incarcerated in a dungeon, alone until the end of his days, and without hope of meeting any of his family again.

Moreover, had he given in to her, there was no way anyone else would ever know about it. He would be able to continue his life as before - a chief steward in sole charge of the house of one of the king's ministers, successful in his position as he had been until then.

Nevertheless, his fear of Hashem prevailed over all else and he refused to sin. Our Sages tell us that a direct consequence of

his refusal was that the sea split for Klal Yisroel and they were all saved.

4. As we know, a miracle was done for him later. Not only did he get out of prison, he became the viceroy of Egypt as well. Eventually he was reunited with his father and the rest of his family too. All because he did not sin. He was thrown into jail for not sinning - there he met Pharaoh's head butler and interpreted a dream for him - the butler was released from prison - he later mentioned Yosef to the king. Looking at it with hindsight we see that the whole chain of events leading up to Yosef's greatness began with his refusal to sin with Potiphar's wife.

At the time though, he could not possibly have known it. To anyone without prophetic vision it appeared that his fate would be exactly the opposite.

5. We see that in the merit of one individual who did not let himself be persuaded to sin, the whole of Klal Yisroel was saved. You might argue that the sin Yosef refrained from committing was a major transgression. But you should know that conducting oneself in a way that promotes holiness and modesty in relatively minor matters also has far-reaching effects. The whole of Klal Yisroel will reap the benefits of Hashem's bounty and blessing because of each individual's efforts. (The subject will be elaborated on later in Part 2.).

6. Our Sages show us how Yosef's z'chus was connected to the Splitting of the Sea - in fact they say it was the cause of it. It is logical to assume that such things happen in other circumstances and to other people too. Surely others who

exerted themselves in order to be more holy were also indirectly - maybe one could even say directly - responsible for many of Klal Yisroel being saved from troubles and oppression.

7. See Part 3 where we shall discuss in detail the unique power that is inherent in anything to do with holiness and modesty, and which brings blessing and salvation for the whole of Klal Yisroel.

### Part 2

1. We can also take a lesson from Kimchis, a woman who so meticulous about tzniuth that it affected the whole of Klal Yisroel. The Gemara (in יומא) tells us that Kimchis had seven sons and every one of them served as a Kohen Gadol. The Sages asked her what she had done to deserve such sons, and she answered that, "even the walls of my home never saw my hair uncovered." They answered that many other righteous women did the same, yet were not rewarded as she was. Yet there is some proof in the Gemara that the Sages did accept her explanation.

2. Furthermore, unlike the above Gemara in the Talmud Bavli, from the Talmud Yerushalmi - in more than one place - it appears that the Sages did accept Kimchis' opinion that it was for being so particular about tzniuth that she had such illustrious sons. They even quote a possuk which supports this view.

3. It is also possible that there is no discrepancy between the Talmud Bavli and the Talmud Yerushalmi. All agree that her exemplary tzniuth that was the principle source of her merit to

have sons who were all Kohanim Gedolim. However the Sages of the Talmud Bavli did not think that this z'chus on its own was sufficient; they were of the opinion that it must have been in combination with other merit too, either her own or her ancestors. There is no disagreement over the fact it was for her attitude to tzniuth that she was so richly rewarded - whether or not other factors were considered as well - and maybe it would be right to accept this as the intended meaning of the words of the Talmud Bavli.

(The רב"ש in another context about בידם עשו ולא עלתה בידם - many did so without the same results - says that undoubtedly for the good deeds of the kind mentioned one deserves that type of reward: the Gemara is only implying that other merit must have been involved too.)

Even if one says that there are two different opinions in the Gemara, the very fact that her words, and the whole exchange with the Sages, is recorded - and only rejected because of the argument that many others did so too - makes it quite clear that her words were seriously considered as plausible. In any case the opinion in the Talmud Yerushalmi is that the Sages did accept her words.

4. The idea that "the walls of her house never saw her hair" needs clarifying. It can not possibly mean that she did not uncover her hair in the presence of men, since that is something expressly forbidden by the Torah. All righteous women refrain from doing so, and for that alone she would not deserve more reward than others. It must mean that she never uncovered her hair even when no-one was present. Again, there must be many

women who, as a general rule, are very particular about keeping their hair covered at all times. Nevertheless, to be able to say that it had never happened - at no time, and however difficult it might have been - shows an exceedingly scrupulous attitude towards matters of tzniuth, for which she well deserved extra credit and could claim that it might be her unique z'chus.

In fact the very text of the Gemara corroborates this interpretation of the words - "even the walls of the house" never saw her hair.

5. To be worthy of having a son who is a Kohen Gadol is a very great z'chus - and how much more so to have seven sons who were all Kohanim Gedolim. We can't even imagine it. The Kohen Gadol's position included the responsibility of obtaining forgiveness for Klal Yisroel on Yom Kippur. He was the only person in the world who was allowed - who was commanded - to go into the holiest place on earth on the most holy day of the year, and carry out the service there. He was the agent who served as the sole representative of Klal Yisroel to go and win forgiveness for them from Hashem.

Without going into detail here, we can be quite sure that, in the unique position he held as the Kohen Gadol of Klal Yisroel, he was active the rest of the year too as their benefactor.

Kimchis, for her modesty, deserved the wonderful z'chus of being the mother of seven such sons who were able to do more for Klal Yisroel than anyone else.

6. Even though only one particular aspect of her tzniuth is mentioned in the Gemara, it clearly reflects on the importance of the whole concept of holiness and modesty for men and

women. (In fact the Talmud Yerushalmi does mention another aspect of tzniuth too, and from the possuk quoted there it can be understood that the subject is tzniuth in general.)

7. Kimchis' remarkable behavior earned merit for all Klal Yisroel. Everyone knew that she had seven sons who were Kohanim Gedolim, and our Sages say that it was because of her conscientiousness about matters of holiness and modesty.

From the fact that our Sages link the two subjects here, we can assume that the connection is always present. Throughout the generations, there have always been Jewish women who were most particular about tzniuth, and we can be sure that they too benefited the multitudes of Klal Yisroel in very many ways.

### **Part 3**

1. We have tried to clarify (in Parts 1 and 2) that even a single individual's efforts to add holiness and modesty to his life can work wonders in terms of blessing and salvation for all Yisroel. We ought to find out why it is particularly for concerns of holiness and modesty that this effect is so noticeable. It has already been mentioned (in Chapter 4) that every mitzva a Jew does - or sin he refrains from doing - has a beneficial effect for all Yisroel, since each mitzva increases the spiritual bounty that comes down to this world from the upper worlds. Nevertheless, it would appear that what a single individual does in the fields of holiness and modesty, reflects more powerfully than other mitzvos on the whole of Klal Yisroel and we would like to discover why it should be so.

2. There are Kabbalistic reasons which explain it in several ways and it is difficult to go into detail about matters pertaining to Kabala. However, with Hashem's help, we shall examine the subject from one particular angle. Our words are based on a basic rule of Kabala which is mentioned in a number of places but the following is quoted primarily from the sefer אדיר במרום (מאמר יחוד הגן) of the Ramchal, since - in comparison with other Kabbalistic words - it is easier to understand.

(There is a letter written by a disciple of R. Chaim Volozhin - and the disciple was a great Torah scholar in his own right - in which he says that R. Chaim claimed that the Vilna Gaon himself testified to the Ramchal's greatness in Kabala, and said that the sefer אדיר במרום is full with awesome revelations from the Upper Worlds, with particular reference to the section of יחוד הגן, about which he says there is no end to how wondrous and awe-inspiring it is.)

3. It has already been explained that Hashem established the world in such a way that the mitzvos and good deeds we do in this world substantiate many lofty spiritual worlds, which in turn are instrumental in bringing down spiritual and material bounty for Am Yisroel in the world.

This spiritual plenty, however, does have one drawback: One has to exercise supreme caution in order to ensure that it will bring all its good with it, and none will be seized by forces of spiritual impurity. The Ramchal says that it is indeed a serious impediment, and because of it only part of the spiritual bounty actually comes down to the world. A great deal of the שפע remains up in the spiritual realms. It is kept for Am Yisroel and

they will receive it in the future, for there is no other way to safeguard it.

The Ramchal explains that if one does anything to protect the aforementioned spiritual bounty, it is a tremendous z'chus because through you the blessing will be able to come to Am Yisroel in this world. (- and we need not fear that what we receive here in any way detracts from what has been designated for us for the future. On the contrary, the extra שפע we get here and now surely helps us earn even more merit.)

4. We should now be interested to know if there is anything that we are capable of doing to protect the שפע , so that more of it can come down to Klal Yisroel.

Anyone who studies Kabalistic writings will find a very clear answer. It is written quite clearly that the key lies in increasing awareness of holiness and modesty. Every man should be feel responsible for all the members of his household. He should make sure both that his sons are particular about those matters pertaining to their holiness and modesty, and that his daughters are equally careful about those with relevance for them. Each and every kind of precaution in these matters has the awesome potential of being able to safeguard Hashem's spiritual bounty.

It is not easy to clarify why the mitzva of tzniuth should have in it the strongest power for preserving the spiritual bounty; the issue is complex and lengthy. Nevertheless we shall quote briefly on the subject and anyone well-versed in Kabala should be able to understand:

"The primary protection is dependent on safeguarding certain emanations of the highest spiritual emanations

belonging to the force which is called the primeval serpent and all that is akin to it, and that surely is closely bound up specifically with the theme of tzniuth."

5. From this can be understood how every precautionary measure one practices in the fields of holiness and modesty, can benefit all Klal Yisroel. Klal Yisroel as a whole have a great deal of merit. They learn a lot of Torah. They do many mitzvos - of both kinds; mitzvos involving only a man and his Creator, and those concerning one's relationship with people too. Likewise prayers and all forms of Hashem's service are meticulously performed. All of which activate a tremendous amount of spiritual bounty which could bring endless blessing for Am Yisroel and save them from so many of their troubles in all spheres of life.

However, a certain amount of the bounty is prevented from coming down to the world and inundating Am Yisroel with goodness because of the above-mentioned antagonism of the forces of evil. It is set aside for the future, and through being careful about matters of holiness and modesty one activates forces which safeguard it. Thus the  $\gamma\psi$ , which has been prepared by Klal Yisroel doing Hashem's service in all its various forms, gets preserved and can come down to this world. It is not a complicated matter since the bounty does not have to be brought into existence; it is already there. All that is necessary is to find a way to bring it down to Klal Yisroel, and that is done by safeguarding it.

6. Merit for being careful in these matters is, therefore, communal merit, and was the kind needed in order for the sea

to split at the ים סוף, and for the Kohen Gadol to do the service successfully. They were matters involving the whole of Klal Yisroel, and accordingly it needed the merit of the whole community. Precautionary measures pertaining to matters of holiness and modesty, even when only individuals practice them, effectively provide the required merit. They have the automatic effect of conferring merit on all Yisroel, and as such have the power to bring Hashem's blessing and His bounty of spiritual and material goodness into this world for Klal Yisroel.

#### **Part 4**

1. Studying all we have written here will surely give you an added incentive to increase the holiness and modesty of your life-style, both because it is a very important mitzva, and because ח"ו disregarding these matters leads to serious transgressions. Additionally, every mitzva has its beneficial effect for all Klal Yisroel - and ח"ו the converse too - as explained in chapter 4. You will have now realized how much caution - and precautions - are necessary if you want to strengthen yourself in these fields.

2. There are a number of reasons why a person should strive to improve his approach to matters of holiness and modesty. Firstly, knowing the great potential these qualities have for bringing blessing and salvation to Yisroel should encourage anyone to do his utmost.

No less than that is the knowledge that your behavior affords Hashem great pleasure and gives Him נחת רוח; Hashem is most

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certainly pleased when you help other members of Klal Yisroel, both materially and spiritually.

There is also the aspect of a person's natural sympathy for his brothers of Klal Yisroel and wanting to help them, whether alleviating troubles that threaten the nation as a whole, or helping individuals with their personal sorrows and problems.

Furthermore, if you are responsible for bringing salvation and blessing to the community as a whole, you can be assured that your reward from Heaven will be immeasurably great.

3. Rashi explains (on a Gemara in עבודה זרה ) that precautionary measures taken to avoid sin fall into two categories.

The first includes those which one employs when faced with the possibility of sinning, and does not ח"ו want the Yetzer Hora to gain the upper hand.

The other type involves using foresight to avoid being brought to a position or place where you might be tempted to sin. While this is true for all mitzvos, it is even more particularly so for matters concerning holiness and modesty. Practical experience shows that in these areas it is not enough for a person to strengthen his resolve to make himself pure and holy at all times. He has to be constantly on the alert, planning ahead and contriving strategies to avoid finding himself in any place or any situation that might compromise his efforts to achieve holiness and modesty.

Without going into much detail here, as a general rule it can be said that the recommended course of action is to spend as much time as possible in the Beth Medrash or Beth Kneset.

Those are the places where one is most protected from negative influences. While he is in the house of Hashem he should, of course, occupy himself learning Torah. Torah is the most effective safeguard that exists.

4. If these are important considerations when a person has to make a decision about where to be at a particular hour, how much more do they have to be born in mind when he has to make major decisions concerning his whole future. Standards of holiness and modesty must surely be taken into account as a deciding factor. Likewise, inasmuch as it is in his hands to do so, he should try to arrange his everyday life so that as much of it as possible revolves around the hours he spends learning Torah in the Beth Medrash.

5. It can happen that a person wants to be particular about all matters of holiness, yet he finds there are certain places where he will be scoffed at for his attitude. There is no reason for him to be ashamed in the presence of the scoffers. To quote from the Shulchan Aruch (תחילת אר"ח): He should know that the truth is on his side. The highest and only truth is what is written in our holy Torah. The time will come when all those scoffers who mocked at him will realize that Torah observance is the correct way to live, and that he was in the right while they were mistaken. When they understand that his conduct protected them and helped them considerably even though they did not even realize at the time, they will be extremely grateful to him. Then, they too will understand that, as we mentioned earlier, being careful about anything to do with holiness and modesty is a very effective way to help all Klal Yisroel.

6. It sometimes happens that a man lives in a neighborhood, or belongs to a certain crowd of people, where he is ridiculed for keeping the mitzvos of the Torah. The best solution for him would be to move to a different area or find a different circle of friends, in order to avoid finding himself in situations where he is likely to be tempted to sin. There are also other reasons why it is recommended.

However, there could also be reasons why the change is not advisable, and one can not generalize. Since there are many and varied issues to be weighed up whenever making major decisions, and each case is bound to be different, it is not really possible to make a general rule for everyone. Nevertheless it is obvious that the alternative of remaining where he is, doesn't even exist if he finds his attitude to matters of holiness and modesty deteriorating as a result of his environment.

**A LETTER**

Although I debated for a long time whether to publish such a type of letter, I decided to do so due to the extremely positive feed-back I've gotten from many individuals who had received it privately. The information had immensely inspired them and they had greatly benefited from reading it.

[Also see "Mishnat Rabbi Aron" vol. 3, pg 157 where Rabbi Aron Kotler, of blessed memory, points out the importance of discussing this topic and that notwithstanding the delicate nature of the topic one shouldn't refrain from bringing it up.]

Dear.....,

You have asked me to explain the terrifying things our Sages have written in the (Babylonian) Talmud (tractate Nida, pg. 13a & b) regarding the seriousness of the sin of "ejaculating in vain"<sup>1</sup>. The "Shulchan Aruch"<sup>2</sup> ("Even HaEzer"<sup>3</sup>, Ch. 23) also writes extremely sharply concerning the seriousness of this sin. So you wanted me to explain why this sin is so grave.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Jewish law any form of secreting ejaculate (male cells discharged during relations), whether intentional or not, except for during intercourse, is a grave sin. One is therefore obligated to abstain from anything that might trigger such event, including pictures and thoughts which might be recalled during sleep, causing unintentional ejaculation in vain.

<sup>2</sup> Jewish code authored by Rabbi Yosef Caro of blessed memory

<sup>3</sup> The section of the "Shulchan Aruch" (out of 4) dealing with marital matters

You also wished to understand why our Sages have defined this sin as being tantamount to murder as you found it difficult to see the comparison.

Firstly I must say that it is clear from your phrasing that your intentions are pure and that you don't mean to question the words of our Sages. It makes no difference whether you will end up understanding or not; either way, you will continue to believe and observe their words. Rather, as is indeed proper according to the Torah-outlook, you wish to better understand, hoping that this will inspire you to take greater care concerning this issue. I will, please Go-d, explain the words of our Sages clearly, in answer to your question, but I need to first establish that the whole following explanation is only a small part of the full picture. There are many more reasons and explanations which cannot be addressed here.

The explanation brought in Kabala<sup>4</sup> is written in the "Sha'ar HaKavonot" in the 7<sup>th</sup> essay about "Kri'at Shema SheAl HaMitta"<sup>5</sup> (standard edition, pg. 56, column 2). This book contains the teachings of the "Ar"i Za"l"<sup>6</sup> as recorded by his preeminent disciple Rabbi Chaim Vital, of blessed memory. I will quote from there, adapting slightly for clarification.

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<sup>4</sup> Jewish mystics

<sup>5</sup> The recitation of the passage of "Shema Israel" (Hear, oh Israel) [Deuteronomy chap. 6, verses 4 through 9] which is customarily recited before lying down to sleep

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Yitzchak Lurye Ashkenazi of blessed memory, one of the greatest masters in Kabala. The Hebrew acronym Ar"i Za"l stands for Adonenu (our master) Rabbi Yitzchak Zichrono LiVracha (of blessed memory)

Go-d created the universe in a way that any action which a person takes on earth elicits a reaction in the upper (spiritual) spheres [as is clearly stated by our Sages in several places and as has been elaborated on in the "Nefesh HaChaim"<sup>7</sup>, essay 1 in the first few chapters]

Rabbi Chaim Vital explains that the spiritual reaction to ejaculating, amongst others, is that a soul is withdrawn from the "soul-bank"<sup>8</sup>. Just like if the ejaculation was done in the proper way this released soul enters the newly created body to produce a live person, so too when it is done through sin the withdrawn soul seeks to fuse with some type of body. However, rather than fusing into a human, it is now handed over to the evil forces and is infused with a destructive spiritual force which becomes its "body". This is the reason why it is tantamount to murder, as the tragedy the soul goes through, by becoming part of a destructive force, is as disastrous as murder. Furthermore its essence is also tantamount to murder, as the soul is removed from the place it used to reside and placed in an environment which is so bitterly harsh for that soul that it cannot be described with words.<sup>9</sup>

You should further know that the holy books write that any success a person encounters in this earthly world, whether spiritual or physical, is dependent on the spiritual "influences of plenty" which are endowed upon him from above. Every person has at any time a certain amount of such influences in his

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<sup>7</sup> Kabbalistic-ethical work by Rabbi Chaim Volozhin of blessed memory

<sup>8</sup> "Otzar HaNeshamot". All the souls of any future individual are already in existence and are stored in this "soul-bank" in anticipation of being sent over to this world.

<sup>9</sup> End of quotation of the "Sha'ar HaKavonot" adapted for explanation.

“account”, depending on various criteria. Now, if a person sins and ejaculates in vain and doesn’t repent, then often the evil forces created by the soul which he released (as mentioned above) are given permission to grab away from those spiritual influences and thus the person lacks success in his endeavors. It is self explanatory that much anguish can be caused by such a lack, may Go-d save us.

Also, see in the Zohar<sup>10</sup> (Parshat VeYeshev, pg 188a & Parshat VaYechi, pg 219b<sup>11</sup>) concerning the severity of this sin. See also “Bet Yosef”<sup>12</sup> (“Even HaEzer”, Ch. 23, pg 45b of the old edition, pg 221 of the new edition and “Even HaEzer”, Ch. 25 in the “Bedek HaBayit”<sup>13</sup>, pg 46a of the old edition, pg 224 of the new edition).

Since we are now in the Shovavim<sup>14</sup>-period which, according to the tradition of our holy Rabbis, requires mainly exercising extra caution in two aspects: the above issue and the prohibition of

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<sup>10</sup> Kabbalistic writings by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai

<sup>11</sup> Also quoted in the Tur (new edition, ibid, pg 221, footnote 6)

<sup>12</sup> Commentary from Rabbi Yosef Caro (author of Shulchan Aruch) on the Tur (printed in the margin of the standard Tur)

<sup>13</sup> Yosef Caro’s additions to his own “Bet Yosef”

<sup>14</sup> A seven-week-period during the winter stretching from the beginning of the week we read Parshat Shemot till the end of the week we read Parshat Mishpatim. The word “Shovavim” which alludes to the verse “Shouvou Banim Shovavim” (Return, O backsliding children) [Jeremy 3, 14 & 22], calling upon people to repent, is (in Hebrew) an acronym of “Shemot”, “VaEro”, “Bo”, “BeShalach”, “Yitro” and “Mishpatim”, which are the seven portions read on the Shabbatot of those 7 weeks.

Nida<sup>15</sup>; it would be fitting to also mention some words regarding the latter. One must know that the prohibition of Nida applies to single and married alike and that all unmarried girls are considered Nidot<sup>16</sup>.

The Chafetz Chaim<sup>17</sup> in his essay concerning the prohibition of Nida wrote the following: *“As is known to all, the prohibition of Nida isn’t just merely a negative commandment as the prohibition of eating pork and the like; rather it is a prohibition which entails Karet<sup>18</sup> for both him and her. They may, Go-d forbid, not live out their projected days. Even if their merits are very great in which case HaShem may grant them a longer life in order to give them more chance to repent, however, if they do not repent then their soul, in the world to come, will be uprooted from amongst the “living” which is akin to eternal death for the soul. Since HaShem’s presence fills the entire universe the verse “This soul will surely be uprooted from before Me” (Leviticus 22, 3) indicates that no room at all will remain for the soul that carries such a sin, not having repented. This is a most terrible verdict which is much worse than the death-*

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<sup>15</sup> The Status of a woman from the day she menstruates till she goes through a purification process, during which time she is prohibited from having relations. The prohibition applies equally to the man she is having relations with.

<sup>16</sup> Plural of Nida. Unmarried girls are considered Nidot since we assume that she has menstruated at some time, and since they customarily don’t go through the required purification process, thus effectively retaining their Nida status.

<sup>17</sup> Rabbi Israel Meir HaKohen Kogan from Radin of blessed memory. He is called "Chafetz Chaim" after one of his famous works on the prohibition of slander.

<sup>18</sup> As is explained further in the text, this is a punishment which consists of the uprooting of the soul for eternity. Usually the person will not survive his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

*penalty which is merely the termination of the temporary physical life, whilst Karet is the extinction of the soul's eternal life. And even that is only after that they will receive their terrible punishment in Gehinom<sup>19</sup>. For they will first descend to the lowest purgatory and will be convicted to bitter misery for each time they have transgressed."* He then continues to elaborate that this prohibition is dangerous for the children of the sinners. See there for additional harsh consequences.

The Chafetz Chaim (ibid.) also wrote: *"People should further know, that which is known to any Torah scholar, that the prohibition of Nida is considered adultery where the rule applies that one must let himself be killed, rather than to transgress<sup>20</sup>. This means that the prohibition is so great that every Jew is obligated to sacrifice his soul and be killed at the stake in order to avoid transgressing it."* The Chofetz Chaim then continues to explain a fundamental idea. *"When the Torah commanded that one must rather be killed than to transgress the prohibition of Nida, this is far more than just a commandment to refrain from it even at the cost of your life. Rather, in addition to the actual commandment, this is also a solid piece of Heavenly advice. Since the damage caused by transgressing this prohibition is so great, it actually pays to die rather than to transgress"*

Let's explain this as follows: If two people were to be involved in a car crash and one would be killed instantly whilst the second one would come out without scratch, if the latter would then

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<sup>19</sup> hell

<sup>20</sup> See "Torat HaYichoud", Ch 1, comment 2 (from pg 10 through pg 13) who proves this at length and quotes many of the earlier and later Poskim<sup>24</sup> who say so.

stumble with a Nida, he would be the one with greater “injuries”, and he has lost out far more than the one who was killed.

It is imperative to make mention of the following which many people are mistakenly unaware of. Though the verdict of Karet only applies to one who actually has relations with a Nida, nevertheless, the obligation to rather be killed than transgress applies equally to any affectionate physical contact as the Chafetz Chaim points out in “Geder Olam”, essay “Chatimat HaSefer”.

Here too we can use the above example and say that if one person were to be killed in a car crash whilst another one were to be spared only to afterwards come into affectionate physical contact with a Nida; the latter is the one who was “injured” the most as the negative effect this physical contact has on one’s soul is far greater than that of death.

Also know that it is obvious and clear that the prohibition of Nida doesn’t only apply during menstruation, but also afterwards. As long as she didn’t immerse in a Mikva<sup>21</sup>, as required after menstruation, at the time specified in Halacha<sup>22</sup>, all the above mentioned stringencies of Nida apply. Any intelligent person should pay attention to all this and choose to avoid the path of death and walk in the path of life. Therefore, anyone who stumbled over any of the above mentioned issues should quickly repent and then he will be forgiven.

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<sup>21</sup> Ritual bath

<sup>22</sup> Jewish code

Since we have explained the prohibition of ejaculating in vain at length above, it makes sense to answer the commonly asked question: “How does one repent for this sin?” It is known that the holy Zohar writes, and is quoted in the Poskim, that it is very difficult to repent for this sin, but we must mention that the “Reishit Chochma”<sup>23</sup> in the “sanctity-essay” writes that one should, Go-d forbid, not think that it is impossible to repent for this sin. It is definitely possible to repent, though, for various reasons, it requires more investment.

It is known that the main guidelines for repentance are mentioned in the Poskim<sup>24</sup> as being: regret, verbal confession and caution for the future. It is important to know that in the “Sha’arei Teshuve” Rabeinu Yona writes that though any repentance earns atonement, nevertheless there are many levels of atonement and the level of atonement will be parallel to the level of repentance. Meaning, one can regret a little, feeling slightly uncomfortable; or one can really regret, feeling extremely bad. Obviously, the greater the regret and the bad feelings, the greater the forgiveness will be. Likewise, one can confess, plainly verbalizing his sins; or one can make a brokenhearted confession. One can make a basic decision for future caution; or one can firmly promise to refrain from sin in the future. Either way one will always attain forgiveness, but its level will depend on the level of the repenting. It is however clearly stated by Rabbi Nissim Ga’on that even if after repenting one stumbles again, nevertheless the repenting remains valid.

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<sup>23</sup> Kabbalistic-ethical work by Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas

<sup>24</sup> Arbiters of Jewish law

[Even though the Ramba"m<sup>25</sup> in the laws of Teshuve<sup>26</sup> wrote: "*The One Who knows the hidden [thoughts of a person] should testify that he is sincere and won't return to this sin*" nevertheless, (without elaborating in order to avoid going to much off topic) the accepted explanation is like the above Rabeinu Yona that really every Teshuve earns atonement, but its level is dependant on the level of the Teshuve. This can be reconciled with the words of the Ramba"m, but this is a topic for a different time.]

We have further a tradition from our Rabbis, based on many proofs, that the greatest way to rectify this sin is by strengthening ones commitment to learning Torah. The reasons for this are manifold. Firstly, as mentioned above, one of the guidelines for Teshuve is caution for the future. Studying Torah is one good way to protect a person from this sin as, on a practical level, by being immersed in connecting to HaShem he distances himself from the bad. Furthermore, on a spiritual level, the tremendous spiritual light which the Torah-study brings to the Neshome is also protective. A further reason why Torah-study atones for this sin is because one of the reasons for the severity of this sin is the fact that people who stumble usually have their entire head and thoughts buried in immorality. Hence immersing in Torah, which is also done with one's entire head and thoughts, has the power to purify one's thoughts from these faults. Thirdly, because the light of the Torah has great power to cleanse the soul from flaws brought about by the grave sins caused by this sin. Furthermore, the

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<sup>25</sup> Maimonides. The Hebrew acronym Ramba"m stands for Rabbi Moshe Ben Maymon.

<sup>26</sup> repenting

Torah has the great power to undo the damage caused by this sin in the upper spiritual spheres.

Another great way to rectify this sin, as mentioned in the above “Sha’ar HaKavanot”, is “Kri’at Shema SheAl HaMitta” as it has the power to kill the evil forces brought about by this sin and is thereby freeing the souls which were trapped in them which then merit returning to the “soul-bank”. The more concentration and zest he invests in its recitation, the more he can achieve in fixing the blemish caused by his sin.

Another great way to rectify this sin is to endeavor to learn Torah, pray and do Mitzvot as well as all service of HaShem from the depth of one’s soul, energetically and if possible with zest. The reason for this is that there are many layers in the human soul. Not every action, speech or thought of a person is the same. Some of them come from a deeper layer of the soul whilst others are more superficial. Now, it is very common that this sin or its causes are done at the deepest levels of the soul. Therefore, if one’s service of Hashem comes from those deeper levels it is very, very helpful in rectifying the blemish. And if one merits that the actual Teshuve for this very sin is done on a very deep level and with zest, it definitely has a very great impact.

Another major way to rectify this sin is taking care to “guard one’s eyes”. Besides for being a very important thing on its own it also has a major impact on this sin. I enumerated this rectification last, as “guarding one’s eyes” is the most fundamental basis to guarding one’s moral sanctity. Firstly, because the actual “guarding” of one’s eyes adds great sanctity

to one's soul and secondly, as it protects the person from many "obstacles" to morality.

"Guarding one's eyes" is done on two levels. Firstly, one should make every possible effort to avoid being in places which are not conducive to "guarding the eyes" and secondly, if, Go-d forbid, it occurred that one happened to be in such a place, he should extend every effort to actually actively "guard" his eyes. Likewise one should make every possible effort to avoid any contact with women and girls.

Now, since we've mentioned the great impact of Torah-study, it is fitting to elaborate on it. As this is the main "pillar" supporting the Jewish nation we will, please Go-d, point out some of what is mentioned by our Sages and the commentators on this subject.

The Chafetz Chaim wrote in "Shem Olam" (essay "Hachzakat HaTora", Ch 9): *"It is known that the actual learning of Torah is a Biblical positive commandment as it is written: "And you shall learn them (the words of the Torah) and be careful to do them." [Deuteronomy 5, 1]. The main purpose for creating men was only in order that he should toil in Torah-study, as the Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin, pg 99) writes: "A person is created to toil as it is written: "The person is born to toil." [Job 5, 7] and that means to toil in Torah-study as it is written: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth." [Joshua 1, 8]" etc."*

In "Shnot Eliyahu"<sup>27</sup> (Tractate Pe'a, Ch 1, Mishna 1) the Gr"<sup>a</sup><sup>28</sup> writes: *"A person should see the Torah as very, very precious as*

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<sup>27</sup> Commentary on the Mishna, printed in some editions of the Mishna at the back.

*every single word is a Mitzve in its own merit etc. Therefore, if one learns one page, for instance, he fulfills a few hundred Mitzvot.*” His words are quoted by the Chafetz Chaim in “Shem Olam” (essay “supporting Torah”, Ch 9).

Accordingly the Chafetz Chaim (ibid.) further wrote that with every single word of Torah-study an angel, intervening on his behalf, is “born”.

See also the “Nefesh HaChaim” (Gate 4, Ch 11 through 34) who writes in great length about the great levels a person merits attaining by Torah-study. He mentions with lofty words how one is able to set right many upper (spiritual) spheres and how one can channel the “lights from above” to his Neshama<sup>29</sup>. One can merit bringing blessings and salvation to the entire Jewish nation, and one merits that a very holy addition is added to his Neshama which very greatly upgrades its power and spiritual abilities and a tremendous heavenly assistance accompanies him in all his endeavors.

One should know that by carefully avoiding the prohibitions of ejaculating in vain and Nida he merits to channel very great “lights from above” to his soul and he brings great spiritual “influences of plenty” to the whole Jewish nation’s endeavors in all dimensions.

Our Sages write that it was in the merit of Joseph, who withstood the test and didn’t commit adultery<sup>30</sup>, that the Sea of

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<sup>28</sup> Rabbi Eliyahu from Vilnius a.k.a. the Vilne Gaon (genius). The Hebrew acronym Gr"a stands for HaGaon Rabbi Eliyahu.

<sup>29</sup> Soul

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 39

Reeds was split. So you see that for the merit of Joseph as an individual, the whole nation was saved from death. I do not want to go in the a lengthy explanation of this idea, but the main point is that you can see the great merit of one single person who is careful in these matters and how much it does for the entire Jewish nation.

Likewise, the Talmud (tractate Yoma, pg 47a) relates how Kimchis merited that all her seven sons served as high-priests because of the great care she took concerning modesty. [The Jerusalem Talmud (tractate Yoma, Ch 1 Halacha 5, pg 5a and tractate Megila, Ch 1, Halacha 10 and tractate Horayot, Ch 3, Halacha 2) expands on this story. This is not the place to clarify how to explain the Babylonian Talmud in order to reconcile it with the Jerusalem Talmud] As you know, the high-priesthood is something which is beneficial to the entire Jewish nation. So here too we see that the care taken by individuals in these matters is able to bring great benefit to the whole of Israel.

Now, the truth is that with any Torah-study or Torah observance one brings great benefit to the whole Jewish nation as is clearly stated by our Sages and as the “Nefesh HaChaim” elaborates, nevertheless, it appears from the above that in matters of sanctity and modesty there is a special force which especially empowers every individual to bring very great benefit to the Jewish people. The Kabbalistic explanation for this is expansive and has been explained elsewhere in this publication in the first chapter.

## THE PRE-EMINENCE OF HOLINESS

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The “Sha’ar Ma’amore Rashb”i”<sup>31</sup> (pg 20, column 2 of old edition) writes: “*When any individual, according to his level, takes any amount of care in matters of sanctity and modesty, this will inevitably lead to bringing a great and awesome spiritual “influence of plenty” to the whole Jewish nation.*” He further adds: “*It is therefore obvious that the individual himself, who was careful in these matters, receives the lion’s share of those influences and will merit incredible levels of plenty.*” Obviously, the more one takes care, the greater the “influences of plenty”. Especially when one needs to make an effort in order to be careful as those influences grow accordingly.



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<sup>31</sup> Kabbalistic work by Rabbi Chaim Vital, of blessed memory, based on the teachings of the Ar”i Za”l. The Hebrew acronym Rashb”i stands for Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, of blessed memory, author of the Zohar.

## HOW DO YOU ILLUMINATE THE SOUL

### CHAPTER ONE

#### SUBSTANCE OF THE SOUL

1. The aim of this book is to make clear to each and every person the depths which lie within his soul. Everyone feels intuitively, and sometimes even has a real understanding of the great vistas within him; they are truly very great, unfathomably so. Indeed, most people cannot explain what is inside. It follows therefore, that they are entirely unable to relate to it. When a person lives detached from the wellsprings of his soul, these great opportunities lie wasted. This brings inescapable feelings of emptiness and depression.
2. The only way to rescue oneself from this emptiness and depression is to search for greater understanding of the soul and to link up to its depths. This will activate the soul's true strengths, and a person will find himself. Everything that is written here is based on Kabbalistic writings; the Zohar, writings of the Ari, RaShash, the Vilna Gaon and the Ramchal. The selection and collation of their words in this book help us to understand the patterns of a person's soul, enabling him to discover and effectively direct the keen bright light of his soul into this world.
3. A person is made up of body and soul. It is quite easy to see and understand what the physical body is, but what exactly the soul consists of is a quite a riddle. To understand this, let us study a parable of the sun and its light rays. If a person were to

place a board in the middle of a sunbeam, it would block its light (at least those rays apparent to the naked eye). This is because the sunbeam is simply a derivative of the sun, and once the board cuts through the sunbeam, it disconnects the light beam from its source, and it ceases to exist.

4. The Ramchal explains in his work, 'Adir Bamarom' that this is also the way the soul is designed. The soul is a spiritual derivative of Hashem Himself. Any level of existence which the soul experiences, is a product of what it receives from Hashem. The soul consists of nothing else. It is thus completely spiritual, without physical characteristics at all.

5. It follows now to ask how the soul can have leanings towards wickedness. We just said that it is a spiritual derivative of Hashem Himself, meaning that it is completely good? The truth is, man's potential for corruption does not find its source in the soul, rather in the spiritual forces and strengths which are attached to the soul, and tempt the soul to sin. However the soul itself has absolutely no connection to evil.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SPIRITUAL NECESSITIES OF THE SOUL

1. Two types of substances exist in the world. The first type is like metals and stones which need no sustenance for their existence. The second group is like vegetation and animals which need food to exist. Were we to leave a lamb for a long period of time without food, it would die, life would depart from it, after which the body itself would decompose.
2. Obviously humans belong to the second category. However it is not just the body which needs food and sustenance, mans soul also needs nourishment. The food of the soul is spiritual, without which the soul is starved. If the soul is deprived of its sustenance for an extended period of time, the situation worsens until it reaches a desperate and emergency state.
3. A person can usually hide from others this state of desperation; however within himself he knows very well how his soul longs for its sustenance. The resulting situation is that most people now have two purposes in life; the first is sometimes accomplished, the second nearly always results in failure. The first task, which is usually realized, is to persuade those around him that his inner self is happy and fulfilled. The second task, which is rarely achieved, is to persuade himself that his inner self, his soul, is truly happy and fulfilled.
4. The only way to really solve this problem is to feed the soul that which it starves for. This however means that a person must first clarify for himself what exactly the food of the soul is.

5. The answer for this is, as David Hamelech writes in his book of Tehillim (chap.42), “Just as a deer yearns towards the water holes, so my soul yearns towards to you Hashem, my soul thirsts for the Eternal Hashem; when will I come and see the face of Hashem?” David Hamelech explains that food that the soul needs and hungers for, is spiritual light from Hashem Every moment that that the soul is missing this it feels like “...a deer thirsting for it’s water hole...“, wandering around in the desert, searching for a spring of pure water to drink.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TO NOURISH THE SOUL

1. Now we come to the central question. How in truth can a person reach and acquire this spiritual light from Hashem, so that he can nourish his soul? The answer to this question is divided into two parts, each one complementing the other.
2. The first is the internal connection with Hashem which comes as a result of speaking to Him, as we see David Hamelech writes all his requests and thanks to Hashem in Tehillim, in many different expressions, pouring out his soul to Hashem.
3. The second is the link with Hashem's Torah that He gave to the Jewish nation. The Torah is not just a book of wisdom. The Torah contains spiritual light, hidden within it by Hashem Himself. As much as a person is bound up with the Torah he will automatically receive this light.
4. Being bound up with the Torah comprises of two complementing parts. They are, the study of Torah, and the fulfillment of Torah. Every moment that a person spends studying Torah, brings spiritual light from Hashem to his soul. So too, every moment a person spends fulfilling any mitzvah in the Torah, be it a mitzvah between man and his fellow, or an action like wearing tefillin, or helping another person, or a mitzvah which involves refraining from action like not eating pig meat or not hurting a fellow person; at that very moment, spiritual light from Hashem pours into his soul.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FEELING SPIRITUAL LIGHT (I)

1. Following all that we have said so far we come now to ask, how is it that so many people claim to have tried to study Torah, or perform things in the Torah and yet still not felt this light? Similarly we could ask, how can a person can learn and fulfill the words of Torah in a way that is guaranteed to provide this feeling and sensation of spiritual light?
2. The answer lies in the fact that this light goes directly to the soul, which is encased in a physical screen, preventing the soul from feeling this light in some measure.
3. To what can this be compared? To a person lying on an operating table under the effects of general anesthesia. The surgeon asks him if he can cut five cm deeper than necessary for his wellbeing - for a different purpose. If the patient is a fool he will agree to this request since he thinks that he anyway can't feel anything now, due to the strength of the anesthetic. However if he is clever he will not allow this. He will understand that after waking from the anesthesia, every extra cm cut will cause him tremendous pain.
4. The same is true of the soul in this world. It exists behind the screen of the body, as if asleep and unable to feel the fullness of the light. Only after a person passes from this world, and the body and the soul are separated from each other, then every mitzvah, a person performed in his life accompanies his

soul with a lofty eternal light. On the other hand every sin which a person did wounds his soul, which he later feels only too well.

5. However our discussion here is regarding this world and not the next. How can a person come to feel the lofty light emitted from the study and fulfillment of Torah, and also from the spirit linking with Hashem Himself via thought and speech? It is indeed possible, despite the body blocking the soul from feeling the full light. Fragments of this light can be felt in this world, yet they are so faint and small that in order to feel them in a powerful way a person requires two pieces of advice.

6. The first is to increase one's study of Torah and mitzvah performance. Even though from every moment of Torah study and mitzvah performance he will only sense part of the light emitted, but through the fusion of all the light together, he will in the end experience a much greater and more intense sensation of light.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FEELING SPIRITUAL LIGHT (II)

1. The second way to feel this higher light well is much faster, but requires more understanding. An introduction is called for here. In the physical world, actions performed produce a result. When a person breaks a plank of wood, he creates two small segments from what was once one big piece. On the other hand a person can take two small planks, nail them together and produce one large piece of wood. The same is true of the spiritual rays from Hashem which enter the soul. A person can bring about results with these lights using his thoughts, especially if it is with great concentration,

2. In context, whenever a person studies Torah or fulfils a mitzvah, he should concentrate at that moment, and also contemplate beforehand, on the greatness of Hashem and how He creates the whole world and keeps everything running. In addition, a person should think that the Torah he is studying now, or the mitzvah that he is performing now, should be a spiritual channel through which his soul be joined to Hashem Himself, bringing spiritual bounty and upper light from Hashem to his soul. This thought has the power to activate spiritual powers. Learning Torah and performing mitzvot in this way will in a short time bring a person to feel this lofty light. There is much to elaborate on this point, too much to include in this small book, yet in the words above lie great openings and opportunities with which a person can reach true light and pleasure in this world, joining with Hashem. If a person uses the

two ways discussed here in chapters 4 and 5, both increasing the learning of and the performance of Torah, and also the intentions explained here in chapter 5, he will greatly amplify his feeling of this light, much more than if he were to use just one of the methods by themselves.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE MITZVAH OF SHABBAT

1. One of the basic mitzvot in the Torah is the mitzvah of Shabbat. To every mitzvah there are myriad understandings, partially from the revealed Torah and part from Kabbalah. It is impossible to speak lengthily here about all these reasons; rather we will bring here just one reason from Kabbalah for the mitzvah of Shabbat. Every day of the week contains a light from the upper worlds. A person's task is to rectify the light of each day which will then shine into his soul.
2. Each of the six days of the week has its own light. When brought together, these six rectified types produce one complete degree of light, compiled of the light from each day. (Obviously the expression of degree is used analogically since the lights are spiritual and it is impossible to define them with physical definitions like 'degree' or any similar expressions.)
3. The Shabbat day has two aspects of light. One aspect is on the regular standard lights, meaning that on Shabbat there is a general, all inclusive light. This light includes all the six types of the days of the week.
4. Apart from this there is another aspect of light on Shabbat, a much greater level of light, making it stronger than the combined lights of the days of the week. On this high level all the lights of the six days of the week and also the light of Shabbat, which includes all the six types, are corrected on the Shabbat day.
5. The result of this is that all six days after Shabbat are blessed and benefit from the power of the Shabbat that came

before. On Shabbat there is an all inclusive light which includes all the six types of light, as is clear from above. Apart from this, on Shabbat there is a greater and higher level of light, which also includes all six types of lights. There is therefore a spiritual power in this light to light up all six days.

6. Therefore, since the lights of Shabbat are higher and more inclusive than those of the weekday, on Shabbat a person needs to make corrections of a different type to the rest of the week. This rectification is resting from work which the Torah forbids on Shabbat. Through this cessation of work the soul has greater strength to link up with these lofty lights, creating two things. The first is that the upper lights are rectified and greatly strengthened by the soul linking up to these lights. The second is that the soul receives a mighty and powerful light, thereby acquiring a great strength from these upper lights which join to the soul.

7. Shabbat includes two parts, the evening and the day. In order to rectify and bring the lights mentioned above, both parts of Shabbat are necessary. The evening is the beginning of Shabbat and the day is the continuation of Shabbat, the day of rest from work forbidden by the Torah. The cessation of work produces the totality of light and is the central basis for receiving these lights. It is thereby understood that to bring about the completion of these Shabbat lights, it is also very important to try to increase in spirituality, our spiritual bond with Hashem. The mitzvot of Shabbat, like Kiddush and the Shabbat prayers greatly help this. Even though there is the mitzvah of prayer every day, on Shabbat it is much greater since the soul rises to a higher place where the soul has greater power to affect.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### HOLINESS IN PRIVATE LIFE

1. Some of the most central mitzvot in the Torah are those connected to married life. It is impossible to deal with all the mitzvot this includes in this context, one must learn the details for oneself, but we can discuss it in a general way here. The first mitzvah is that of family purity. This means that during her monthly cycle of blood, a woman is forbidden to have marital relations for a period of approximately twelve days. On the last seven days she must check her purity daily. At the end of the twelve days she immerses herself in a kosher mikvah. To have marital relations before this procedure is one of the gravest prohibitions in the Torah, and applies whether within the framework of marriage or not, the prohibition stands regardless.
2. Obviously the Torah forbids marital relations to take place outside of the marital framework. Still, the prohibition of lacking purity hugely increases the severity of transgression.
3. Superfluous as it is to add, the Torah severely prohibits any relationship with someone else's wife.
4. The prohibitions mentioned here do not intend to minimize a person in any way, rather to show us that marital intercourse is something very spiritual, it is the joining of souls. This bonding can greatly benefit the souls, but could also bring destruction to the souls. Hashem, who creates and perpetuates souls, taught us in the Torah that marital relations in a forbidden manner enormously damage a person's soul. On the

other hand, when it is performed in a Torah manner, it is a very holy thing.

5. Apart from the prohibition of marital relations in a forbidden manner, there is also the area of how to behave and how to dress. The Torah teaches us how crucial it is to take care that everything be done in a refined and modest way. The reason for this, according to the revealed Torah, is to prevent one from stumbling in one's thoughts and deeds, which is obviously of great importance.

6. However Torat HaKabbalah brings another reason for this necessity of purity and modesty. Apart from the soul that every person has in this world, he also has a soul source or root which exists in the higher realms. The state of a person in this world is very much influenced by the state of the soul root in the upper worlds. The same is true the other way around too. The soul in the upper worlds is influenced by the behavior of a person in this world. Like in this world there are better people and there are worse people, this is true also in the upper worlds. There are good angels who are given tasks to benefit the soul roots and the creatures in general. And there are bad angels, called destroying angels. We must ensure that our soul roots not fall into their clutches, heaven forbid, since if they were to succeed in trapping the soul root, it could cause serious damage in this world. If a person behaves in an unrefined or immodest manner, or wears an unrefined or immodest garment, this causes damage in the upper worlds. It also weakens the soul in the upper worlds, endangering the person here in this world. When one keeps away from having marital relationships in an unrefined, immodest manner, one strengthens the protection of the soul

root from evil forces. In addition the soul links up with the upper lights, which influence and benefit every sphere of a person's life in this world.

7. As much as a person exercises caution in the area of marital relations and with anything conflicting with holiness and purity, so the protection of his soul root from evil forces increases. His soul root joins with the upper light and influences and benefits a person's every sphere of in this world.

8. To finish, there is a true story in the medrash rabbah at the end of Parshat Toldot which connects to our discussion about the soul and its purpose.

9. The medrash writes; when the holy temple was being destroyed the conquering gentiles wanted that the first person to enter the temple and plunder it be a Jew (seemingly to denigrate them even more). A Jew by the name of Yosef Meshisa took the task upon himself, entered the holy temple and brought out the candelabra. The gentiles asked him to re-enter and bring out another item, but he refused and said, "Is it not sufficient that I angered my Creator once that I should anger him again". The gentiles tried to persuade him with substantial sums of money and high positions. They then threatened him with punishments and death but he would not give in. In the end they gave him a terrible death with an axe. Whilst they were killing him he was shouting, yet not because of the terrible pain; rather he cried out, "Woe is to me that I angered my Creator. Woe is to me that I angered my Creator."

10. We ask the question, where did this Jew find the strength to make this turnaround in one short instant? Just one moment

earlier he agreed to enter the holy temple and plunder it, a terrible action in itself, and at such a difficult time for the Jewish nation. The temple was being destroyed, so many people killed, captured, wounded, starving and suffering; and at such a time to be so treacherous and enter the holiest place of the nation and plunder it. Yet one moment later he transformed himself and reached the lofty level of being killed for the sake of the glorification of Hashem's name. And even more, at the time of his death he didn't cry out due to the pain, rather that he had angered his Creator!

11. The answer for this is that in every Jew lies a holy soul which wants only to do the will of Hashem with all its might. But, there are many covers on the soul which sometimes have different desires and affect the actions of a person, especially if these urges are influenced by an environment which doesn't go in the way of Hashem. Therefore even this Jew who stooped so low as to enter the holy temple to plunder it, could in one moment affect such a complete turn around. Because deep within him he had a holy soul whose desire was only to serve Hashem - at any cost.

12. The challenge of every Jew is to work on himself so that the sacred part within himself will affect his actions and behavior so that he always go in the way of Hashem.

13. There are a few ways that a person can activate this. From the main ways for this we will bring two points. The first point is that a person must be aware of the immeasurable goodness hidden within him, and the great strength he has to reach high levels in the service of Hashem. The second point is that a

person must be aware of the far reaching results of his every action, word, intention, thought or desire for the good.

14. Were every Jew to fully recognize these two strengths within him, the knowledge alone, without a doubt brings him enormous strength to withstand all tests and serve his Creator with all his strength, day and night. It could also be that he won't suffer stumbling into sin. But we are not usually able to fully know our strengths. In any case, a person must try to discover more and more about his strengths and work on reinforcing them. It follows then, that his desire to serve his Creator will increase and intensify.



## **A LETTER ABOUT BELIEF IN HASHEM AND HIS TORAH**

Even though belief in Hashem is a clear and obvious thing, and I know you well enough to see that this belief is very clear to you, however I will still write a few points relevant to the topic that we left off with, which could help some of your family and friends who need a boost in this area. It is taken as obvious that the things written in this letter are very much abbreviated, since I wanted to keep it as short as possible. The topics in their entirety are much too lengthy for this letter.

### **Part One**

1. The proofs of the basic belief in our religion are divided into two. The first part is the proof that there is a Creator. The second part proves that the Torah of the Jewish people was received from the Creator of the world.
2. The proofs for the first part prove the existence of the Creator, but still don't prove the second part. However the proofs of the second part prove the Torah of the Jewish people, and can also be used to prove the first part, i.e. the existence of Hashem.

### **Part Two**

1. The simple proof for the existence of a Creator is that it is impossible to have a creation and such an incredible creation at

that, without a Creator. For example, a person finds a purse full of money and valuable items on the street and decides to keep it for himself. A police officer arrests him and accuses him of theft, and for not returning the lost item. If the thief were to claim that the purse and all its contents created themselves, it is certain that his words will not be heeded. How much more so with this fabulous world! It just couldn't have created itself!

2. One of the more recently discovered wonders of creation is that a cup of water is not simply a cup of water. Rather, the water in the cup is made up of tiny molecules of water, each one containing many atoms; systems containing neutrons, protons and electrons, some which are stationary and some which spin around at high speed. One can classify this further into smaller parts and energies which cannot be explained here. It turns out that in a cup of water there exists a more comprehensive factory than the most complex industry in the world.

3. How much more so with things more complicated than a cup of water, like the human brain. Anyone who understands the workings of the human brain, and also the workings of computers, knows that there is nothing to compare between the most sophisticated computer and the most primitive human brain in the world. The human brain is so much more sophisticated, a difference greater than that of an old Suisse motor and the engine of a concord airplane, which is so much more developed. A person who is not prepared to accept that even the most simple of computers created itself, how can he accept such a thing about the human brain?

4. This proof is so obvious that it is difficult to understand how so many people don't think about it at all; they push it aside with weak explanations. We find the answer for this is in the Torah in parshat Shoftim, "For bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and makes crooked the words of the righteous." The text analysts question why the Torah writes this concept in two different ways, "blind the wise", and "makes crooked the words of the righteous"? They explain that it is because the judge who accepts bribes errs in two areas. First of all he cannot see things straight anymore, and also the laws regarding to the actual reality of an event he will not see correctly. So too, when most people come to judge belief in Hashem they lean towards the side of rejection and disbelief since they know that if they choose the correctness of belief they will have to change things in their lives, and it's hard to change. They therefore twist their minds from seeing the truth. The solution is that a person separates the two things in his mind. He decides first of all to judge if there is a Creator of the world in an objective manner, without calculating what he will have to change if the outcome is that there is indeed a Creator. In this way a person will be able to come to the correct conclusion.

5. I once spoke to someone about belief in Hashem and he fought stubbornly against it. I said to him, "Be truthful with yourself, were the Torah to ask from you only two easy things - to pray for five minutes every Shabbat morning and for a period of five minutes every Shabbat afternoon not to kindle any fire, and that would be it, then what would you say to the proofs of belief that we have mentioned? Would you then agree that they

are compelling?” The man thought for a few moments and then said, “You are right.”

### **Part Three**

1. Recently people have come to accept that the idea of ‘The big Bang’ solves the problem. The theory itself is truly illogical. (The intention of these words is not to judge the correctness of the theory of the big bang, rather to prove that even if one were to accept it as authentic, it doesn’t weaken the veracity of the existence of Hashem.)

2. It is necessary to bring here some explanation of the big bang (obviously a shortened version due to limited space). The world is divided into two types; a force called energy and substance called matter. The theory of the big bang is based on the occurrence of an enormous amount of energy changing to become matter and that is how the world was formed. There was a huge explosion of energy and from this force all the matter that exists was made.

3. When we analyze properly we see that this theory not only does not minimize the unavoidable truth that there is a Creator of the world, rather it supports it. It can be compared to a competition, testing who could create the most sophisticated computer in the world. The contestants arrived to the final competition, each one having built the best computer he could. The computers of each were worth the same monetarily, but there was a slight difference in the way that they were made. The first brought his computer finished, skillfully built and designed. The second contestant brought a block of stone which

he threw to the ground and due to the force of the blow, a chain reaction occurred until it had completely changed to become a high-tech computer on the same standard as the computer which the first contestant had made. It is clear that the design of the second contestant is greater than the first since the concept of a stone changing in a natural process to become a hi-tech computer is unheard of. Surely he built this stone in a very particular, clever way with electric abilities and the like, so that when it receives a blow, millions of chain reactions take place one after the other until in the end it becomes a sophisticated computer.

4. So too with the creation of the world. As explained above, the existence of the world and all the incredible wonders within it prove that there is a Creator of the world. If we say that the way that the world was created was not in a direct manner, rather there was a huge explosion of energy, the force of which created all the matter in existence, we need to ask ourselves a simple question. If this is true, how were the myriad types of creation formed in such a clever way? The huge number of different types of vegetation, fish etc.? And in each species there are so many amazing things!? It would mean that this explosion of energy would have to create so much more than a one type, simple thing e.g. that not everything be only earth and or something similarly simple. It can only be that this energy which exploded must have been programmed with myriad details, organized in a genius way to produce this energy which would explode, and then become matter, which is also made of millions of multitudes of parts.

## **Part Four**

1. We can connect this to a question about belief written in many books, including that of the Chazon Ish, Emunah and Bitachon. He writes the answer to this question, but it is not printed in the regular version of the book, rather it is found only in the version which is found in the works of the Chazon Ish on Shas, at the end of the volume of Taharot, (chapter 1:9) and in the previous edition (300b).

2. I quote his words. “There are amongst some imaginative people those who ask, ‘What do we gain if we agree that the world has a Creator?’ After they are prepared to agree that a Creator of the world does exist, Who has no age and Whose existence is eternal. The difficulty is how is it possible to exist without being in the present. i.e. within time? The Rambam writes in Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah (chapter 1: halacha 1) “Everything that exists in the world is from the truth of His existence.” *[It seems that there must be some comparison here to everything in existence since they are all from Hashem. If so everything in the world of ideas and intellect are joined in a way as if they were a Torah existence. Our intellect understands that every existence has some element of creation and beginning and that this is definitely not possible to say about Hashem that He began at some time. The Chazon Ish explains that there is a completely different type of existence, explained to us in the torah – something spiritual and pure like something intellectual which is entirely spiritual and pure, with no element of time or beginning or ending.] But the imagination cannot understand that all existing things are measured and limited to length and*

*area we picture in our minds ... and all that fits into this category must have a length of time that they exist. They also have a time when they began, and all that which has a beginning must have a past and all that has a past must have a Creator. However there do exist things which don't have a measure and a space and they exist ...*

3. There is a detail which requires explanation here. We should not think that he intended to say, Hashem forbid, that one can compare the existence of The Creator to things which exist in one's knowledge, that he mentions as an example like the ... more the length, since in his works he writes extensively at the end of his words that the existence of the Creator is a real existence. He merely wanted to bring an example for the point about the details which he speaks about when answering the question.

4. Apart from answering his own question he mentions a few other important things about Hashem's connection to the world. Whoever contemplates upon his words will merit understanding them.

## Part 5

1. The real proof of the giving of the Torah lies in the Torah itself. The story of the giving of the Torah with all the accompanying super-natural happenings, (and all the other clearly unnatural which happened during the period of the exodus from Egypt, the sojourning in the desert and the splitting of the red sea, the falling of the manna and the well of water travelling with them and all the other amazing things

recorded in the Torah) happened before millions of people. There were six hundred thousand males above the age of twenty; when we add the women that makes one million two hundred thousand people, and with the children, and youngsters under twenty, and the mixed multitude who left Egypt with them, there were over two million people.

2. It just would not be realistic to fabricate a story which happened before millions of people. Everyone who heard it would ask, "If so, how have we not heard about it from one of those millions of people?" In addition, the Torah is not just a regular reporter of events; rather it speaks about things which greatly obligate a person, with many details. A person would not take such a thing upon himself if the story behind it were to refute his very existence. Everyone knows that the Torah and its story has been amongst the Jewish nation for many many years, and they have known it from the time that the story is said to have happened. It would not be in any way possible to fabricate such a story.

3. In other religions, the incredible stories told over are about events which happened to individuals, or a person told about himself. Things like that are easier to fabricate!

4. This is apparently the reason why two well-known religions built themselves upon the foundations of the Jewish nation and the giving of the Torah. This was so that their religions have some basis even though their adaptations are really very amusing, all their changes and falsifications. This also explains why these two religions are full of such an overwhelming hatred for the Jewish nation, and why over the ages they massacred so

many multitudes of Jews just because they were Jews. It bothers them that the Jews were the first stage, and that the Jewish nation are the most logical continuance. All this is constantly thrown in the face of those religions, refuting their lies.

5. A person must be logical and objective about this, as explained previously at the end of chapter two. Whoever thinks about this properly will see the compelling truth in it. There is much more to elaborate on this topic but since we have spoken about it at length in previous chapters I feel obligated to cut down here. I hope that on another occasion I will be able to elaborate further -see my book 'Closeness to Hashem', fifth chapter, which is relevant to this issue.

6. To finish I will bring an extract from the words of the Chazon Ish on the topic of how a person feels when he merits to have complete belief. The Chazon Ish writes in his book, 'Emunah and Bitachon' (chapter 1:7), "When a person merits to see the truth of the existence of Hashem, immediately great and infinite joy enters him, his soul relaxes within him and he sees the pleasantness of Hashem. All physical enjoyments and urges pass on and his gentle soul is wrapped in holiness. It is as if the soul separates from the limiting body and abides in the heavens. When the person grows in these sacred values a new world is opened before him; it is possible for a person in this world to be like an angel for moments and to bask in the glow of Hashem's presence. All the pleasures of this world are like nothing in contrast to the pleasure of being close to the Creator."

May it be His will that we all merit to always see the true light of belief and that we merit to have the spiritual light of Torah

## A LETTER ABOUT BELIEF IN HASHEM

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illuminate our souls. The soul will then receive true strength and the true will. of the soul be for Hashem. When a person merits to this his soul is joined to Hashem not only in the next world but also in this world. This is the greatest enjoyment possible in this world and is what David Hamelech describes in Tehillim, (chapter 42), "Like a deer thirsts towards the water hole so my heart longs to you oh Hashem. My soul thirsts for the living Hashem. When will I come and see the face of Hashem?" In general I recommend that it is very worthwhile to try - belieder - to read and review this chapter of Tehillim (chapter 42) which so much inspires the feelings of longing of the soul towards Hashem.



## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

### ADVICE TO PEOPLE OVERWHELMED BY DIFFICULT FINANCIAL AND SPIRITUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The following was written in answer to a group of people dealing with adversaries who had caused them severe financial losses, and they realized that it was having a negative effect on their spiritual growth too. They felt themselves weakening and their Avodas Hashem suffering, and that added to the despondency caused by situation as a whole.

They came to seek the support and encouragement that there is to be found in the teachings of our holy Sages and the wisdom to be derived from knowing how to understand their words.

Since the same age-old advice and wisdom is relevant to many people in various situations in life, we thought it would be advantageous to quote it here. (Many of the ideas are also mentioned elsewhere in the sefer; nevertheless the letter is brought here in its entirety.)

I myself have seen that others are beset by difficulties of a similar nature to those you are experiencing, I have met them personally or heard about the situation, and understand the tremendous hardships with which you and many of your associates are challenged.

## **DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES**

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I must be honest and say that even though I would like to provide solutions for all your problems, the truth is that the situation is a very distressing one for a variety of reasons.

Nonetheless it is vital to come up with some kind of solution, so that you should be able to pull yourselves together and carry on doing what is demanded of you, even in the present troubled state of affairs.

Since the answers I want to write are rather lengthy and divided into chapters, I would advise you to read it all carefully. You will see that many basic aspects of serving Hashem and man's role in the world, are outlined here. Each item includes guidelines which can be of assistance to you, not only in dealing with your current crisis but also in many other situations that can crop up in life

## CHAPTER 1

1. Every Jew must know that he was sent to this world with a very definite purpose: his time here on earth should be spent striving to elevate his soul and bring it closer to his Creator. In this way he enables Hashem's spiritual radiance to be perceived and to light up his soul with a spiritual brilliance.

In the first chapter of the Mesilas Yeshorim it is defined as follows: "Proximity to Hashem is the only real good that exists. Anything else that human beings consider good is in reality worthless and without any intrinsic value. Therefore a man should always go in the direction that will draw him closer to Hashem. He should strive in these matters to the very best of his ability; similarly he should flee, as from a burning fire, from anything that might distance him from Hashem."

2. The above statement is true for every individual on this earth. It is true both as regards his private life, and also to the way he interacts with other people and influences their behaviour. He may be in a position to bring all Yisroel closer to Hashem, and enable His holy spiritual Light to shine on to the souls of other members of Klal Yisroel. Even someone who thinks he is unable to influence others in a direct manner, is nevertheless obliged to do whatever he can. The very minimum – of which everyone is capable - is to concentrate while praying. When you say Shemone Esre - with its wording arranged by our holy Sages which is as relevant today as it was when they compiled it - you should think, not only of yourself, but of the whole of Klal

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Yisroel. When asking Hashem for your needs, ask for other people too.

3. The way for a man to connect himself to Hashem and enable His holy spiritual Light to radiate through his soul is through serving Him: By learning Torah, by doing mitzvos, by praying to Him, by taking care not to transgress His will, by helping people - all forms of His service are appropriate.

4. This idea sums up every man's purpose here on earth. Yet, at the same time, no two people have exactly the same role in life. Even learning Torah – to use one example – is different for each individual. One man finds himself attracted to in-depth study, another to gaining a broad spectrum of knowledge, a third to learning through discussion and debate - pilpul, while yet another finds himself interested in practical Halacha, and so it goes on.

## CHAPTER 2

1. Sometimes a man feels that his life ought to be going in a specific direction. Yet there will still be times when he finds himself as if drawn from Above along a different road. Obviously this is because only Hashem truly knows the right way for him to go at any given time. The only thing that we know for a certainty is that the ultimate goal is to bring our souls closer to our Creator and His spiritual brilliance.

2. It can happen that although at first Hashem gives a man a certain mission to fulfill, He might subsequently see fit to substitute that mission for another. It does not mean, *וְהָיָה*, that the ultimate goal of unifying his soul with his Creator is in any way altered; the change is only in the manner in which that goal is realized.

It most assuredly does not mean that the original role was less important in any way. It was just as much a part of Hashem's plan for the world. Nevertheless, for reasons unknown to us, He changed the details of the way to achieving it.

3. In Kabbalistic writings it says that every place in the whole world, and those in Eretz Yisroel in particular, have their own sparks of spirituality which wait to be perfected. If Jews live in a place and serve Hashem there, then the place is able to attain its perfection. The Kabbalists describe it as "clarifying the clarifications" - *מבררים את הבירורים* - which belongs to the place.

4. There are some places where the type of 'clarification' required is not necessarily always the same. They have their

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elements of spirituality awaiting correction like anywhere else, but the manner in which it is achieved may change over the years – at one time one particular type of improvement is called for, and at another time a something quite different is required.

### CHAPTER 3

1. You and your contemporaries have been living and settled for many years in the same place. There you have been endeavoring to serve Hashem to the best of your abilities. You have undoubtedly succeeded in improving the sparks of spirituality and 'clarifying clarifications' belonging to the place, and for doing so, incalculable reward awaits you in the World-to-Come.

2. Now you have been compelled by Hashem to leave that place. It is obvious that Hashem has a role for you to fulfill in a different location now; to 'clarify clarifications' in the new place. Possibly the spiritual 'lights' He now wants you to perfect are also of a different kind.

3. If, for personal reasons, a man decides to leave the place where he is living and to seek a different location with a different role to fulfill, he can not be sure that Hashem wants him to effect those changes in his life. It is always possible that his calculations and deliberations in reaching the decision were faulty.

4. In your case, however, you made every effort that the change should not come about. The new state of affairs was forced upon you, and the only explanation is that Hashem has a different task for you to undertake now.

**CHAPTER 4.**

1. To the casual observer, it looks as if your present situation was forced upon you by decisions that inconsiderate people made. Nevertheless you should be aware that only Hashem is the cause of whatever happens, and whatever He does is always right and always the best for you.

You might have felt that it was your duty to prevent those changes taking place. If you did your best, yet still were unsuccessful, it is proof that Hashem wants the changes to take place. They must be good for you, and essential for your task of improving and perfecting your soul.

2. The Gemorah (in *ברכות ס' עמ' ב*) quotes several Tannoim who advised us to get used to always telling ourselves that whatever Hashem does is good for us.

3. The Gemorah there in Brochos relates the well-known story about Rabbi Akiva and his disciples: They were traveling, and when night fell, they went to look for somewhere to sleep in the nearest town. However no-one there offered them accommodation, and they were forced to leave the town. Rabbi Akiva said that "whatever Hashem does is good," and he and his disciples went to lie down in the fields.

They had with them a cock to wake them in the morning, a donkey on which to ride, and a lamp to illuminate the darkness for them. During the night the wind blew out the lamp, a cat came and killed the cock, and a lion devoured the donkey. Rabbi Akiva still declared that whatever Hashem does is best for us.

In the morning they discovered that, during the night, bandits had attacked the town and taken all the residents captive to sell as slaves. Rabbi Akiva said to his disciples: See that all the things which happened to us - and seemed to be bad - were in fact for our benefit: Had we been sleeping in the town, we too would have been captured. Had they not been killed, the cock would have crowed and the donkey would have brayed. Similarly, the light would have attracted the attention of the bandits, and we too, would have been found.

4. It is a Halachic fact (see what the רי"ף, and the רא"ש, write there in the Gemorah in Brochos, and the טו"ר and the שו"ע in (אורה חיים סימן ר"ל) that, whatever happens, a man is obliged to recognize that whatever Hashem does is good for him.

5. Certainly, when something happens to us, and in our eyes it appears to be bad, we must pray to Hashem and ask Him to make the situation easier for us to bear. However, if a man prays, and the situation remains as it was, he can be sure that it is good for him - even if at the present moment he is unable appreciate where the goodness lies.

**CHAPTER 5**

1. There is another point that is important to stress. As you mentioned, you have been living in the same place for many years, and you tell me that you invested a great deal of effort, primarily mental effort, in trying to overcome the problems you were encountering so that could continue living there. This should prove to you that you are indeed in possession of powerful mental faculties.

2. Now Hashem is directing you towards a new role in your life. Without going in to the details of what exactly your new role entails, you can be sure that the general idea is to unite your soul with Hashem and to bring as much as possible of His spiritual Light into your soul,

Before the upheaval too, that was your goal in life. That has not changed. Now you still have to reach that same goal, but using different methods. The only thing that has changed is the way you arrive there; the destination for which you are heading remains identical.

Before taking on the new role, it is very important to assess your own abilities and know how to use them to the full.

3. In the Gemorah (בבא מציעא דף פ"ד עמ' ב) it explains in more detail. Rabbi Yochanan and Resh Lokish were two of the Sages of the Gemorah. Rabbi Yochanan had always been one of the Sages. Resh Lokish, however, had belonged to a band of thieves in his earlier years. Rabbi Yochanan once met him, and perceived that he had tremendous potential if his powers could be harnessed for spiritual goals. Rabbi Yochanan told Resh Lokish that his

strengths were given to him by Hashem with a purpose; all his passion and enthusiasm should be used for learning Torah. Resh Lokish heard and accepted Rabbi Yochanan's words. From then on he devoted his life to learning Torah and he became one of the leading Torah scholars of his generation.

4. From this incident we can see that even powers of a secular nature were given to a Jew by Hashem and can be used for serving Him. It can happen that those powers are as if 'captured' by non-productive or even negative forces. Nevertheless, a Jew always has within himself the strength to change direction, and to use those same faculties to further interests of holiness and serving Hashem.

### CHAPTER 6

1. You referred to another major problem. You outlined in detail how difficult your present situation is as far as housing and earning a living is concerned. You feel that as a result of those pressures your Avodas Hashem is suffering too.
2. Know that it is only natural for you to feel that way. Whenever a person is suffering from physical and material hardships, it is bound to have an adverse affect on his Avodas Hashem too.
3. However, a man is also in possession of the means to surmount those obstacles. There is one point in particular that can help him, not only overcome the difficulties, but to become even stronger in his Avodas Hashem in spite of them. To make use of it he has to be aware of one of the causes of the disturbances.
4. The Gemorah (מסכת סוכה דף נ"ב עמ' א) teaches us an important rule: An 'old man' said to Abaye that whoever is greater than his comrades has a greater Evil Inclination. (There is an opinion that the 'old man' who spoke to Abaye was Eliyohu Hanovi) It means that if there are two people, one of whom has a soul which is lofty and holy, while the other's soul is not so elevated, know that the former also has a stronger Yetzer Horah to contend with. He has to be on his guard and exercise more caution than the other – contrary to the belief most people have that a greater person with more holiness has less need to fear the attacks of the Yetzer Horah.

5. The obvious reasoning behind this principle is that in a battle the two sides have to be equally matched. If a great and holy man would have only a weak Yetzer Horah there would be no struggle. He would overcome it easily and it would not be considered a test for him.

In Kabbalistic writings there is an additional explanation. The idea of an evil inclination does not emanate from the soul itself; it is an external spiritual force which entices the soul. The soul of every Jew, without exception, is of itself pure and holy and without any trace of evil in it.

The reason why the Yetzer Horah tries to persuade the soul to sin is as follows: In heaven every Jew has a store of abundant spiritual wealth upon which revolves his success in this world and in the next. The object of the forces of evil is to 'steal' as much as they can of that spiritual wealth. The way they do so is by causing him ח"ו to stumble in sin.

Therefore when the forces of evil see a man with a lofty soul they exert greater pressure to vanquish him and 'steal' from his spiritual wealth. They know the value of the treasury of spiritual 'lights' awaiting him in heaven, and in the same way as a thief is more interested in stealing from a rich man, so the forces of evil are more interested in stealing from those who have the most abundant spiritual wealth.

6. The Vilna Gaon, in his explanation of the Zohar, adds that just as it is a fact that a greater person has to contend with a greater Yetzer Horah, so it is also true of those occasions in his life when a man receives a greater bounty of spiritual 'lights'. At

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those very times the Yetzer Horah will also be given extra strength to prevent him taking advantage of it.

7. From all the above we can conclude that there is a connection between the various kinds of troubles you are experiencing. It is not by chance that it frequently happens that at troubled times in his life, a person finds himself coping with hardships more difficult to deal with than any he faced before. The real reason behind it is that Hashem has increased his soul's spiritual powers, and for that very reason the forces of evil are battling more fiercely. They wish to 'steal' those spiritual 'lights' from him, and they use all the means at their disposal to disturb his Avodas Hashem

8. You will now be able to see your present situation from a new angle. The fact that you and your friends are involved in such a challenging state of affairs, is a sure sign that you have been given greater and loftier spiritual 'lights'. And together with them, you have been given the abilities to realize their potential. Your potential now for reaching greatness is much higher than in times of routine, and for that very reason the forces of evil are trying their utmost to hamper you in your Avodas Hashem.

If you exert yourself, and make every effort to overcome all the obstacles, you will see that your accomplishments in these fields of Avodas Hashem will far exceed your achievements in your regular everyday life.

## CHAPTER 7

1. Having clarified the above ideas, we are still left with the main question: What does Hashem want you to do now? What is the mission that He wants you to undertake, and for which He found it necessary to bring about such a drastic change in your circumstances?

I am very sorry, but I am afraid that I will have to disappoint you, since I am not in a position to give you a precise answer to that question. I do not know you personally, nor am I familiar with your qualifications and capabilities. Neither do I know anything about your background as regards to your way of life or the type of livelihood you are used to.

You will have to make the decision for yourself, or consult a Rav who is either intimately acquainted with you, or is prepared to sit with you and hear all the details and then help you to reach a decision.

2. However, even though I am unable to supply a detailed solution to all the aspects of your query, I can give you a general guiding rule: My advice to you is to always seek the way that will bring nearer to Hashem.

3. In practice that means that you should concentrate on the following points: - Learn as much Torah as you can and to the best of your ability.

- Tefilla - prayer - is no less important. Try harder to concentrate, and strive that each of your daily prayers should be as a prayer ought to be; Pour out your heart in supplication to Hashem.

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- Be careful with the mitzvos – careful to fulfill the positive mitzvos in all their detail, and equally careful to avoid all things which are forbidden.
- Help other people as much as you can, whether it is assistance in material matters or help with Avodas Hashem.
- Above all try to strengthen yourself and be extra careful about all matters pertaining to holiness, tznius and family purity, since these are the basics for coming closer to Hashem.

Your children's upbringing too, is of prime concern at times like these. It is only natural that if the situation is unstable and changes are taking place, it can result in the children's education getting somewhat neglected. Know that every minute you spend learning with your children earns you unimaginable reward and merit, which you would surely be prepared to go to any lengths not to forfeit. All the care you take for your children's spiritual welfare, especially matters of holiness and tznius, is very meritorious and something about which to be extremely vigilant.

4. Whoever is capable of influencing other people in any of the above matters should certainly make use of those abilities to help them and to gain more merit for himself.

## CHAPTER 8

1. We have mentioned a number of times in earlier chapters that our goal in life is to enhance our souls' connection with Hashem and to bring Hashem's spiritual Light into our souls.

This would seem a good place to elaborate on the subject from the writings of the Ramchal (in *אדיר במרום* and also in *נפש החיים* and others). He quotes from the Zohar and states that "Hashem, the Torah, and Yisroel are one."

2. This statement needs elucidation. How can we say that Hashem, the Torah and Yisroel are all one? Surely Hashem has no body and is in no way corporeal; He fills the entirety of both worlds and all which happens in them is caused by Him, the Torah is the holy Torah, and Yisroel are human beings. What do they have in common? How can one possibly say that they are all the same?

3. Before we come to the actual explanation, we will first mention the fact that man is made up of a body and a soul. We all know and feel what our body is. The soul, however, for all we know of its existence and feel its presence – the difference between a live and a dead man is unmistakable. Nevertheless, to define precisely of what the soul is made up, is extremely difficult.

To help us get some inkling, we can use the idea of the sun and the rays of light that emanate from it. Those rays of light are drawn from the sun and get their power from it and exist only as an extension of the sun. When you put a piece of wood between the sun and those rays of light, no rays come through

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to the other side of the wood. (- referring to what we see of those rays of sunlight)

Similarly a Jewish soul emanates from Hashem and draws its whole existence from Him. (Obviously the comparison to the sun is only to help us understand the point that our soul draws all its existence from Hashem – the difference between Hashem and the concept of a soul is too immense for us to grasp, and can in no way be likened to the sun and the rays which come out of it with less power than it itself has.)

In fact everything in the world draws its existence from Hashem. (We will not elaborate on that point here.) Nevertheless the way we see that the soul of a Jew comes from Hashem is more direct and more easily discernable.

4. To return to the dictum that Hashem, the Torah, and Yisroel are one: It means that the soul of a Jew is a manifestation of spiritual inspiration emanating from Hashem's bounty. (In Kabbalistic writings, Hashem's wonderful spiritual bounty is called **אור** or **הארה** - light, illumination, inspiration. One reason for this is that in our materialistic world the most spiritual substance we can observe is light, and we perceive it as something beneficial. There are also more profound reasons which we will not go into here.) Our souls are made up of Hashem's spiritual bounty, and in that way it can be said that Hashem and Yisroel are one – He is the source of the bounty and the soul is the recipient of the same bounty.

5. We have attempted to explain how it is possible to say that Hashem's Shechina and Yisroel are one. We shall now refer to the Torah which our Sages included as part of the same unit -

'Hashem, the Torah, and Yisroel are one,' - We will preface our remarks with an explanation of the possuk נפש עמל עמלה לו – 'the soul which toils, toils for itself.' The Sages comment on the word עמל - toil – appearing twice in the verse, and explain that the man toils in one place and at the same time the Torah is toiling for him in another place. Rashi explains that when a man learns Torah, the Torah turns and addresses Hashem and asks Him to help him understand the Torah. From this we can deduce that the Torah is not only the Sefer Torah that we have in this world; the same Torah is also a spiritual entity which exists in the Upper Worlds and is able to ask things from Hashem. (Think of it in the same way as one thinks of מלאכים - angels - spiritual beings whose existence we all acknowledge.)

6. Now we can try to understand how our Sages could say that the Torah is also one with Hashem and Yisroel. It means that Hashem so arranged it in His world that the bounty that comes from Him to our souls reaches us via the spiritual channel of the Torah. The formation of the spiritual bounty of which Jewish souls are made up, is produced by the bounty of the holy Torah, and also comes to us through the bounty of the holy Torah - the same Torah which itself is a manifestation of Hashem's spiritual bounty. (This is how the words of the Ramchal are explained in the sefer אדיר במרום, and while possibly not accurate to the last detail, I have given over the general idea of what he wrote.)

7. There is another point to mention. The most powerful and deep-seated yearning ingrained in a man's soul is to bond with its roots. This is the means by which it fortifies itself and absorbs more spiritual bounty. The way to do so is, as we said, through extra Torah. Learning more Torah and keeping all that

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is written in the Torah. (and all branches of Avodas Hashem are included: keeping mitzvos and avoiding sin – both mitzvos concerning Hashem and mitzvos involving people - and prayer too. All are considered Torah for the purpose of receiving Hashem's spiritual bounty.) Through the light of the Torah, a man can bring upon himself more of the spiritual plenty from Above.

8. If a person thinks about these matters, it will awaken in his heart an intense longing to learn Torah and do what Hashem requires of him. He now understands that only thus can his soul unite with the source from which it originates, and then be granted extra spiritual Light of the same substance as that of which it is made up. This is indeed the innermost yearning of a person's soul and is more truly a part of his being than all the things he desires in this world. In the first chapter of the Mesilas Yeshorim too, it says that since the soul is a spiritual entity which comes from Above, the only real pleasure it feels is in the spiritual Light of Hashem's Presence.

## CHAPTER 9

1. Whenever a Jew performs a mitzvah - whatever mitzvah and whichever way he does it - the above two results transpire; his bond with Hashem is reinforced, and more of Hashem's spiritual Light enters his soul.

2. In the **אורח חיים** and in the **sefer שער רוח הקודש** the above idea is mentioned. There it says that when a man learns Torah, prays, does a mitzvah, avoids transgressing, or any other form of Avodas Hashem, he should get used to having these two ideas – of uniting his soul with its Source and receiving more of Hashem's spiritual bounty - in mind. When he learns, prays or does mitzvos, with the express intention that they should bring Hashem's spiritual light into his soul and unite his soul with Hashem ( - it is true that the soul is always fused with Hashem, but there is always a possibility for the bond to be strengthened still more), the effect will be more powerful, and the Light absorbed into his soul will be of a more intense quality.

3. As well as the actual benefit of receiving the extra 'light', there is another advantage too. He is given an extra reward in that Hashem makes him aware of the spiritual Light that has entered his soul. (It is important to note that although this awareness might come to him each time he serves Hashem with these ideas in mind, it may also be that he is aware of the spiritual Light only on some occasions, or possibly only after having these intentions a number of times, or over an extended period of time.) The awareness will cause him to develop a tremendous drive to learn more Torah and do more mitzvos.

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4. It is not so difficult to accustom oneself to serving Hashem with these two ideas in mind. If unable to do so all the time, one should at least make an effort to do so from time to time - maybe once a day, or several times a day.

5. From the writings of the Ari HaKadosh (in his sefer **מבוא שערים**) and the Vilna Gaon, (explaining the Zohar to Parshas Pikudei) it can be understood that these **כוונות** - concentrating on the ideas we mentioned above - are the core of all the Torah of Kabbala and they lie behind all great achievements in Avodas Hashem.

## CHAPTER 10

1. There may be people who are inclined to think that, even though true, these are commendable ideas and forms of serving Hashem, but they belong to the sphere of those distinguished people, whose souls are exceptionally great and uplifted above the average. They consider themselves ordinary people who have little to do with such lofty ideals.

Know that it is a fallacy; for each and every Jewish person has a lofty soul. Deep within himself each one of us has an earnest desire to come closer to Hashem. It is true that some may feel it more often than others, but that spiritual yearning does exist within every Jew.

2. Our Sages tell us (in the Medrash at the end of Parshas Toldos) that when the Beis Hamikdosh was destroyed, the non-jews who were responsible for the destruction wanted a Jew to be the first to go in and steal an item from the Beis Hamikdosh (presumably to humiliate them as much as possible). A Jew by name of Yosef, took upon himself to be the one to go in first. He went in and came out with a lamp. The enemy, however, did not approve of his selection, and they told him to go in again and choose something more appropriate. To this, however, he refused. "It is not enough that I have angered my G-d once; should I anger Him again?" They tried to persuade him, first with promises of wealth or a position of rank, then with threats of torture and death, but he remained adamant. In the end they did torture him to death. When he was being tortured, he cried out, but not in pain. He

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cried: "Woe to me that I have angered my Creator. Woe to me that I have angered my Creator."

3. The question one finds oneself asking is: From where did he draw the spiritual strength to change so suddenly? A short time before, he had been prepared to do an extremely contemptible act; to enter the Beis Hamikdosh and steal. At a time when the Beis Hamikdosh had just been destroyed and so many of his fellow-Jews were being killed, wounded, dying of hunger and taken into captivity, he was ready to desert his people. To be ready to collaborate with the enemy at such a time by going into the holy Beis Hamikdosh to take something for himself, is an extremely despicable act. Yet within moments he underwent a radical change and was prepared to give up his life for Kiddush Hashem - and not only to give his life, but as he was dying his only concern was that he had angered Hashem. How can it be explained?

4. The answer is that within every Jew there exists a holy Jewish soul with a single desire; to do Hashem's will. However, the soul is sent to this world with two spiritual 'companions' - the Yetzer Ha'tov and the Yetzer Horah. The latter entices the soul to do things which are forbidden. It can even happen that the soul is taken over entirely by the Yetzer Horah, and works in its service. Nevertheless the soul itself always remains essentially holy: Even a Jew capable of going into the Beis Hamikdosh to steal, could revolutionize his attitude instantly - because the soul of a Jew at its true core always remains extremely holy, and retains all the longing to serve only Hashem whatever the consequences.

5. Every Jew should work on himself to ensure that the holy soul within him is the driving force behind his actions and his behaviour. If he succeeds, he can be sure that whatever he does is a part of Hashem's service.

6. There are several aids to achieving this goal. Of the main ones there are two points. Firstly, be aware of the extent of the wonderful goodness that is involved and the potential it has to help one reach elevated spiritual levels of Avodas Hashem. The second point is to know the tremendous good that emanates from everything positive a person does, whether it involves actions, words, intentions, thoughts or desires.

7. Without doubt, awareness of these facts is enough to give a man a tremendous boost. It will give the strength to withstand all the trials and temptations that life presents to him. He will find it easier to serve his Creator using all his faculties to their full, and at all times of the day and night, and whatever the circumstances.

Ideally, it could even be that a thorough knowledge of these ideas would result in a world where mistakes do not happen and no-one sins. Usually, however, people are unable to fully comprehend all that is involved in this attitude to life.

Nevertheless you should always try to bear this attitude in mind. For even if your appreciation is not absolute, the more you know of these concepts and the more you contemplate on how powerful they are, so will your desire to serve your Creator intensify.

**CHAPTER 11**

1. You asked about the prayers too. You feel that so many people were praying that something should not happen, and it appears as if those prayers were ineffective or ignored, since in the end, the scenario you were trying so hard to prevent, did take place in all its severity. You would like to know what happened to all those prayers.

2. It is important to know that there is no such a thing as a prayer which goes unanswered. However, Hashem does know what is good for us even better than we ourselves do, and He decides to what end the prayer will serve us best. Not a single prayer ever gets 'lost'. You will most certainly reap the benefit of each and every one of your prayers, both in this world and in the next.

3. In Parshas Va'eschanan we read how Moshe Rabbeinu pleaded with Hashem to be allowed to go to Eretz Yisroel. Our Sages say that he prayed 515 prayers - the numerical value of ואתחנן - and even after so many prayers was refused entry into the Land. We certainly do not think that our prayers can achieve more than Moshe's did. Surely prayers offered by Moshe Rabbeinu to Hashem should have been answered. What happened to all those 515 prayers?

4. The Gemorah (ברכות ל"ב ע"ב) says that from this Parsha in ואתחנן we can learn to appreciate the power of prayer. Moshe Rabbeinu, for all the wondrous deeds he had done, still had to pray for what he wanted. Even if Hashem did not give him all he asked for, his prayers nevertheless had far-reaching



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וַאֲתַחֲנֶן. There it says that from the plains of Moav, Moshe went up to the highest peak of Har Nevo, and Hashem showed him the whole land, "from Gilad to Dan, the whole of Naftali, the land of Efraim and Menashe, all the land of Yehuda until the last sea, the Negev, the vale of Yericho the city of palms, as far a Tzoar." There is no natural way by which human eyes could see such a vast area from a mountain-top on the opposite bank the river. Obviously it was supernatural spiritual 'sight' that Moshe was granted.

7. Rashi ad loc at the end of Devarim says even more. He says that not only did Hashem show Moshe all the physical regions of the Land; He also showed him what was going to happen there in the future. He told Moshe what would befall Klal Yisroel throughout the generations, until the end of days at the time of תְּחִית הַמָּתִים. Without a doubt, this could only be if it was spiritual 'sight' with which Moshe saw.

8. Hashem showed it all to Moshe because Moshe was a tremendously great spiritual personality. Anything Hashem showed him meant a fusion of Moshe's spirituality with the spiritual lights of what he 'saw'. The resultant increase in holiness and in the intensity of the holiness, can be felt to this day; we still reap untold benefit from Moshe 'seeing' the Land and the future generations of Am Yisroel.

9. In the same vein we can understand a possuk at the end of Sefer Devarim about Yehoshua: וַיְהִי וְשַׁע בֶּן נוּן מָלֵא רוּחַ חֵכְמָה כִּי סָמַךְ - 'Yehoshua was filled with a spirit of wisdom because Moshe placed his hands upon him.' The 'spirit of wisdom' that Yehoshua received via Moshe is surely something

more lofty and awesome than we can possibly grasp. The Torah tells us that it was through Moshe placing his hands on him that he received it. (In Parshas Pinchos it says that Hashem commanded Moshe to put his hand (sing.) on Yehoshua's head, and Moshe placed both hands on him. Rashi comments that Hashem commanded him to do so with one hand, and Moshe Rabbeinu gave with a 'generous eye,' and put both his hands on Yehoshua's head.)

Here we see proof of the strength of Moshe's spiritual faculties: At Hashem's command, he placed his hands on Yehoshua's head, and Yehoshua was filled with a wonderfully elevated spirit of wisdom.

10. To return to the subject under discussion: It was as a result of his prayers - to enter Eretz Yisroel - that Moshe was allowed to 'see' Eretz Yisroel and what would happen to all later generations.

Even though the prayers were not answered literally as Moshe had asked - he asked to be allowed to enter the Land; in answer Hashem let him see it - we see that tremendous benefit for Moshe and for all Yisroel did come from those prayers.

We will add a comment of Rashi on a possuk in Parshas Va'eschanan. Moshe beseeched Hashem to let him enter the Land, and Hashem answered: ' רב לך - it is a great deal for you.' Rashi (second explanation) says that in answer to his request to enter the land, Hashem was telling Moshe that there are matters of greater importance in store for him. It could well be that those 'matters of greater importance' that Moshe was now being promised, resulted from his prayers.

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Several of the points mentioned in the previous chapters could do with elaboration. However this article is already lengthy enough, and you are advised to refer to the sefer התקרבות להשם where a number of the points are discussed at length.

11. The essential significance of every prayer should now be obvious. The importance of Tefilla in your present trying circumstances can not be over-emphasized. Pray to Hashem and ask Him to help you see success in all your physical and spiritual endeavors; housing, work, and all else they entail.

People often mistakenly think that prayer is mainly for spiritual needs. They are inclined to believe that, as regards their material needs, 'whatever will be, will be' and prayer is not so necessary.

Know that it is not so. A person should always pray for whatever seems important to him, and for whatever he feels that he needs. Shemone Esre is a pivotal element of our prayers, and yet our Sages saw fit to include in it a number of requests for our material needs.

One should always bear in mind that everything - whether personal or general - depends only on Hashem. He listens to our prayers, and we have to turn to Him for whatever we want. The more one puts of one's heart and soul into praying, the more effective it will be.

I understand that your present predicament includes problems which involve your children's upbringing. In this area too, prayer is essential. Pray to Hashem with all your heart and soul. Pray that your children should always go the right way - the way of Torah and mitzvos. Pray to Him as much as you can and whenever you can, for there are no limits to what a Jew can accomplish with his prayers.

## CHAPTER 12

1. You put forward the argument that in your previous position you were able to be of service to Klal Yisroel. The other things you do are all private concerns. Therefore, you feel that now you are focusing only on your own interests.
2. The answer is that whatever one does of Avodas Hashem benefits Klal Yisroel. In the sefer נפש החיים it explains that when Hashem created the universe, He created not only the world we know, but also numerous worlds which are higher than ours. When a Jew does what Hashem wants of him, it generates a wonderful spiritual light in those upper worlds, which in turn reflects blessings and success on to the whole of Klal Yisroel. The converse is also true ח"ו - a Jew who sins causes harm in the upper worlds and all Klal Yisroel lose by it.
3. There are two things in particular that an individual can do to bring Hashem's bounty to all Yisroel.

The first is learning Torah: In the sefer Nefesh Ha'Chayim (שער) (פרק י"א והלאה) it explains at length an important point in the way Hashem created the world. Hashem established the world in such a way that the bounty of spiritual light that Yisroel receives is largely dependent on how much each individual Jew learns Torah. It is advisable to refer to the sefer and read it for yourself. (There are passages there from the Zohar which may seem difficult; however, most recent editions of the Nefesh HaChayim include an easy-to-understand translation of the excerpts from the Zohar.)

4. The second point which brings Hashem's bounty to Klal Yisroel involves exercising supreme caution about all matters concerning holiness and tznius. The Medrash in Parshas VaYeshev says that in the merit of Yosef's extreme vigilance in these spheres, the sea split for all Yisroel at the Yam Suf. The Vilna Gaon, quoting the Zohar, says that this Medrash means that had Yosef failed, the sea would not have split and all Yisroel would have drowned in the sea. Thus we see how a single person's vigilance was capable of effecting salvation for all Klal Yisroel.

In the Talmud Yerushalmi, our Sages relate about a woman called Kimchis who was noteworthy for her modesty and tznius. She was rewarded with seven sons, each of whom became a Kohen Gadol. The Kohen Gadol is the one through whom atonement comes to Klal Yisroel on Yom Kippur - and surely that is an aspect of bringing Hashem's blessing to all Yisroel. In that generation, it came to Yisroel in the merit of a woman who was extremely careful about all matters of modesty and tznius.

It should be noted that all we have discussed in this chapter includes keeping the laws of family purity as conscientiously as possible. This is one of the ways in which an individual can earn merit for Klal Yisroel. (refer to the sefer *להשם פרק י"ז* (התקרבות להשם פרק י"ז))

5. In conclusion: Try and intensify your Avodas Hashem as much as you can. If you lay the emphasis on the two points we have been discussing - learning Torah and vigilance about matters of holiness and tznius - you will bring an abundance of all blessings to Klal Yisroel. Even more so, if your personality puts you into a position of being able to influence others - again, with the stress on these two areas - the whole of Klal Yisroel will most certainly profit from your behaviour.

## CHAPTER 13

1. All forms of Avodas Hashem are beneficial for Klal Yisroel. They also all earn untold reward for the person concerned, in this world and in the next. Additionally, Avodas Hashem is the only true spiritual food upon which a man's soul can thrive even in this world, and therefore is essential for it.

2. In Chapter 42 of Tehillim it says: כאיל תערוג על אפיקי מים כן נפשי כאלקים תערוג אליך אלקים. צמאה נפשי לקל חי מתי אבוא ואראה פני אלקים. "As a deer yearns for deep waters, so my soul yearns for You, Hashem. My soul thirsts for The Living G-d. When will I come and see Hashem's Presence?"

In the world that Hashem created there are two different kinds of created beings. There are objects like stone and metals which remain as they were made and need no extra nutrition to continue their existence. The other form that Hashem created are the plants and animals which do need food to thrive. Man belongs to the latter category.

From these verses we should realize that a man consists of a body and a soul, and both need nourishment. We all know about the food that the body needs. David Hamelech is telling us that the soul too, needs its form of sustenance. Food for the soul is the spiritual light which emanates from Hashem and permeates a man's soul.

Creatures living in the wilderness will search for pools of water. They were created with that instinct because they need water to survive. Our soul too, was created with an instinctive yearning for Hashem.

## **DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES**

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3. If a man does not give his soul the contact with Hashem that it longs for, it - and he - will suffer acutely. Even if he thinks he has everything he wants in the world, his soul will remain unsatisfied and be tormented by indescribable distress.

4. Only if a man approaches Hashem sincerely and thus enables His holy spiritual light to permeate his soul, will it truly come into its own. To be the recipient of Hashem's light, one has to draw himself nearer to Hashem - by learning Torah, praying to Him, doing His mitzvos, and keeping away from sin. When you do so, Hashem's holy spiritual light will fill your soul, and the lofty goal for which man was brought into this world will be accomplished.

## CHAPTER 14

1. We shall conclude with a passage from the Yalkut Shimoni on Megilas Eichah. When the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the Bnei Yisroel were exiled to Babylon. Hashem instructed Yirmiyahu to go to Moshe Rabbeinu, who was buried in Har Nevo, and tell him what had happened. He did so, and Moshe said that he wants to go and see the exiles. Yirmiyahu replied that the way is littered with corpses and it is impossible. Moshe Rabbeinu replied: Nevertheless, let us go. They went, and came upon the exiles next to the Euphrates River. When Am Yisroel saw them, they recognized Moshe Rabbeinu (- it is indeed remarkable that all the exiles were worthy of seeing Moshe Rabbeinu who was no longer alive) who came with Yirmiyahu, and they rejoiced: They thought that Moshe had come to redeem them again, as he had redeemed their ancestors from Egypt. A Voice was heard from Heaven announcing that the exile could not yet end. Moshe told them: To return from the exile immediately is not possible, since the decree of exile has been finalized. Moshe gave them a blessing; he blessed them that Hashem should soon bring them back from the exile. When they heard his words, they all wept long and bitter weeping, until their cries went up to Heaven. A possuk in Tehillim refers to this incident; על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו - 'By the rivers of Babylon, where we sat and we wept.'

2. There is a lot that needs explaining in this Medrash. We will make an attempt to clarify one point. The fact that the exiles were all worthy of seeing Moshe Rabbeinu was a very great z'chus, which undoubtedly had a profound spiritual impact on

their souls. We would like to understand what it was that made them worthy of such a great revelation.

3. The answer is that when Hashem brought them into such a tragic situation as the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh and exile, He increased their spiritual vitality at the same time to enable them to survive it.

4. The Medrash says that immediately afterwards, they wept: 'בכו בכיה גדולה מאוד' - they cried 'a very great cry' which went up and penetrated the Heavens.

The spiritual energy that resulted from seeing Moshe Rabbeinu and the blessing they received from him, manifested itself in increased powers of prayer.

As mentioned in several places, Moshe Rabbeinu was the 'Pillar of Prayer' - עמוד התפילה - He stood in prayer for Am Yisroel for 40 consecutive days and nights - a total of nine hundred and sixty hours. His prayers were so powerful that they saved Am Yisroel from total destruction.

When the exiles met Moshe Rabbeinu, they received from him powers of prayer that they did not have before. They immediately cried out in prayer, and their prayers were so effective that they went straight up to the highest realms of the Upper Worlds.

5. Obviously it is not possible to compare any tragedy to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh and the exile of our whole nation. However the Vilna Gaon writes that whatever is written in the Chumash about Klal Yisroel refers also to every Jew in every generation. Even without fully understanding his words, we should realize that nothing that happens to us is simply as it

appears at surface level. Everything that occurs involves lofty spiritual dimensions too.

It follows that the underlying concept must be equally relevant when it comes to problems of an individual community, or even a single Jew who has lost his home and place of work. Know that if Hashem does things like these to you, He will simultaneously give you spiritual energies that you did not have before.

In the Gemorah (שבת דף י"ב ע"ב) it says that The Shechina - Hashem's holy Presence - rests at the head of a sickbed. However, it may well be that the sick person is entirely unaware of the forces of holiness that have come to him. Instead of appreciating that Hashem is close to him, he might just get upset and depressed, thinking only of his misfortune and his illness.

You can be quite sure that whenever troubles come, Hashem grants you correspondingly great spiritual powers, the like of which you never experienced before. Make use of these new energies to strengthen your ties to spirituality and to draw yourself closer to Hashem. If you are in any way capable of influencing people and encouraging them to improve their Avodas Hashem, you should help others too.

If you follow this advice you will find that the whole picture changes. At first the circumstances appeared to be so trying and conducive only to spiritual decline. Now you will see them as a ladder for you to climb - a ladder for spiritual growth the like of which you never knew before.



## **TRADITIONAL EDUCATION**

### **Introduction**

1. Teaching and learning with pupils entails making use of a wide variety of teaching methods and techniques. Instructing young children is not the same as teaching older children, and the methods of imparting knowledge to teen-agers or adult Avreichim will differ yet again. In the following chapters, some sections refer to all categories of pupils and others to only one or more. From the context it should be readily understood which are general principles and which apply only to a specific age-group.

Most of what is written here applies equally to parents bringing up their children and to teachers instructing their pupils.

2. Everything that is brought here was culled from the writings of our Sages and the traditional interpretation of their words, as has been given over from one generation to the next. Nothing חדש comes from any other source.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PRIME IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING WITH CHILDREN, AND THE RESOURCES THAT SHOULD GO INTO EDUCATION.

#### Section 1: The Gemorah in Bava Basra about the possuk in Daniel.

1. In the book of Daniel, in chapter 12, there is a possuk: והמשכילים יזהירו כזוהר הרקיע ומצדיקי הרבים ככוכבים לעולם ועד. 'The wise will shine forth with the brilliance of the sky, and those who make the multitudes righteous like the stars, for ever and ever.'

2. The Gemorah (בבא בתרא דף ה' עמ' ב') explains this possuk, and says that 'those who make the multitudes righteous' refers to teachers who instruct young children.

3. The way to understand the Gemorah's comment is that the stars that shine in the sky look very small to us, although in actual fact they are enormous. Only because of the vast distance which separates them from the earth do they appear small.

4. Similarly, teachers are doing vitally important work. The impact their teaching has on their pupils' souls is tremendous. One reason is that it is natural for impressions formed at an early age to be etched deeply into a young child's mind and continue to influence him throughout his life.

A second reason is rooted in spiritual causes. There is a special spiritual factor that causes the learning of his younger

years to effect a child's soul so profoundly that it can be of assistance to him all through his life. The spiritual acquisitions of his youth continue to raise his spiritual level and shape his behaviour in later years.

5. However there is a time-gap between the years when a child learns from his teacher, and the later years of his life which are built upon the foundations of that learning. The distance is so great that people usually fail to connect the two. Consequently, learning with young children is accorded relatively minor importance.

The possuk we quoted from Daniel - and the Gemorah that clarifies it - reminds us that it is not so, and that learning with children is indeed of major significance.

6. There is more to be derived from the above possuk about the stars in the heavens. Not only are the stars much bigger than they appear to a man standing on earth and looking at them; many of them are even larger than the earth itself.

We often see people who have made impressive achievements in the fields of Torah and Avodas Hashem, and we attribute it entirely to their own efforts. We assume that their elevated spiritual level is the outcome of years of concentrated efforts to learn as much Torah as they can, and to serve Hashem in every way and at all times.

However, it is indeed possible that they owe a high proportion of their greatness to a teacher who taught them when they were children. It could be that the imprint a teacher left on their souls during the impressionable years of their childhood, served as the root from which their greatness grew. It

was the teacher's encouragement that drew the child's soul closer to Hashem and in later years the resultant greatness becomes evident.

More than any other causes that we can see and know, the source of success is likely to be rooted in the positive spiritual assets one received from a teacher when young.

A teacher can indeed have so profound an influence on a child that years later such wonderful fruits grow from the seeds he planted. If so, we can be quite sure that the teacher too will reap the reward for the lofty spiritual level his pupil reaches when he grows up.

## **Section 2: The same Gemorah in Bava Basra about Rav Shmuel bar Shilat's devotion to his pupils**

1. The above Gemorah comments that the ultimate example of a teacher who can be compared to the stars is Rav Shmuel bar Shilat. Rav, who was Rav Shmuel bar Shilat's spiritual guide, once saw him standing in the garden of his house.

Rav asked Rav Shmuel: Have you abandoned your vocation? I remember you teaching your pupils without any interruption. How do you now have time to stand in your garden?

Rav Shmuel bar Shilat answered him: For thirteen years I have not seen this garden at all, and even now, I am on my way to my pupils and thinking about them.

The Gemorah is telling us about a teacher who was so dedicated to his pupils and so preoccupied with their needs, that for years he did not have even a moment to step into his own garden.

2. One lesson we should learn from this Gemorah is that often when a teacher feels that he doesn't have the strength to exert himself fully for his pupils, it is because he does not appreciate the full significance of learning with young children. Therefore he finds it difficult to give himself over totally to his pupils' needs, especially as teaching young children is not an easy task. They are inclined to be lazy and interested more in playing up than paying attention to the teacher. If the teacher does not know the value of his work, he is unlikely to be able to give of himself as much as is necessary to do the job in an exemplary manner.

The Gemorah tells us that it was because Rav Shmuel bar Shilat was aware of the enormity of the responsibility of a teacher's position - their greatness is comparable to the stars, as the Gemorah explains - that he was so dedicated a teacher.

### **Section 3: The Gemorah which says that the world rests on the Torah learnt by young children**

1. There is a Gemorah ( in שבת דף קי"ט ע"ב ) which discusses the significance of Torah learnt by young children:

Resh Lokish quoted Rabbi Yehuda HaNossi as saying that the world exists only because of the הבל פיהם של תינוקות של בית רבן - the words uttered by young children learning Torah.

Rav Pappa said to Abaye: Is our learning - the learning of Sages - not up to that standard? Abaye answered that words of Torah untainted by sin can not be compared to Torah learnt by people who have sinned.

It must be borne in mind that the concept of 'sin' in relation to the Sages of the Talmud refers to a fault so slight that we would not even perceive it as such. Yet when Torah is learnt without even so minor a blemish, it is preferable.

2. In the above Gemorah Resh Lokish quotes another saying of Rabbi Yehuda: One does not stop children learning Torah even to build the Beis Hamikdash

#### **Section 4: More about the importance of Torah learnt by children**

1. There are two reasons why it is essential to learn Torah with children. The first is the reason mentioned in the above Gemorah in שבת.

In a number of places we come across the idea that the world draws its very existence from the Torah learnt by Am Yisroel. Refer to the Gemorah in א ע"ח ע"א and the sefer Nefesh HaChayim (שער ד) where the concept is discussed at length. It is explained that the most powerful Torah, is Torah learnt by young children whose souls are still pure and wholly free of sin.

2. The second idea is discussed by the Ramchal: A man's soul is made up of spiritual 'light' which Hashem reflects on to us. Together with the 'light', He sends two 'companions', the Yetzer Hatov and the Yetzer Horah. (Neither is an intrinsic part of the

soul; they merely come with it - see the sefer כ"ו שער חיים, (for more details.) Each moment when a man is learning Torah he attracts more of the spiritual 'light' to his soul, and this light makes his soul stronger and gives it more power to serve Hashem and be saved from the Yetzer Horah.

Hashem put into our nature that the stronger and more dangerous forms of the Yetzer Horah come to a man only when he is older. A child does not have the Yetzer Horah in all the manifestations that an adult has. When a child learns Torah, its spiritual 'light' penetrates his soul. If this light of spirituality comes to him before the more powerful Yetzer Horah does, it has the unique quality of being able to watch over him all his life, and protect him from the Yetzer Horah.

3. Many people think that the main purpose of learning with a small child is to get him used to learning Torah. The true learning, they think, will come when grows up and understands what he is learning.

They could not be more mistaken. Beginning from childhood, every moment of learning Torah, is a very great mitzva, and fills a person's soul with spiritual 'light' which will be his for all his life.

4. The Ramchal expresses the same idea, but with even more forceful application: A man's spiritual prowess when he matures depends very much upon the spiritual lights accumulated in his childhood. The more Torah he learnt as a child, the more spiritual strength his soul will have when he grows up. The spiritual lights of what he learnt as a child remain with him throughout his life and always give him a natural advantage over

the Yetzer Horah. (See also the Vilna Gaon's commentary to the Zohar to Parshas Lech Lecha about good deeds a man does before his Bar Mitzva which come to his assistance in the fight against the Yetzer Horah and in striving to perfect himself afterwards.)

5. However, there is no call for despair even for someone who did not learn Torah as a child; Hashem will help him, as indeed He helps everyone. There is a well-known Gemorah (ברכות ב' ע"ד ל"ד ע"ב) which says that "where Ba'alei Teshuva stand, even perfectly righteous Tzaddikim are unable to stand." Rabbeinu Yonah (at the beginning of his sefer Sha'arei Teshuva) tells us that if someone repents, Hashem will come to his assistance and grant him supernatural strength to help him overcome the Yetzer Horah.

Nevertheless, whenever one can learn Torah with a child it is essential to be aware of the importance of doing so. Always remember that it equips him with spiritual vitality which will stand him in good stead all his life.

**Section 5: The purpose of learning with children is to instill in them feelings of love for the Torah and for doing Mitzvos, and to teach them to appreciate their importance**

1. The idea of teaching Torah to children is not only to impart knowledge of the holy Torah to them, but also to inspire them with an intense feeling of love for learning Torah and doing mitzvos. A great deal of attention should be paid to this point.

2. Similarly, the teacher should strive to give over to his pupils a strong sense of the importance of learning Torah and keeping mitzvos, until it takes firm root in their hearts. They should know that Torah and mitzvos are the most important things in life.

In the first chapter of the Mesilas Yeshorim it says that being close to Hashem is the only good that there is. Anything else, even if it appears good to people, is in reality insignificant and of no value.

It follows that whenever a person comes across anything that might bring him closer to Hashem, he should run after it and take hold of it with all his might. Conversely, if he knows of anything that can distance him from Hashem, he should flee from it as he would flee from a fire.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHY THE TORAH REFERS TO PUPILS AS SONS, AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHER

#### Section 1.

1. In the first paragraph of Krias Shema, in פרשת ואתחנן , it says: **ושננתם לבניך** - "You should teach your sons." Similarly in the second paragraph, **והיה אם שמוע**, which is in פרשת עקב it says: **ולמדתם אותם את בניכם** - "You should teach them to your sons." This is the source of the mitzva for a father to teach his sons Torah.

2. Many of the commentaries ( ספרי בדברים, רמב"ם בהלכות תלמוד ( תורה, טור, יורה דעה, שולחן ערוך ) say that this mitzva does not apply only to a father and his duty to learn with his sons. They explain that the mitzva is for every knowledgeable member of Yisroel to teach pupils, since they are also called 'sons'.

The obligation to learn with one's own sons does, however, take precedence over learning with other children.

3. The mitzva for a teacher to learn with children other than his own, is not written explicitly in the Torah. It is included in the mitzva to teach one's sons. We will try to discover why teaching one's sons and teaching other students are not reckoned as two separate mitzvos.

4. The commentaries explain that teaching pupils and helping them increase their knowledge of Torah and their fear of Hashem demands full commitment on the part of the teacher . Only if he takes his pupils' progress to heart in the same way as

he does that of his own sons, will he be able to devote himself wholeheartedly to the holy task of being a teacher of young children and to see success in his work.

5. Everyone knows how hard a father tries to encourage his sons to learn Torah and to gain Yiras Shomayim and how much he cares and worries that they should succeed. To the same extent does a good teacher care about his students and worry about their welfare and their progress in Torah and Yiras Shomayim.

6. It is known that many of the students who learnt from HaGaon HaRav Nosson Tzvi Finkel - the Alte of Slobodka - became world-renowned Talmidei Chachomim. The reason is not hard to discover: Very often, when HaRav Nosson Tzvi saw a student who was having problems with his learning, he would fast for days trying to arouse Hashem's mercy so that the student should succeed.

Obviously such a course of action is not demanded of every teacher, nor would health considerations allow anyone to do so. The Alte of Slabodka's example does, however, demonstrate the lengths to which a person should go - each according to his abilities - to ensure that his pupils succeed. If he can not fast, there are other ways and means of striving to help his pupils take their Torah studies seriously and understand what they learn.

Prayer is another factor which should not be ignored; a teacher should constantly pray for his pupils' success.

## Section 2.

1. We mentioned above that the Torah refers to pupils as sons, and we explained the simplest and most straightforward reason for it.

The Vilna Gaon (in his commentary to the ספר היצירה and to the תיקוני זוהר ) adds a truly awesome comment to the subject. He writes that when a teacher is teaching students, there is another process - in addition to the Torah knowledge that he passes on to them - involved as well. At the same time, he also brings down from the Upper Worlds sections of their souls that they were not in possession of previously, and transfers them to his students..

2. For this reason too, the Torah considers students to be a man's sons. Just as a the father brought the major part of his child's soul to the world, so the teacher provides the child with additional portions of his soul.

3. The practical implications are very significant. We explained that the teacher adds to his pupil's soul: Those additional sections of the soul which reach the pupils through their teacher can vary greatly in quality. The teacher's Yiras Shomayim, the purity of his intentions, and his holiness, all influence those parts of the soul that he generates for his pupils. The quality of the new section of the pupils' souls is dependent on the spiritual level of the teacher - and that acts as a decisive factor determining the degree of success his students will see in their Torah studies and other forms of Avodas Hashem all their lives.

4. Nor is that all. The teacher's behaviour even when he is not with his pupils has its effect on them too. The more his own life is imbued with holiness, and the more sincere his Avodas Hashem is, the stronger his spiritual powers will become. As a result, the additional elements he brings to his pupils' souls will also be holier and more elevated.

5. In Malachi, chapter 2, it says that **כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך ה' צבקות הוא** - "For the lips of a Kohen retain knowledge, and Torah is sought from his mouth, since he is a **מלאך** (- an angel, a messenger -) of Hashem the G-d of hosts."

There is a Gemorah ( **חגיגה דף ט"ו ע"ב** ) in which Rava bar bar Chana, quoting Rav Yochanan, tells us how to understand the possuk: If the Rav is righteous and can be likened to an angel, learn Torah from him, and if he is not righteous enough to be likened to an angel, do not learn Torah from him.

This can be understood simply to mean that if a teacher is not extremely righteous, his student are prone to pick up negative or harmful habits and behaviour characteristics from him. As well as that, if his Yiras Shomayim is in any way lacking, it could also be that he does not pay enough attention to the accuracy of the finer details of the Torah he teaches.

The Vilna Gaon reveals to us a more profound level of understanding why one ought learn only from a Rav or teacher who is a Tzaddik: We mentioned earlier that together with the Torah he teaches them, a teacher adds new dimensions to his pupils souls. We made it clear that the greater a Tzaddik the teacher is, the more elevated and purified are the parts of the soul that his pupils receive. For that reason too it is

recommended to learn only from a Rav who is a righteous Tzaddik.

6. The above Gemorah tells a student to learn Torah only from a Rav who is a Tzaddik. We can deduce from the Gemorah that the greater a Tzaddik the teacher is, the more holy and elevated will be the influence he exerts on his pupils. Bear in mind the Vilna Gaon's explanation too. The obvious conclusion to draw is that it is essential for a teacher to try at all times - even when he is not with his pupils - to raise the standard of his Avodas Hashem, not only because of his own personal obligation to do so, but also because of the extent to which his pupils' success depends on it.

**CHAPTER 3**

**THE NEED TO HELP ALL PUPILS REALIZE THEIR  
POTENTIAL, EVEN THOSE WHO APPEAR TO LACK  
MOTIVATION OR NATURAL APTITUDE.**

**Section 1.**

1. The Gemorah (in 'בבא מציעא דף פ"ה עמ' א) relates about Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who passed and was survived by a young son. The child did not behave as he should. He was obviously heading in the wrong direction, and some of his misdemeanors were very serious indeed. From the Gemorah it appears that it was well-known in the town that he was not going the right way.

2. Rebbi (- Rabbi Yehuda HaNossi who compiled the Mishna was known as Rebbi or Rabbeinu HaKodosh -) once came to the town where Rabbi Elazar had lived. He and asked whether a child of Rabbi Elazar Ben Rabbi Shimon still survived. He was answered that Rabbi Elazar did indeed leave a son, but the way that son was conducting his life was not at all satisfactory.

3. Rebbi asked to meet the boy. He tried to befriend him and showed him a great deal of respect, although the boy's spiritual state was still sadly lacking. He raised his standing in the community, and arranged for Rabbi Shimon ben Rav Issi ben Lakonia to learn with him. Yet for all his efforts, positive results were not forthcoming; time and again the boy still felt drawn back to his former undesirable ways.

4. Finally he told him (- from the Gemorah it is not clear whether the speaker was Rebbi or Rabbi Shimon ben Rav Issi -) to look at how much respect he was getting, and the good standing he was now in. He asked him to consider why, in spite of it all, he still wanted to return to his bad ways. Only when he heard those words, did the boy change his attitude. He then made a firm commitment not to revert to the wayward conduct of his past.

5. The Gemorah continues to relate that he became a very great Tzaddik and one of the highly-respected Tannoim. His name was Rabbi Yossi ben Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon.

He became so great that when he passed away it was considered appropriate to bury him in the cave where his father, Rabbi Elazar, and his grandfather, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, were laid to rest. However, a snake appeared and prevented entry to the cave. It was bidden not to obstruct the proceedings, and to let the son be laid to rest with his fathers, yet it refused to move away. The bystanders were inclined say to that it must be that Rabbi Yossi was not of as high a spiritual caliber as his father.

A Heavenly Voice was heard proclaiming that it was for an entirely different reason that entry to the cave was being denied. It was not due to his being inferior to his father, but only because Rabbi Elazar had suffered in the cave - the Gemorah (שבתי דף ל"ג ע"ב) describes how he learnt Torah there for many years, enduring suffering and privation the whole time - and his son, Rabbi Yossi, had not been through the 'suffering in the cave.'

### Section 2.

1. The above Gemorah encapsulates an important rule to remember when educating children, and it is a rule that applies equally to learning Torah and to behaviour development.

From the Gemorah we can deduce that the pupils' success depends to a very great extent to the encouragement he gets. The teacher's confidence in a child's ability to achieve, is what stimulates him to succeed in learning Torah and modifying his behaviour.

2. In the depths of his heart, every Jew wants to learn Torah and behave like a Tzaddik. Everyone can appreciate the superiority of a person who excels in Torah and in righteous behaviour in comparison to one who doesn't. However each of us has his own reasons and causes which prevent him achieving his full potential. To overcome all the pitfalls that stand in the way, often demands major efforts in more than one area.

3. One of the most valuable tools which help a person surmount the obstacles in his path in life, is the sure knowledge that it is within his powers to accomplish great things. With that confidence of mind he finds it easier to exert himself. He will then be prepared to expend a great deal of effort to achieve his goals.

4. On the other hand, if he feels that, however much he tries, his efforts are unlikely to be crowned with success, it automatically weakens his will-power and lessens his ability to try to withstand the temptations and difficulties he has in life.

5. Very often, even if a person is only unsure as to whether his object is attainable, it already weakens his resolve and renders him unfit to cope with the situation. Only when he is absolutely convinced that he is capable of accomplishing what he set out to do, or overcoming the temptation that stands in his way, can a successful outcome be guaranteed.

6. This is what lies behind the story quoted in the above Gemorah. The trials Rabbi Yossi ben Elazar faced were very difficult for him to overcome. Rebbi knew that only if would appreciate his own self-worth, did he stand a chance. It was clear to Rebbi that if Rabbi Yossi ben Elazar would indeed put his mind to it, he had the potential to become one of the great Sages. All that was missing was to provide him with the necessary motivation; with the confidence that success was within his reach, he would be able to exert himself enough to reach those elevated standards of spirituality.

### Section 3.

1. With effort, each and every pupils is capable of great accomplishments in Torah and Avodas Hashem. It is true that, as far as other forms of knowledge are concerned, there are set limits. Success in other fields is dependent on innate intelligence. Torah is different. Torah does not conform to the natural order of the world.

2. Anyone who wants Torah can succeed. There are several reasons for this. One is brought in the Gemorah (סנהדרין דף צ"ט) and Rashi's comment on the possuk נפש עמל עמלה לו - 'the soul which toils, toils for itself.' The word עמל is mentioned twice in

the possuk; to teach us that at the same time as a man toils to learn Torah in this world, the Torah's spiritual lights are also toiling in the Upper Worlds. They appeal to Hashem and beg of Him to help him succeed and to grant him a thorough understanding of the Torah he is learning.

From these supplications which are brought to Hashem by the Torah that he learns, a man can merit success which is far beyond anything he would have achieved using only the natural abilities with which he was born.

3. There is another point too - cited in the sefer שער הגלגולים and the Vilna Gaon's comment to the Zohar in Parshas Pikudei: When a man works on himself to increase his knowledge of Torah and advance in Avodas Hashem, he merits that his soul becomes more elevated. New elements are introduced into his soul and they are far more exalted than the soul he had originally.

4. A person's success in Torah and Avodas Hashem is largely dependent on the quality of his soul. Therefore, when his soul gains extra elements of holiness, it automatically improves his ability to learn Torah and serve Hashem

5. The Chazon Ish is known to have said that every pupil who is prepared to work hard enough for Torah is able to become one of the Gedolei Yisroel. He said it categorically - every pupil, without exception.

6. It is well-known that a number of the famous Gedolei Yisroel were not outstanding for their intelligence in their youth; some were positively weak academically. Nevertheless, because of the great efforts and devotion that they put into learning Torah and

Avodas Hashem they overcame their natural limitations and became some of the greatest Torah scholars.

#### **Section 4.**

1. From all the above, every teacher will find himself forced to the conclusion that the responsibility to guide his pupils to believe in themselves rests upon him. He must make each and every pupil be aware that he is capable of great accomplishments in Torah and Avodas Hashem. The knowledge of his potential increases a pupil's motivation tremendously, and it will most certainly be reflected in his achievements.

2. It is the teacher's duty to let his students know that they are all capable of achieving. He must repeat the idea constantly until they have all internalized the message. For if the teacher does not tell them, how else will they know it?

3. Indeed there are many students who have any number of excuses to believe that their chances of becoming great Torah scholars are poor or non-existent. They blame weak intellect, inability to concentrate sufficiently, and innumerable other factors and causes. Only by hearing over and over again about the great potential that they most assuredly do have, can they be convinced of the truth and be prepared to try hard to do their best.

4. As well as incorporating this message in his teaching to the class as a whole, very often the teacher has to repeat it to a number of his pupils individually. He sees that they seem to have every reason to believe the contrary about themselves, and he must make a point of stressing that it applies to them too.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE TEACHER'S DUTY TO HELP GIFTED PUPILS ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.

#### Section 1.

1. We just explained in the last chapter how even weaker students are capable of impressive accomplishments when it comes to learning Torah and Avodas Hashem.

It will, therefore, be appreciated that if a naturally gifted student works hard and does his best, he is undoubtedly capable of reaching truly outstanding levels of success in Torah.

I heard from a reliable source - and a supremely intelligent person - that when he was young, the Steipler Gaon (Harav Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky, also known as the Kehilas Yaakov) told him that the most important factor for spiritual growth is the effort one expends. But - he stressed - if someone has been blessed with innate intelligence and is also prepared to exert himself, he is the one who will merit to become a world-renowned Gaon.

HaGaon Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was of the same opinion. On the one hand, he took great pains to encourage less gifted students to learn Torah; he believed they were capable of being successful, and was distressed when he saw a teacher neglecting pupils because they did not appear to show promise. On the other hand, whenever he came across a student who had been blessed with above-average intellect, he would go out of

his way to encourage him and he would invest in him stupendous energies, for he understood the potential such a student had to excel and achieve true greatness in Torah.

2. Unfortunately a great many teachers nowadays do not seem to put enough emphasis on this principle. On the contrary, they tell their pupils that nothing depends on natural abilities and the only things that matters is their efforts. Some even go as far as to make out that natural intelligence is a disadvantage - that less gifted students have more chances of succeeding because they have to work harder, etc.

This attitude is prevalent today in many places where Torah is taught. But you should know that it has infiltrated into our circles from external sources, and it will cause the Torah to be uprooted. It directly opposes the traditions of education that have been passed down by our great Rabbis from one generation to the next. It discourages Mesirus Nefesh for Torah, and prevents our best students from achieving their potential to become great Torah scholars.

(It is an undeniable fact that there were indeed Gedolei Yisroel who were not remarkable for their natural intelligence as children, and nevertheless succeeded in overcoming their limitations and became Torah giants. However, as anyone who knows the history of our people can attest, they were the minority; most of the world-renowned Gedolei Yisroel showed exceptional promise already in their youth.)

3. The Chofetz Chayim (in his sefer ו' פרק ב' חלק ב' שם עולם, חלק ב' פרק ו') made an observation which has awesome implications. He writes that the more natural abilities a person is endowed with, the more

elevated his soul is. His duty in this world is to make full use of all the resources he has been granted, and to achieve greatness in Avodas Hashem. If he is content merely with a level of success that is considered good by average people, it will cause him great distress in the world-to-come. (Refer to the sefer for more on the subject.)

From the Chofetz Chayim's words it should be understood that the principle applies to the teacher too. A teacher is usually capable of encouraging a clever child to achieve more than his classmates, using the natural gifts with which he has been blessed. If he neglects to do so, because he sees no value in above-average performance, he will be held responsible. He might help his student achieve - but the child is capable of still more, and the standard he reaches is good only compared to the other students. If so, the teacher's reward will surely be incomplete in the world-to-come, and who knows if his liability will not exceed even that.

4. Therefore, one of a teacher's responsibilities is to look out for the children in his class with above-average abilities. He should do all he can to encourage them to make maximum use of their strengths, and to reach above-average achievements. If he neglects to do so, he is accountable for the student's potential that was not realized.

His accountability goes even further. He might find himself answerable for a loss from which many other people suffer too: If his student could have become a great Torah scholar who would have taught Torah to others - and he deprived Klal Yisroel

of that Talmid Chochom - it is included in the responsibility the teacher has for neglecting his pupil.

5. We mentioned those teachers whose attitude is even more extreme. They would lead their talented students to believe that the intelligence they have been blessed with gives them no advantage, and on the contrary can even be considered a drawback. They should know that they are committing a very grave sin; the outcome of such an attitude is that their best students will lose interest in learning Torah.

It is true that very often it is unintentional; the teacher himself honestly believes that there is no advantage in being clever. His own intelligence might be only mediocre - certainly not outstanding in any way - and he is incapable of appreciating the importance of encouraging gifted students who have been blessed with superior intelligence. However, he must learn to disregard the approach that appeals to him, and understand that it must be mistaken, since the Gedolim of every generation made quite clear that it is not so. We have quoted some of the sources earlier; there are many more that we have not brought here. From the writings and sayings of all our teachers and Rabbis it is manifestly evident that they believe every pupil should be trained to make maximum use of all the natural intelligence with which he was blessed and encouraged to realize his potential to the full.

6. You might have seen or read that some Gedolim seem to imply differently. In fact, they are simply referring to the many facets that there are to the subject. As we wrote earlier, gifted and less gifted students alike should always be encouraged to

strive to the best of their abilities, and all are then guaranteed success. However, no-one would take that to mean that the more intelligent pupils should ever be neglected in favor of the average and poorer students.

It is true that sometimes a great deal of tact and discretion is required to encourage the gifted members of the class to do their best in such a way that none of the weaker students should get hurt or discouraged. The teacher must be very careful not to slight them in any way - but it should never be a reason to let the talents of the cleverer students be wasted.

7. It is even more important to know that sometimes when a gifted child is discouraged from achieving more than average results, he will end up achieving even less than the others - and yet worse, he might deteriorate until he is in danger of failing completely. These students are capable of doing well only when using all their faculties to the full.

The Vilna Gaon mentions this point briefly (in the ביאור הגר"א (לאגדות הש"ס למסכת בכורות פרק א) and we need not elaborate here. Anyone with experience in education knows that it is true. Therefore the teacher's obligation to encourage his gifted students can not be over-emphasized. They should be given all the support they need to achieve as much as they possibly can.

At the same time, the teacher should also be aware that if a child is pushed too hard to aim for goals which are beyond his reach, it might dishearten him and weaken his motivation.

A great deal of *שיעור דשמיא* is always needed to calculate exactly which is the approach that will achieve optimal results.

## Section 2.

1. Very often there seem to be all sorts of obstacles standing in the way of the most gifted children which hold them back from advancing as they could in their Torah studies. They might suffer from behavior problems such as playfulness or laziness, for example - or a multitude of other distractions.

2. You should know that it is part of the general rule laid down by our Sages (מסכת סוכה דף נ"ב ע"א) that: כל הגדול מחברו יצרו גדול - 'whoever is greater than his friend, has a greater evil inclination.'

The greater spiritual powers a person has, the more the powers of evil will strive to stunt his spiritual development. The powers of evil know that if he does succeed in elevating himself, he will raise himself to an extremely lofty level of serving Hashem and will gain tremendous spiritual powers for himself and for others.

There are letters on the subject written by the Chazon Ish in the sefer קובץ אגרות חזון איש and by the Kehilas Yaakov, printed in the קריינא דאיגרתא, which would be worth consulting, since we will not elaborate here.

3. If teachers are aware that this is a common occurrence, they will be in a better position to help their pupils overcome the problems.

4. There are stories told about a number of the Gedolei Yisroel who were very talented as children and yet at the same time had to deal with major setbacks and deterrents, consistent with the idea we have been discussing here. Their teachers, being great

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Rabbis themselves, went out of their way to help them, showing a degree of total devotion that literally amounted to מסירות נפש. By dint of their unremitting efforts, they succeeded in standing them on their feet and merited to see their pupils become Gedolei Yisroel.

## CHAPTER 5

### HOW CONCERNED A TEACHER MUST BE NOT TO EMBARRASS A PUPIL.

1. In several places our Sages emphasize the need to refrain from publicly embarrassing anyone. They go as far as to say that it is preferable to throw oneself into a furnace rather than put someone to shame. They also state that a man who publicly shames another has no portion in the world-to come.
2. There are teachers and educators who ask how they are meant to act, in view of the fact that publicly shaming anyone is condoned so severely. It can often happen that, in the child's best interests, a teacher finds it necessary to rebuke him and shame him in front of the rest of the class. How is the teacher to reconcile the two conflicting interests?

This is not the place to answer the question; when the circumstances arise each teacher should consult his Rabbi for guidance.

(When answering such a question, the Rabbi should be aware that when a teacher disgraces a pupil, the emotional impact it has on the child is extreme, due to the teacher's position of authority in the class. Additionally if it takes place in the presence of many of his classmates, that also makes it worse.)

3. However, the point we would like to raise here is that very often the whole question is based on a misconception. The truth is that in the vast majority of cases, shaming a child does not result in any pedagogical benefit. On the contrary, from the

educational point of view there is nothing less likely to be effective. The most probable result will be that feelings of resentment will take root in the child's heart making it difficult for him to accept anything he hears from his teacher in the future. It is possible that, after the incident, the child's behavior will improve temporarily because he is afraid of being humiliated again. In the long run, however, the damage caused far outweighs any gain.

4. Even more, experience has shown that, in a way, children see their teacher as a figure representing Hashem's interests, since it is from him that they learn what they know about His ways. When the teacher causes a pupil to dislike him, very often it brings in its wake antipathy to all that the teacher represents as well; the child's negative feelings might  $\text{וְכִי}$  extend to Hashem, to serving Him and to His holy Torah.

5. Another negative result is that it causes a streak of cruelty to take root in the child's heart - his classmates too will be affected - and cruelty is a characteristic which is extremely difficult to subdue. Once it has become established as part of one's personality, it might be impossible ever to uproot it.

6. The truth is that very often when a teacher makes excessive use of embarrassing a pupil in front of his classmates as a teaching method, he himself is at fault. His own flawed middos, rather than disinterested educational motives, are very possibly what drive him to treat his pupils as he does.

If he would subject himself to honest introspection, he will understand that it is a weakness of his which surfaces at other times too - at home or among friends - which have nothing to do

with his role as a teacher. If he is more successful at controlling himself at home or amongst friends, it is simply because he is has more sympathy for his family and is reluctant to spoil relationships with friends. In the classroom when only his pupils are present, and he knows that they are unable to retaliate, his faulty middos are more inclined to show themselves.

7. Additionally, more than anything else, experience shows that whatever the teacher wanted to achieve by shaming the pupil can be accomplished much more effectively by encouraging the child and showing him that he approves of him. Time and again, it has been proven that all educational methods which rely on making a pupil feel disgraced, ultimately cause far more harm than benefit.

We know from reliable sources about quite a number of students who left the Derech HaTorah completely, and the beginning of their fall can be traced directly to teachers in Cheder or Yeshiva who insulted them, either verbally or with corporal punishment. The teacher's insensitivity caused the student to turn away from him, and the spiritual decline that followed was a natural consequence.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING THE PATIENCE TO EXPLAIN THE SUBJECT MATTER AS MANY TIMES AS NECESSARY FOR THE PUPILS TO UNDERSTAND IT.

#### Section 1.

1. The Gemorah (עירובין דף נ"ד עמ' ב) tells about a pupil of Rav Preida who found it difficult to understand what he was learning unless it was explained to him very many times. Only when Rav Preida had explained it to him four hundred times did he understand.

2. It once happened that while they was learning, Rav Preida was approached about doing a certain mitzva which involved going to a different place. Before starting out on the mission, Rav Preida finished learning with his student - going over the subject matter four hundred times, as he always did. That day, however the student claimed that he still did not understand. When asked for the reason, he explained to Rav Preida that it was because he had heard the men speak to Rav Preida about the mission he was to undertake. He kept thinking that Rav Preida might have to go away in the middle of their learning session, and it made it difficult for him to concentrate. Rav Preida reassured him that he would not leave until he had mastered the subject thoroughly, and he then proceeded to repeat his explanations another four hundred times.

3. A Heavenly Voice was heard announcing that Rav Preida's deserved a great reward for the extreme dedication he had

shown in the interests of his pupil's advancement. Rav Preida was offered a choice: either he would be granted another four hundred years of life, or he and all the people of his generation would be guaranteed a place in the world-to-come. Rav Preida answered that he preferred the second option - life in the world-to-come for the entire generation.

4. Hashem said that He would grant Rav Preida both rewards - an extra four hundred years of life for himself, and also a place in the world-to-come for his generation.

## **Section 2.**

1. In a class there are usually some children who find it more difficult to understand. For the teacher it can be bothersome to have to repeat his explanations several times for their benefit. Yet from the above Gemorah we see how important it is to be concerned about the needs of these pupils too, and how great is the reward. We also see from the Gemorah how strong the commitment should be; Rav Preida was in the habit of repeating his lessons four hundred times every day, and on the occasion referred to he even found it necessary to double it to eight hundred.

2. Obviously there other members of the class too, and the teacher needs to use his discretion to find the method best suited to teaching his class. Brighter students, who understand already after the teacher has explained once, are likely to get bored and stop paying attention. Good judgment and careful deliberation on the part of the teacher are required in order to keep up the interest of the whole class and to ensure that they all enjoy learning.

CHAPTER 7

THE TREMENDOUS RESPONSIBILITY A TEACHER HAS  
FOR HIS PUPILS' FUTURE SPIRITUAL WELFARE.

1. The Vilna Gaon writes in his commentary to Mishlei about a man who persuades his friend to leave the wrong path and guides him to go along the right one. Afterwards the friend does many mitzvos as an outcome of that change of direction and, in Heaven, he will obviously be rewarded. The Vilna Gaon adds that the reward is not only for the perpetrator of the mitzvos himself; the spiritual mentor who set him on the right track is also credited for each mitzva that results even indirectly from his influence. It goes even further: one result of the friend's influence is that he will now bring up his children differently - and even for the mitzvos his children do, will the friend be rewarded. Every mitzva that you cause to be done - however indirectly and however many generations later - is considered yours too.

It must be added that the converse is also true, and a person is responsible for sins he caused someone else to do, even indirectly.

2. There is a Gemorah (in ראש השנה ט"ז ע"ב ) where it says that "on Rosh Hashona the Books of the Living and the Books of the Dead are opened."

There are several explanations as to why the 'Books of the Dead' are opened. The Chofetz Chayim's interpretation is that a person sometimes does acts while he is alive and their effects

carry on reverberating through the world long after he has passed away. If mitzvos are still being done in this world as a result of something he did in his lifetime, they have to be added to his credit: his 'Book' must be opened on Rosh Hashona even though he is no longer alive. It goes without saying that the same is true for aveiros one causes to be done after one's death.

3. It is an undeniable fact that a teacher greatly influences his pupils' spiritual development. The more he instills a love for Torah and learning and Yiras Shomayim into their hearts, the more likely are they to go the right way all their lives. And even more: the teacher's influence will also be reflected in the way their raise their own children in the future.

4. If ח"ו the opposite happens - if a teacher is to blame for a pupil of his coming to dislike the Derech HaTorah and learning - his responsibility for that reaches far into future too.

5. If a teacher feels that he is forced to give up on a difficult pupil ח"ו - to leave him to his own devices and jeopardize his spiritual future - he must first make a very serious self-examination. He has to ask himself whether he would treat the case in a similar manner if he was being offered hundreds of thousands of diamonds not to quit - imagine, for instance, that a rich man is promising such a reward if you would save the child. Would you still be so sure about the decision to abandon him and all hope for his spiritual future?

Usually the answer will be that, with such an incentive, he would find the strength to put in even more resources. He would do everything that is necessary, until he sees his efforts begin to bear fruit, and his pupil progressing in the right direction.

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The teacher will look at the challenge quite differently if he reminds himself that the reward from Hashem for putting a problematic student on the right track - the Derech HaTorah - is a treasure which far exceeds all the diamonds in the world.



## PRAYING FOR THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH*

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Chapter Five: Methods that allow a Jew to experience the pain that the heavens suffer because of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and exile of the *Shechina*; commentary on *Tehillim* 137 describing the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and exile of the nation; advice and guidelines in serving Hashem.

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Chapter Six: Prayers and entreaties on behalf of the heavens are accepted; feeling the anguish of the *Shechina* draws the final Redemption ever nearer; praying on behalf of the heavens initiates the fulfillment of one's personal prayers; focusing on conveying pleasure to Hashem Yisborach; the inestimable potency of prayer that can transform any situation to good—personal and collective.

Chapter Seven: Compilation of topics as listed in previous chapters.

## CHAPTER ONE

THE OBLIGATION TO ENTREAT HASHEM TO REBUILD THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH* AND REVEAL HIS KINGSHIP IN THE WORLD; THE ULTIMATE REDEMPTION IS DEPENDENT UPON *BNEI YISRAEL'S* PRAYERS AND SUPPLICATIONS; THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER; THE MANIFOLD BENEFITS AND BLESSINGS THAT *BNEI YISRAEL* REAPED FROM THE *SHECHINA* IN THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH*; THE NATION'S TRAGIC LOSS IN THE DESTRUCTION OF THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH*; THE JEWISH SOUL CONNECTION TO HASHEM YISBORACH.

### Part I

- A. *Rashi* in *Hosheah* 3:5 quotes Chazal, "Yisrael will not see a good sign until they restore the kingdom of the heavens and the kingdom of the House of Dovid and *the Beis Hamikdash* (Holy Temple)."
- B. *Shmuel* A Ch. 8 relates of *Bnei Yisrael's* request to Shmuel *HaNavi* to anoint a king for them. Verse 7 states: "And Hashem said to Shmuel, 'Listen to the voice of the nation, to all they tell you, for it is not you whom they despise, but Me that they despise for ruling upon them.'"
- C. *Melachim* A 12:16 states: "And all of Yisrael saw that the king had not listened to them. And the nation returned a message to the king saying, 'What need do we have in Dovid? Nor [do we have] an inheritance in the son of Yishai. To your tents, Yisrael!

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Now see to your own house, Dovid! And Yisrael departed to their tents.”

D. *Hosheah* 3:5 relates, “Afterward, *Bnei Yisrael* shall return and seek Hashem, their G-D, and Dovid their king; and they shall come trembling to Hashem and His goodness in the end of days.”

E. *Midrash Shmuel Parshah* 13 on *Shmuel* 8:7 above teaches: “Rabbi Shimon *bar* Yochai learned that the words ‘despise’ used in the verse reveal that Hashem told Shmuel that Yisrael are destined to despise three things in the days of Rechavam, and these are they: The kingdom of heavens, the kingdom of Dovid, and the *Beis Hamikdash*.” [He learns this from the verse in *Melachim* 12:16.]

*Midrash Shmuel* likewise states: “Rabbi Shimon *ben* Menasya said, ‘*Bnei Yisrael* will never see a sign of blessing in the world until they return and beseech for those three things’ [which he infers from the verse in *Hosheah*]. How is it written? ‘Afterward, *Bnei Yisrael* shall return and seek Hashem, their G-D’—this is the kingdom of heavens; ‘And Dovid their king,’—this is the kingdom of Dovid; ‘And they shall come trembling to Hashem and His goodness in the end of days’—this is the *Beis Hamikdash*.”

F. This *Midrash* is cited by the following sources:

1. *Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel* Ch. 106
2. *Rashi, Hosheah* 3:5
3. *Minchas Shai, Melachim* A 12:16
4. *Shibolei Haleket* Ch. 157

5. *Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim* Ch. 188, end of p. 245
6. *Ibid, Prisha* Paragraph 4
7. [*Chiddushei Haga'os* on the *Tur* notes that this *Midrash* is also cited by *Rashi* in *Hosheah* 3:5.]

G. *Gemara Megilla* 17b, 18a states: "Upon this, the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* instituted the blessing '*Es Tzemach Dovid*' in the *Shemone Esrei* prayer following the blessing, 'Binyan Yerushalayim.'" This is based on the verse in *Hosheah*.

H. The *Midrash* and many other sources affirm that *Yisrael's* ultimate Redemption is contingent upon *Bnei Yisrael* praying to Hashem to restore His Kingship to the world, restore the House of *Dovid* and rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash*.

I. The *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* instituted many a prayer and blessing regarding the final Redemption and rebuilding the *Beis Hamikdash*. *Shemone Esrei* includes several blessings, and even *Shemone Esreis* of *Shabbos* and holidays, which omit the majority of 'request blessings' include a prayer for Hashem to rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash*. The added portion of '*Retzeh*' in *Shabbos* Grace likewise includes mention of the end of days. *Mussaf* prayer of *Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh*, the Three Festivals, and especially *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* include many lengthy prayers entreating Hashem to rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash* and allow us to serve him completely as in the days of old. Throughout history, our sages have spilled their hearts in sincere prayer that Hashem accept our collective entreaties and restore his Kingship to the world eternally.

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J. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* Ch. 1:3 states: “It is fitting that every G-d fearing person shall grieve and be distressed because of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*.”

The very first paragraph in the Vilna Gaon’s *Sefer Ma’ase Rav* instructs that one is obligated to rise at midnight in order to recite *Tikkun Chatzos* which is mostly comprised of mournful prayers and supplications for the *Beis Hamikdash* to be rebuilt.

K. One who does not regularly recite *Tikkun Chatzos* should peruse the *Ma’ase Rav* in order to garner appreciation for the absolute necessity of seeking opportunities to beseech Hashem to rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash* even during his regular prayers or at any other time.

L. *Gemara Bava Basra* 60b teaches: “The Rabbis taught that when the Second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, the Pharisees of Yisrael argued that they should not eat meat nor drink wine. Rabbi Yehoshua accosted them and said, ‘My children, why are you not eating meat, and why are you not drinking wine?’ They asked him [perplexed], ‘How can we eat the meat which they offered upon the Altar which is now destroyed; and how can we drink wine that was poured on the Altar which is now destroyed?’ He told them, ‘If so, then bread you shall not eat either, as the *Minchah* offering has been annulled. Perhaps we can eat fruit? But fruit we cannot eat as the *Bikkurim* have been annulled. Water we will not drink, as the Pouring of the Water has been annulled.’ They were silent. He told them, ‘My sons, come and I will tell you not to mourn totally. We cannot, as the verdict was already sealed; and we may not mourn too much. It

is impossible that they will decree something upon the public that the majority cannot uphold.” [See *ibid.*]

Indeed, Rabbi Yehoshua’s words seem to allude that the idea of abstaining from meat and wine is an appropriate step, yet cannot be instituted as the majority of the nation could not abide by this directive. Notwithstanding, this *Gemara* does emphasize the extent of pain that every Jew must feel in his heart and that he must conduct his life in a way that allows him to mourn the *Beis Hamikdash*.

M. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* Ch. 580 states: “Some opinions maintain that one must fast every Monday and Thursday because of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and the Torah that was burned and for the terrible desecration of Hashem’s Holy Name. And in the future, Hashem will transform these days into times of joy and celebration.”

*Mishnah Brurah* *ibid* Paragraph 16 adds: “One who is unable to [recite *Tikkun Chatzos* at night] should pray during the day for these things.”

In this day and age, the sages rule that the vast majority of Jews fall under the category of ‘One who is unable, [to fast],’ as described by the *Mishnah Brurah*. Moreover, he adds, if people would fast too often, it would interfere with their service of Hashem. Notwithstanding, the above *Halacha* emphasizes that a Jew’s grief and suffering upon the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* should be so intense that he would certainly fast every Monday and Thursday were he capable of doing so! Yet, as the majority cannot fast so frequently, the *Mishnah Brurah* teaches, ‘In any case, one should devote one’s prayers during

these times to the concepts mentioned by the *Shulchan Aruch*. This is especially true when prayer is recited in lieu of a sacrifice, and one must pray from the depths of his heart and with spiritual arousal.

### Part II

A. Prayers and supplications for the restoration of the *Beis Hamikdash* should encompass two aspects:

1. *Longing to fulfill the mitzvos in the Torah that can only be performed when the Beis Hamikdash is complete.* Most significantly, one must focus on the essential mitzvah, “And they shall build me a Temple, and I shall dwell in their midst.” Other *mitzvos* encompass the numerous sacrifices and offerings including the *Tamid* sacrifice, *Mussaf* sacrifices, and the High Priest’s *Yom Kippur* service which granted atonement to the nation, as well as the incredible bounty that *Bnei Yisrael* drew from the opportunity to perform these *mitzvos*.

2. *Longing for the Divine Presence to dwell once more in the Beis Hamikdash.* The famous verse in *Parshas Trumah* states: “And they shall build me a Temple, and I shall dwell in their midst.” Commentaries highlight the adjustment from singular to plural as the verse states ‘in *their* [*Bnei Yisrael*’s] midst,’ instead of ‘in *its* [*Beis Hamikdash*’s] midst.’ Indeed, the Divine Presence that dwelled in the *Beis Hamikdash* caused *Shechina* to enter into the body and soul of every Jew, which inspired added holiness and G-dly radiance in each and every individual.

Reflecting upon the *Shechina* is central to our collective yearning for the *Beis Hamikdash* to be rebuilt. Indeed, *Rashi* in *Parshas Shemini* states that before the *Shechina* revealed itself in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), *Bnei Yisrael* complained to Moshe, “All the toil and labor that we bothered to invest in building the *Mishkan*, what was it for?”

[Many commentaries ask how *Bnei Yisrael* could have described their endeavors to build the *Mishkan* as a ‘toil’ and ‘bother,’ when it had been an express *mitzvah*? Indeed, the commandment to build the *Mishkan* was directly linked to the conclusion of the verse, “And I shall dwell in their midst.” Hence, *Bnei Yisrael* were complaining that they had not merited fulfilling the *mitzvah* completely, as Hashem’s Presence did not yet dwell amongst them.]

B. The Vilna Gaon writes (*Likutim*, end of *Biur HaGr”a* on *Safra D’tzniusa* p. 38 column 1): “When the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, this caused a removal of the *Shechina* from the *Beis Hamikdash*.” [*Gemara Rosh Hashanah* 30a describes that the *Shechina* had already absconded prior to the destruction. See section below which presents this debate; although the *Shechina* had already absconded from the *Beis Hamikdash*, a significant portion of its Presence still remained, and it was this final portion that was totally eliminated during the destruction.]

As the *Shechina* departed the *Beis Hamikdash*, a portion of the G-dly radiance which is contingent upon the *Shechina* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, likewise departed all Jewish souls. Although a significant portion of *Shechina* still remains within us until this

very day, it is less than that which existed in previous eras when *Shechina* had abounded within all Jewish souls.

The Vilna Gaon expands that there is also a marked difference between Jewish souls that lived before and after the destruction, to the extent that it resembles the disparity between a living person and a dead person. Indeed, a living person possesses a soul within his body, a soul that nourishes, sustains and causes the body to function. A dead person is a body without a soul, without force and vigor to control the body's actions. The same is true of the *Shechina*. The *Shechina* that dwelled in the heart of every Jew thrived from the force of the *Shechina* in the *Beis Hamikdash*; it nourished them, sustained them and impelled them to act. Thus, the removal of the *Shechina* from their souls that followed the removal of *Shechina* from the *Beis Hamikdash* resembled a person's soul exiting his body permanently and severely weakening the powers of the soul. (See *ibid* for complete discussion.)

C. The *Ramchal* in *Sefer Adir Ba'Marom* poetically describes, "The soul is a G-dly light that comes from Hashem Yisborach." He presents a parable of rays of sunlight that draw their essence from the sun but have no substance unto themselves, as their entire existence is founded in the sun. Similarly, the very essence and existence of the Jewish soul are its connection to Hashem Yisborach, which is also why the soul yearns perpetually to draw ever nearer to Him.

This is as Dovid *Hamelech* inscribed in *Tehillim* 42: "As a deer desires for the water brook, so my soul will desire for You, Hashem. My soul thirsts for G-D, for the Living G-D; when will I

come and see the Face of G-D?" The more a Jewish soul is connected to Hashem Yisborach and the more the Jew senses this vital connection, the greater vigor and power the soul will acquire, as written in *Parshas Va'eschanan*, "And for you, who cling to Hashem your G-D, there is life always."

D. The *Shechina* dwells in the soul of each and every Jew always, in every situation and every generation since the beginning of time, albeit its Presence was stronger and more intense during the era of the *Beis Hamikdash*. As the *Shechina* created a keen impression on the heart of every Jew of that era, it increased vigor and life to their souls. This automatically intensified their yearning to draw ever nearer to Hashem and stimulated a precious cycle of spiritual growth and aspiration. In contrast, as the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, prompting an aspect of *Shechina* to depart Jewish souls, all Jewish souls were collectively weakened and their passionate yearning to draw nearer to Hashem subsided as well, thus instigating a vicious cycle of spiritual degeneration.

This is the essence of 'soul demise.' Just as the soul's departure from the corporeal body signifies physical death; so too, the *Shechina's* departure from the soul is tantamount to 'soul death.'

E. Notwithstanding, although we are deeply pained and lost because of the destruction of our *Beis Hamikdash* and the departure of the *Shechina* from within us, each and every Jew must still endeavor to his maximal abilities to draw nearer to Hashem and strive to experience the life and vigor described in the verse, "And for you, who cling to Hashem your G-D, there is

life always.” The conclusion of the verse, ‘*always*,’ emphasizes that, though the *Shechina* was once the most compelling force within Jewish souls, it continues to rest its Presence within them until today, albeit in a weaker form.

F. Mourning the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and expressing one’s longing and prayer for its future rebuilding binds a person to the radiance of the *Beis Hamikdash* and endows his soul with the spiritual radiance unique to the House of Hashem. It is this indescribable radiance that grants increased life and vigor to one’s soul. Although the radiance acquired through prayer is less potent and incomplete relative to the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, it is still inordinately powerful and endows a Jew with an extraordinary connection to Hashem.

G. As aforementioned, one’s prayers to Hashem to rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash* must encompass the two aspects mentioned above: The desire to merit fulfilling the *mitzvos* associated with the *Beis Hamikdash* which we are presently unable to perform, and the desire to merit absolute *Shechina* in our souls as a product of the *Shechina* in the *Beis Hamikdash*. While praying for the latter, one must simultaneously beseech Hashem to bequeath him a deeper soul-connection to His Holy Presence now, until the *Beis Hamikdash* is rebuilt.

Our loss is tremendous; it cannot be encapsulated in words. We must feel deeply pained that we no longer merit our *Beis Hamikdash* and thus fail to achieve the ultimate soul-connection to Hashem that every Jewish soul should rightfully own. The current state of Jewish souls is truly appalling when compared to the lofty spiritual entities that Hashem fashioned them to be.

H. The blessings recited after reading the *Haftara* entreat, “Have mercy on Zion, for it is the house of our life.” The Vilna Gaon expounds that just as the soul is the spiritual Light sustaining the body; so the *Shechina* is a spiritual Light sustaining the soul; and the resting place of the *Shechina* is the *Beis Hamikdash*. [Despite the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and partial departure of the *Shechina*, the location of the *Beis Hamikdash* still retains immeasurable holiness, which is why it is forbidden to enter it in a state of impurity. This is affirmed by the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Beis HaBechira*, the *Magen Avraham* and *Mishnah Brurah* who unanimously state: “They sanctified the site of the *Beis Hamikdash* for the period of the first *Beis Hamikdash* and eternally thereafter.”

Indeed, as the *Beis Hamikdash* is the “house of our life” and the soul is “our life,” it is clear that every Jew must intensify and improve his desire for the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*—our one and only home.

I. This chapter has presented a basic description of the connection that binds the Jewish soul to Hashem Yisborach in order to clarify the concept of the *Shechina* dwelling in the Jewish soul. It is vital that every Jew internalize the knowledge that he harbors a permanent soul-connection to Hashem Yisborach, as this is one of the key foundations to spiritual growth. Indeed, an appreciation of this soul-connection is that which inspired leading sages in every generation to achieve spiritual greatness in Torah and service of Hashem.

J. The responsibility of each and every Jew is to seek out those paths that will motivate and inspire him to yearn for and

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reinforce his soul-connection with Hashem Yisborach, each person on his individual level and according to the spiritual capacities that he was granted. Some people merit enhancing their soul-connection by spilling their emotions in prayer; others by learning Torah for extended periods of time and/or with intense concentration, and still others by fervently reciting chapters of *Tehillim*. Every Jew is an individual, an entire world owning unique capacities and strengths; and every Jew must conduct a genuine search of his soul in order to discover the unique key that will intensify his soul-connection to Hashem. This is a life-long process, a never-ending journey that leads one to attain ever loftier spiritual heights. It is a journey that expands one's spiritual strengths and leads one to the pinnacle of success in the study of Torah and service of Hashem.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PAIN AND TEARS THAT HASHEM SHEDS UPON THE DESTRUCTION OF THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH* AND EXILE OF HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE.

A. *Sefer Yirmiyahu* 13:17 states, “And if you shall not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and My Eye shall weep sore and run with tears, for Hashem’s flock has been carried away captive.”

B. *Gemara Chagiga* 5b elucidates the verse above: “Rav Shmuel *bar* Einei said from Rav, ‘The Holy One Blessed Is He has a place, and it is called, ‘A secret place’; and it is there that He weeps.”

C. The verse states that Hashem weeps because of ‘pride.’ The *Gemara* teaches, “What is ‘pride?’ Rav Shmuel *bar* Yitzchak taught, ‘Because of *Bnei Yisrael’s* pride that was taken from them and given to idol-worshippers. Rabbi Shmuel *bar* Nachmani said, ‘Because of the pride of the Kingdom of heaven.’”

D. The *Gemara* *ibid* adds, “What is the meaning of the words, ‘My Eye shall weep sore?’”

The above verse employs the word ‘weeping-tears’ three times. “Rabbi Elazar said, ‘Three weepings—why? One for the first Temple; and one for the second Temple; and one for Yisrael who were exiled from their land.’ Another explanation is, ‘One because of annulled Torah study.’” This last explanation for

Hashem's third weeping maintains that *Bnei Yisrael's* exile is included in the phrase, "For Hashem's flock has been carried away captive." Indeed, there can be no worse annulment of Torah than when the flock—Yisrael—has been taken captive and exiled among the nations.

E. It must be stated that the 'tears shed by *Hakaddosh Baruch Hu*' are not actual tears, as Hashem possesses neither corporeal body nor physical form. Similarly, the verse referring to Hashem weeping in a 'secret place,' cannot be taken literally either, as Hashem is Present everywhere, at all times. However, we must appreciate that Hashem and His Heavenly Court endure deep pain, mourning the destruction of His holy, beloved *Beis Hamikdash* and the exile of His Chosen Nation—both due to their spiritual and physical consequences.

F. *Gemara Brachos* 3a states: "Rabbi Yosi taught, 'I was once walking along the way and I entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray. Eliyahu, may he be remembered for good, came to me and stood by the entrance and waited until I finished praying. After I finished praying, he told me, "My son, what voice did you hear in this ruin?" I answered him, "I heard a *bas kol* wailing as a dove and saying, 'Woe is to the children in whose sins I have destroyed My House and burned My Hall, and I exiled them amongst the nations.'" He said to me, "On your life and the life of your head, it is not saying this just at this time; behold, it says so thrice each and every day. And not only this, but also whenever Yisrael enter synagogues and houses of study and respond, '*Amen! Yehei Shmei Rabba mevorach* (May the Name of Hashem be blessed),' Hashem proclaims, 'Lucky is the King Who is praised in His House. So, what is for a Father Who

exiled His sons? And woe to the children who were exiled from the table of their Father.””” [This episode is the first instance in the *Gemara* in which Eliyahu reveals himself. *Gemara Sanhedrin* notes that Eliyahu *HaNavi* appeared frequently to Rabbi Yosi.]

G. *Midrash Rabba* on *Megillas Eichah*, introductory Letter 24 poignantly describes the intense and acute anguish that *Hakaddosh Baruch Hu* suffers because of the exile and destruction of His Temple.

CHAPTER THREE

CITED FROM *GEMARAS ROSH HASHANAH* AND  
*MEGILLA* REGARDING THE EXILE OF THE *SHECHINA*  
AND AN EXPLANATION OF THESE *GEMARAS*.

Part I

A. *Gemara Rosh Hashanah* 30a states: “Rabbi Yehuda *bar* Idi said, Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘The Divine Presence traveled ten journeys. [Rashi elucidates, ‘To depart from Yisrael when they sinned.’] And these are they: (1) From the *Kappores* [cloth that covered the Ark in the Holy of Holies] to the *Kruvim* [Cherubs that also rested on the Ark]; (2) from the *Kruvim* to the threshold; (3) from the threshold to the courtyard; (4) from the courtyard to the Altar; (5) from the Altar to the roof; (6) from the roof to the wall; (7) from the wall to the city; (8) from the city to the mountain; (9) from the mountain to the desert; (10) and from the desert it ascended and sat in its place.”

B. There are several versions of this *Gemara*:

1. The Vilna Gaon cites ‘roof’ before ‘courtyard,’ instead of after the ‘altar.’

2. The *Gemara* mentions that the *Shechina* also traveled from one *Kruv* to the other, although *Haga’os HaBach* erased this and *Mesores HaShas* cites the *Ein Yaakov* which concurs with the *Bach*, offering proof that the additional ‘one *Kruv* to the other,’ would mean that there had been eleven journeys, unless the final journey—the ascent—is not included in the

'ten journeys.' Commentaries also query as to the difference between traveling from one *Kruv* to the other? They reply that the *Right Kruv* was more significant than the left.

C. *Gemara Megilla 29a* states: "Rabbi Shimon *ben Yochai* teaches, 'Come and see how beloved are *Bnei Yisrael* to *Hakaddosh Baruch Hu*, as the Divine Presence accompanied them to every place they were exiled. They were exiled to Egypt; the *Shechina* was with them. [*Shmuel A 2:127* states:] 'Behold I was exiled to the house of your father when they were in Egypt.' They were exiled to Babylon, the *Shechina* was with them, as written, [*Yeshaya 43:14*, see *Minchas Shai* *ibid*] 'On your behalf, I was sent to Babylon.' And also when they are destined to be redeemed, the *Shechina* will be with them, as written, [*Parshas Nitzavim 30:3*], 'And Hashem your G-D will return your captives.' The Torah does not use the proper form of the word '*v'heishiv*—He will return them,' but the word '*v'shav*—and He, Himself, will return.' This teaches that *Hakaddosh Baruch Hu* will return with them from the exile."

D. It would seem that these two concepts are contradictory. *Gemara Rosh Hashanah* states that the '*Shechina* ascended to its Place,' whereas *Gemara Megilla* writes that the '*Shechina* was exiled together with *Bnei Yisrael* to Babylon.'

Indeed, this query can be resolved with the understanding that the *Shechina* encompasses many aspects and spiritual levels. Thus, a part of the *Shechina* was exiled together with the nation, while another aspect ascended heavenward. [See *Ohr HaChaim, Parshas Vayigash 46:4* regarding his commentary on *Brachos 6a*.]

E. *Midrash Rabba* on *Megillas Eichah*, Introduction Letter 24 states that the *Shechina's* departure to the heavens occurred at the time when the *Beis Hamikdash* was burning—see there. According to the above explanation, this would refer to one aspect of the *Shechina* only.

F. The basis of all holiness in the *Beis Hamikdash* was the *Shechina* which dwelled there always; and it seems that an aspect of this *Shechina* remains on the original site of the *Beis Hamikdash* until this very day. This also clarifies the concept of the intrinsic holiness of the *Beis Mikdash*, as the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Beis Habechira*, *Magen Avraham* and *Mishnah Brurah* in *Orach Chaim* Ch. 561 rule that one who steps upon the site of the *Beis Hamikdash* is punished due to the holiness that remains there. It is also possible that the basis for this ruling is *Chazal's* famed statement, “The *Shechina* has never departed from the Western Wall” (see *Midrash Rabba*, *Shmos Parsha 2* Ch. 2; *Shir Hashirim Rabba* Ch. 2:9).

This statement also differs from the teachings of *Chazal* in *Gemaras Rosh Hashanah* and *Megilla*, which both relate that the *Shechina* did indeed flee the site of the *Beis Hamikdash*. However, this too can be resolved according to the opinion that explains the *Shechina* as encompassing many aspects, each of which currently rests in a different place.

G. In order to delve deeper into this concept, it is important to acquire a clearer understanding of the concept of the *Shechina* resting its Presence. Indeed, it is known that Hashem Yisborach is Omnipresent—both within the world and without—at all times, as described the *Zohar*, “Hashem surrounds all the words

and fills all the worlds, and there is no difference in His Existence from one time to another.”

The meaning of this statement is that there is a G-dly radiance that works actively and constantly to join the souls of *Klal Yisrael* to Hashem Yisborach; and this G-dly radiance is often referred to as the *Shechina*. This is how the *Shechina* is present in several places simultaneously, including the heavens and exile, as described above.

H. The concept of this G-dly radiance is extremely profound, abstract, and cannot be aptly encompassed in words. One who aspires to achieve deeper understanding of this lofty concept should study *Ramban, Parshas Vayigash* Ch. 46:1. In this section, the *Ramban* cites the *Rambam* in *Moreh Nevuchim* Vol. 1 Ch. 27 and presents his argument. [Perhaps, these two opinions can be resolved according to the concept of the Eternal, Infinite Light that is clothed within the *Sefiros*.]

I. See *Biur HaGr"á* on the Introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar* (in *Sha'am* printing, p. 2a) *Tikkun 6* (*Sha'am* printing, p. 22b) and *ibid Biur HaGr"á*. Also see *Leshem Shvo V'Achlama, Klalim* Vol. 1 p. 16 column 2 which cites the Vilna Gaon. Also see *Sefer Kabbalas HaGr"á* Vol. 1 in the brief explanation to *Biur HaGr"á* on *Tikkunei Zohar* *ibid*.

J. Thrice each day, we recite the blessing ‘*Bone Yerushalayim*’ in *Shemone Esrei*, beseeching for the restoration of the *Shechina* to its original place of holiness in the *Beis Hamikdash*. The word ‘*Shechina*’ is explicitly mentioned in the conclusion of the blessing, ‘Who returns His Presence to Zion.’

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In his *Sefer Pe'as HaSadeh*, Rabbi Chaim Shaul Doueck relates in his personal biography that he always focused intensely upon the conclusion of this blessing. Once, the passion of his fervent prayers, tears and yearning for Hashem to restore His Presence to the *Beis Hamikdash* caused him to faint as he recited these words.

Obviously, the primary dwelling place of the *Shechina* is the *Beis Hamikdash*, as described by the verse in *Parshas Terumah* 25:8, "And they shall make for me a Temple, and I will dwell in their midst," as the Presence of the *Shechina* is directly linked to the site of *Beis Hamikdash*. [See above Ch. 1 Part II for expanded elucidation of this verse.]

### Part II

A. *Sefer Yirmiyahu* 2:8 states, "The Priests did not say, 'Where is Hashem?' and those who grasp the Torah did not know Me." In this prophecy, Yirmiyahu rebukes his generation for failing to seek Hashem. It is necessary to delve deeper into this message in order to understand the exact point of *Bnei Yisrael's* failing. Indeed, there is no actual commandment for the priests to ask, 'Where is Hashem,' so why were they reprimanded for this?

B. Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik of Brisk explains that this verse is associated with *Gemara Rosh Hashanah* 30a (as quoted in Part I above) which relates that the *Shechina* had fled the *Beis Hamikdash* even prior to the destruction. Sadly, the priests of

that generation, who were men of extremely lofty spiritual stature, sensed this but did nothing to prevent it.

C. Thus, the Prophet Yirmiyahu castigates the priests for being idle when the holy *Shechina* departed the *Beis Hamikdash*. He rebukes them for failing to rend the heavens with their prayers that Hashem restore His *Shechina* to the *Beis Hamikdash* and repent wholeheartedly in thoughts, words and action in order to merit the return of the *Shechina*.

D. *Gemara Taanis* 29a further enhances this message. The *Gemara* states, “The Sages taught that when the first *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, groups and groups of priests-in-training gathered together with the keys to the Sanctuary in their hands, and they ascended to the rooftop of the Sanctuary and they cried, ‘Master of the World, since we have not merited being faithful guards, let these keys be relayed to You; and they tossed the keys heavenward, and a part of a hand appeared and received it from them. Then they jumped and fell into the fires. [This episode is very perplexing, as the Torah strictly prohibits suicide; yet this is not the place to expound upon this issue.] And upon them, Yeshayahu *HaNavi* lamented of the mountain that everyone look upon [Jerusalem], ‘Why have you all ascended to the rooftops? A city filled with sounds of people, a bustling city, a joyful district; [and now] your fallen have neither perished from sword nor from war. And also of Hashem, it says, “He wrecks the walls and cries to the mountains.””

E. Hence Yirmiyahu *HaNavi* rebukes the priests for failing to ask, “Where is Hashem?” The priests of the era possessed profoundly spiritual souls that afforded them clear

understanding that without the *Shechina* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, they have nothing for which to live. If so, they should have certainly appreciated that the *Beis Hamikdash* blazing was only the final stage of the destruction. The true agony should have commenced with the *Shechina's* departure from the *Beis Hamikdash*. As explained in Part I above, which cites Gemara Rosh Hashanah, the purpose of building the *Beis Hamikdash* was to create a resting place for the *Shechina* in our midst, as commanded in *Parshas Terumah* 25:8, "And they shall make for Me a dwelling place; and I shall dwell in their midst." *Rashi* in *Parshas Shemini* 9:23 elucidates, "Before the *Shechina* dwelled in the *Mishkan*, Yisrael said to Moshe, 'For what was all this work that we bothered to toil, if the *Shechina* did not rest its Presence here?'" If *Bnei Yisrael* were truly so devastated by the lack of *Shechina* in their midst; they should have been similarly crushed when the *Shechina* departed. Moreover, instead of sacrificing themselves into the inferno when the *Beis Hamikdash* was finally destroyed, they should have rent the heavens with tearful prayer and beseeched Hashem to restore the *Shechina* to His House; and perhaps, the *Beis Hamikdash* would have never been destroyed.

F. In the second half of the verse, Yirmiyahu rebukes the Torah scholars, "And those who grasp My Torah did not know Me." Indeed, even the scholars of the era who studied Torah diligently failed to learn with feelings of connection to Hashem Yisborach. See the *Bach* on *Tur*, Orach Chaim Ch. 47 which describes one's obligation to learn Torah with the goal of connecting one's soul to Hashem Yisborach and drawing bounty from Hashem onto one's soul. It was the absence of this longing for a closer

spiritual connection with Hashem that prompted the exile and subsequent destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

It is interesting to note that Yirmiyahu employs the phrase, 'Those who grasp Torah' to describe the Torah scholars. Indeed, the essence of the mitzvah of Torah study is that the soul of every Jew is a spiritual Light, and the Torah is a vast spiritual Light. When a Jew learns Torah, these two G-dly lights unite and create a boundless energy and spiritual force. However, when one learns Torah without aspiring to connect to the Light of Torah or draw his soul nearer to Hashem, then the union of these two Lights is severely impaired.

Yirmiyahu thus referred to the Torah scholars of that period derogatorily as 'men who grasp Torah.' Indeed, these scholars did not unite with the Torah or become one with it; they merely associated themselves with the Torah. It was as if they held it in their hands, but failed to absorb it and become one with its holiness.

It was during this period that the Sages instituted the Blessings upon the Torah which entreat that we should become '[People] who know Your Name and learn Your Torah for its sake.' [The text of these blessings was composed by the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*, as related by *Gemara Brachos* 33a; and many Sages rule that the essence of the blessing is actually a *mitzvah d'oraysa*. (See *Mishnah Brurah* Ch. 47.) Interestingly, although the blessing regards the study of Torah, the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* preceded the request that we shall be '[People] who know Your Name' to that of 'And who learn Your Torah.' This emphasizes that knowing Hashem is a prerequisite

to learning Torah and ensures that scholars approach the Torah with the clear appreciation that they are learning Torah in order to further enhance their soul connection with Hashem Yisborach.

G. *Gemara Brachos* 8a relates, “From the day that the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, Hashem has nothing in His world but the four *amos* of *Halacha*.” This *Gemara* prompts many a query, yet this section will focus solely upon the *Gemara’s* emphasis upon the four *amos* of *Halacha*. Indeed, this is actually a reference to the other *Gemara* that explains the verse, ‘And they shall make for Me a Temple—a place where Hashem’s Presence will settle in this world. Moreover, Torah study likewise attracts the *Shechina* to settle amidst the nation. Chazal thus employ the term ‘four *amos*’ to refer to a place where the *Shechina* can settle, as ‘four *amos*’ is the minimal Halachic specifications of a place.

The above highlights that just as the *Shechina* is absolutely vital to the *Beis Hamikdash*, so it is to Torah, and especially Torah learned since the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*. Indeed, it is Torah that completes the *Shechina’s* presence in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

CHAPTER FOUR

CITED FROM *TIKKUNEI ZOHAR* REGARDING A JEW'S OBLIGATION TO FEEL THE ANGUISH OF THE HEAVENS THAT RESULTED FROM THE EXILE OF THE *SHECHINA*; A JEW'S OBLIGATION TO REPENT AND PRAY TO RECTIFY THIS TRAGEDY, AS HE YEARNES TO ACCORD HONOR TO THE HEAVENS AND CONVEY PLEASURE TO HASHEM YISBORACH.

A. *Tikkunei Zohar Tikkun 6* states: "Woe unto the people with whom Hashem is bound; and with whom the *Shechina* is also bound. And it says of them, 'Someone who is jailed cannot escape.' The way that they are liberated is with repentance; and this is in their hands, for there are fifty gates of repentance corresponding to the fifty times it says, '*Yetzias Mitzrayim* (Exodus from Egypt) in the Torah. The verse, '*Vayifen ko vacho*—And he turned here and there,' alludes to this. [The numerical equivalent of the Hebrew words *ko* and *cho* are twenty-five, the sum of which is fifty.] These are the fifty letters used to proclaim Hashem as One every day; twenty-five letters in the first recitation of '*Shema*,' and twenty-five letters in the second recitation of '*Shema*.' [The verse continues,] 'And he saw that there was no man' who awakens himself through them... Have we no shame that there is nobody to cry out in repentance, that the *Shechina*, which is so distanced from us, should return to us, and all the kindness that they do, they do for themselves."

B. The above describes the *Shechina's* anguish, as people do not identify with the intense pain and suffering that Hashem feels while the *Shechina*—a G-dly radiance that dwells amongst *Bnei Yisrael*—remains partially severed from Him. *Tikkunei Zohar* adds that it is an obligation for every Jew to strive to rectify this loss by repenting wholeheartedly to Hashem, learning Torah, praying earnestly and fulfilling the essential *mitzvos* of *tefillin*, *tzitzis* and *Kri'as Shema*.

C. The *Zohar* likewise laments that people are too frequently absorbed in their own mundane thoughts and activities rather than focusing upon the distress and grief that Hashem feels because of the exile of His *Shechina*.

D. The *Zohar* painfully expresses that even when people do readily engage in Torah study and the performance of *mitzvos*, their focus and motivation are usually for themselves as opposed to the sake of heaven or the lofty goal of rectifying the great loss in our world. Similarly, when people pray, their prayers revolve around their own selfish needs, aspirations and desires as opposed to the Will of Hashem and lofty purposes of creation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

METHODS THAT HELP A JEW EXPERIENCE THE PAIN THAT THE HEAVENS SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH* AND EXILE OF THE *SHECHINA*; COMMENTARY ON TEHILLIM 137 WHICH DESCRIBES THE DESTRUCTION OF THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH* AND EXILE OF THE NATION; RECOMMENDATIONS IN SERVING HASHEM.

### Part I

A. The above chapters primarily discuss two topics: The first is the intense tragedy and Hashem's indescribable pain upon the destruction of His *Beis Hamikdash* and the exile of His *Shechina* and nation; the second is a Jew's obligation to experience this pain and pray for the *Beis Hamikdash* to be rebuilt and the *Shechina* to return to its resting place.

Unfortunately, many are those who yearn to fulfill this obligation, but lack the means and ability to do so. They strive to sense the intense pain and void; they long to arouse themselves to pray that Hashem's Honor shall be restored to the world and that the *Beis Hamikdash* be rebuilt; and they aspire to eliminate any ulterior motives. Yet, not always do they succeed in shedding even a tear on behalf of Hashem and His Honor.

B. This chapter will present two practical methods to attaining these intense feelings of loss and pain on behalf of the *Shechina*

and praying sincerely, with earnest supplications on behalf of the heavens:

C. The first method abides by the general concept of serving Hashem: A Jew must reflect upon his purpose in the world, as the *Rambam* described at length in *Hilchos Teshuva* Ch. 10, “The proper way is that his service [of Hashem] should be in order to convey pleasure to Hashem Yisborach.” There, he presents numerous points and methods that allow a Jew to merit this lofty spiritual level. (See *Rambam* *ibid* for complete essay.)

D. The second method that allows a Jew to sense the grief of the heavens is as written by the *Biur HaGr”a* to *Sefer Yetzira* Ch. 1:6 p. 9 column 4. He explains that the G-dly radiance called *Shechina* harbors an intense pull to Hashem Yisborach with vast supernatural forces that surpass the laws of nature [since the forces of the Upper Worlds greatly exceed those of the lower worlds and the *Shechina* itself derives from the Upper World.] He also describes that the *Shechina* dwells in the souls of *Bnei Yisrael* and is the force that motivates each and every Jew to yearn for Hashem Yisborach, albeit the intensity of this desire depends upon the extent of the *Shechina’s* connection with the soul in which it rests.

E. See *Ohr HaChaim, Parshas Acharei Mos* and *Ohr Hachaim, Parshas Bechukosai* regarding these lofty concepts.

F. The above underscores that every Jewish soul encompasses the *Shechina* within it, albeit there are times when this relationship is stronger and more intense than others. When the connection between *Shechina* and soul is profound and strong,

then the soul receives lofty powers from the *Shechina* which draws a Jew nearer to Hashem Yisborach.

G. The connection between soul and *Shechina* allows the soul to absorb qualities of the *Shechina* which automatically impels the person to partake in the intense suffering of the *Shechina*, which is so very distanced from Hashem Yisborach and exiled together with the Jewish nation. The more a Jew intensifies his soul's union with the *Shechina* within it, the more he will sense the *Shechina's* suffering.

There are many ways and means of enhancing the connection between soul and *Shechina*. Foremost is learning Torah, praying earnestly, performing *mitzvos* and avoiding *averios*. Moreover, when a person senses hislahavus (profound exhilaration) in his connection to Hashem, this feeling endows him with special powers to bind that moment of exhilaration to Hashem Yisborach [which creates a long-term effect that can be sensed much thereafter]. In fact, there are many who acquire those coveted experiences of yearning and suffering for the *Shechina* only during moments of exhilarated connection with Hashem Yisborach.

## Part II

A. *Tehillim* Ch. 137 exemplifies the intense spiritual connection binding the Jewish soul to Hashem Yisborach and the Jewish nation to their Father in heaven via the *Beis Hamikdash*: "Upon the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and also wept as we recalled Zion. Upon the willows in the midst thereof, we hung our violins, for there our captors required of us a song, and those

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who took our spoils required of us mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.' 'How can we sing the song of Hashem in a foreign land?' If I forget thee, Jerusalem, my right hand shall forget its strength. My tongue will stick to my pallet if I do not remember you, if I do not place Jerusalem above my chief joy."

B. There are four courses of Torah study: The simple explanation, allusion, interpretation, and mystical secrets of Torah.

The above verses in *Tehillim* can be defined according to the mystical secrets of Torah as follows: Every Jew, without exception, harbors a profound, intrinsic connection to Hashem Yisborach, a bond that is so fierce that it cannot be encapsulated in words. This union is the most powerful force that the soul owns, more compelling than any force in the world. (See above Part 1:4.)

C. Tragically, there are many Jews who cannot sense this intrinsic union to Hashem and believe that they are not truly connected to Him. The reason for this is because their entire being is absorbed in materialism and mundane activity. They are swathed in the outer trappings of their souls and the negative forces that surround them, and they fail to penetrate to the most profound depths of their own souls.

D. Song and music are profoundly spiritual concepts. For many, song is an energy that emerges from the deeper recesses of their soul. In this day and age, it is exceedingly rare for a song to emanate from the deepest levels of the soul, albeit it usually derives from a deeper area than the regular soul level.

E. The 'Song of Zion,' which the Babylonians ordered their Jewish captives to sing was an utterly lofty melody, one that inspired the spiritual union of Hashem with Yisrael. It was a song that was sourced—and also touched—the innermost levels of the Jewish soul. The Babylonians wanted to intone that poignant melody not for the sake of Hashem and the soul-connection with Him, but in relation to mundane activities.

F. Thus, their Jewish captives responded, 'How can we sing the song of Hashem in a foreign land?' Indeed, they could not bear to desecrate the depth of Jewish soul melodies by relating them to mundane activities; these were beautiful, stirring melodies that could be used only to enhance one's spiritual connection to Hashem.

G. The verse continues, 'If I do not place Jerusalem above my chief joy.' The teachings of *Kabbalah* divide man and the lofty aspects that represent him into two primary categories:

1. Top-down: This category defines man in accordance with the significance of his organs, the highest level being the head, which is referred to by the *sefiros* as *Kesser*, *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*.

2. Outside-in: This category defines man according to the aspects of his soul, from the outermost trappings to his innermost soul. The first level is *Nefesh*, second is *Ruach*, third is *Neshama*, fourth is *Chaya*, and fifth is *Yechida*. [An acronym for these five layers is NRNCY.]

*Sefer Nahar Shalom*, written by the *Rashash*, states that the activities that man performs while in a state of inner *hislahavus* (spiritual exhilaration) operate on a much deeper level, on the

spiritual level called *Yechida*. This is why Dovid *HaMelech* wrote, 'If I do not place Jerusalem.' Indeed, Jerusalem is the place that fosters connection between the Jewish soul and Hashem; it is the home of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

'Upon my chief joy.' In Hebrew, the text is '*Al rosh simchasi*.' The word *rosh*, in translated here as 'chief,' yet its literal meaning is 'head.' Indeed, activities that occur in the highest place—man's head and brain; and in the deepest level—the *Yechida* aspect of his soul,' can only transpire when there is true *simcha*, true joy and celebration. [The *Arizal* notes that the verse is written as, '*al rosh simchasi*—upon my chief joy,' in order to highlight that there is still a loftier spiritual level than man's mind and head.]

H. The above lesson can be applied to daily life. Indeed, if one finds that he harbors negative thoughts and desires in the deeper levels of his heart, he should realize that these reflections are emanating from the misdeed of 'singing the song of Hashem in a foreign land.'

The strength of the connecting force that binds a Jew to Hashem is rooted in extremely holy, lofty source that enters the world solely in order to forge a more intense bond between Hashem and His people. However, like the Jewish people who were driven by their captors to the riverbanks of Babylon, this force too was taken captive by the forces of evil in the world and exploited for evil purposes. Thus, if one believes that he harbors this type of strength within, he should appreciate that it is a favorable sign. Indeed, the root of his soul bears fantastic strength that can allow him to unite fully with Hashem

Yisborach, the only hindrance being that his strength is now being abused by the forces of evil. Moreover, his connection to evil relates to *Chazal's* message in *Gemara Sukkah* 52a, 'Anyone who is greater than his friend; his [evil] inclination is stronger than his.' Thus, a Jew must strive to garner all his strengths and direct them all intensely toward Hashem Yisborach while breaking away from his connection to evil. This double effort will allow him to attain the loftiest spiritual levels imaginable. The *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar C* and *Ibn Ezra's* commentary on the Torah describe that it is with this *dveikus hamachshava* to Hashem Yisborach that man receives strengths and spiritual powers that surpass the laws of nature. (See *Ibn Ezra, Parshas Shmos* Ch. 3:15; *Parshas Va'era* 6:3; *Parshas Ki Sisa* 33:21; *Parshas Chukas* 20:8. To further understand these concepts, see *Divrei Yaakov*, Topics in *Shas* as quoted in the booklet *In the Ways of Ascent* Ch. 10.]

The ideal means of escaping the pitfalls of negative thoughts and being drawn toward evil is to channel the force that derives from the soul's connection along its natural course—directly to Hashem Yisborach. A person must empty his soul into its Upper Source—Hashem Yisborach. And it is this that will grant life, vitality and true powers to the soul, as eloquently expressed in *Parshas Va'eschanan*, "And to you, who cleave to Hashem your G-D, there is life always!"

CHAPTER SIX

PRAYERS AND ENTREATIES ON BEHALF OF THE HEAVENS ARE ACCEPTED; FEELING THE ANGUISH OF THE *SHECHINA* DRAWS THE FINAL REDEMPTION EVER NEARER; PRAYING ON BEHALF OF THE HEAVENS INITIATES THE FULFILLMENT OF ONE'S PERSONAL PRAYERS; FOCUSING ON CONVEYING PLEASURE TO HASHEM YISBORACH; THE INESTIMABLE POTENCY OF PRAYER THAT CAN TRANSFORM ANY SITUATION TO GOOD—PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE.

Part I

A. Several printings of the *Nefesh HaChaim* include a lecture that Rav Chaim Volozhin once relayed during the Ten Days of Repentance. Toward the end of the speech, he stated, “If we would only focus upon the pain of the *Shechina* in our prayers and supplications, then we would surely merit that our prayers would be answered, and we would rejoice with the final Redemption. Yet we are guilty, as we do not place the pain of the *Shechina* upon our hearts; rather, we ask only for our own needs and livelihood, which is why we do not merit redemption, and merit only a meager bounty of livelihood in order to sustain our bodies instead. Yes, we are formed solely of material; and we cannot fathom the spiritual pleasure that we will enjoy in the future. Thus, the *Shechina* must disguise itself as the angel of the nation to which Yisrael is subjugated, so that they will

survive and merit being slightly rescued from the idol worshippers.” (See *ibid* for complete essay.)

B. *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar* B Ch. 11-12 expounds at length upon the importance of a Jew focusing on his prayers and directing his thoughts and entreaties to the goal of increasing the honor of heaven. (See *ibid* for complete essay.) He cites the words instituted by *Chazal* as part of the special prayers that we recite during the High Holy Days when we beseech for Hashem’s Honor to be restored to the world: ‘Rule upon the entire world with Your Honor and elevate Yourself upon the land with Your eminence.’ Indeed, the High Holy Days are the deciding factor for the coming year—both individually and collectively. Thus, *Chazal* instituted that these special prayers be recited during the High Holy Days—the most critical days of the year—to signify that our most profound and intense yearning is that Hashem’s Kingdom be restored to its previous Glory.

C. Certainly, one is also obligated to pray for his personal needs as well. In fact, the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Tefilla* Ch. 1. rules that prayer is one of the imperative *mitzvos* in the Torah; and it is wrong for one to ignore his personal needs while praying singularly on behalf of Hashem’s honor.

D. The Chazon Ish once divulged that if he would not pray to Hashem to grant him shoes, then it would constitute a serious lack in his service of Hashem. He explained that were he to merit attaining a spiritual level upon which he would not care at all whether he wore shoes, then perhaps he would be exempt from this prayer. However, given that he did care to own shoes and took the time and energy to earn money in order to purchase

them; he must appreciate that those shoes—like everything other gift in this world—come only from Hashem, and that He is our Only Address in prayer.

E. *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar* B Ch. 11 shares that when a Jew prays for his own personal needs or because of his own personal suffering, even if it unrelated to the desecration of Hashem's Name; it is praiseworthy to simultaneously reflect upon conveying pleasure to Hashem Yisborach. *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 46a relates that when a Jew suffers pain, they suffer pain in the heavens as well (see there); and one may thus pray to remedy that pain that the heavens endure on his behalf.

*Nefesh HaChaim* Ch. 12 comments elucidates *Gemara Brachos* 73a: "One who includes the heavens in this suffering; they double his livelihood." Indeed, one who prays to Hashem to grant his personal needs while simultaneously beseeching Hashem to alleviate the suffering of the heavens, merits double salvation.

F. It is important to emphasize that a Jew must be cognizant of his own spiritual level. If ever he feels aroused to tears while beseeching for his needs or to allay his personal suffering, he should intensify his prayers at that time. Indeed, the deeper the source of a heartfelt prayer, the higher it ascends in the heavens. It is more common for a person to attain the loftiest levels of prayer while beseeching for his own personal needs, as these touch him on a deeper level. Thus, prayer for one's personal needs can potentially catapult a Jew to a much higher level than prayer for a lofty concept that he cannot fully grasp or relate to or that does not touch him to the same extent.

G. People face many a challenges, problems and issues that must be overcome and resolved. Some challenges are spiritual, while others are physical or material concerns that create other spiritual issues. Often the key to resolving these difficulties and surmounting the challenge is heartfelt prayer. Obviously, if one would avoid praying for his personal salvation due to his intent to pray solely on behalf of the heavens; then he would remain forever entrapped in his troubles and would never be capable of overcoming various challenges in life.

## Part II

G. Prayer harbors inordinate power to instigate boundless salvations, both on a personal and national level. Chapters in Jewish history and generation-old miracles attest to the potent force of prayer which successfully transformed dire, formidable situations of despair and certain death to wondrous instances of salvation and joy.

*Shmos* Ch. 2:23-24 states that the Exodus from Egypt itself was initiated with prayer: “And they cried; and their shouts ascended to Hashem from the labor; and Hashem heard their wailing, and Hashem recalled his covenant, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.”

*Shmos* Ch. 3:7: “And I heard their cries from their oppressors.”

*Shmos* Ch. 6:5: “And also I heard *Bnei Yisrael's* groaning, as Egypt oppresses them, and I recalled My covenant.”

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*Devarim* 26:7: “And we cried out to Hashem, the G-D of our fathers; and Hashem heard our voice, and He saw our suffering and our toil and our terrible pressures.”

*Shmuel A* 12:8: “When Yaakov descended to Egypt, *Bnei Yisrael* cried out to Hashem; and Hashem sent Moshe and Aharon; and they redeemed your fathers from Egypt and settled you in this place.”

The above verses all indicate that *Bnei Yisrael's* sincere prayers to Hashem heralded their redemption from Egypt. (Several of these verses are also mentioned in the *Mussaf* prayer of Rosh Hashanah.)

Hashem pledged to Avraham that He would redeem his children from a 400-year exile, yet *Bnei Yisrael's* heartrending cries and entreaties instigated an early, swift redemption. The original decree ordained that *Bnei Yisrael* would suffer under Egyptian exile for 400 years, yet the nation's poignant prayers caused Hashem to count the 400 years from the time of Yitzchak's birth; and *Bnei Yisrael* remained exiled in Egypt for but 210 years (see *Shmos* 12:40, *Rashi*).

H. The Spitting of the Sea also transpired as a result of *Bnei Yisrael's* heartfelt prayers. *Shmos* 14:10 vividly describes the miraculous event of the Splitting of the Sea: “And Pharaoh approached; and *Bnei Yisrael* raised their eyes; and behold, Egypt is pursuing them. And *Bnei Yisrael* were very afraid; and *Bnei Yisrael* cried out to Hashem.”

At this historic moment, an entire nation faced threat of imminent death. Locked between the sea and a furious enemy nation, their only choice was prayer. *Bnei Yisrael* turned in

desperate plea to their Father, and their heartfelt cries rent the heavens. It was at that moment that *Bnei Yisrael* witnessed one of the greatest miracles of all times, as the Red Sea split before them, manifestly contradicting the very laws of nature.

I. *Shmuel* A 12:8 states that it was only in the merit of prayer that *Bnei Yisrael* merited redemption from Egypt and settling in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The subsequent verses relate: “And they forgot Hashem their G-D; and He sold them into the hands of Sisra, army general of Chatzor, and into the hands of the Philistines and into the hand of the King of Moav; and they fought against them. And they cried out to Hashem and said, ‘We sinned as we abandoned Hashem, and we worshipped idols. And now, Hashem, deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve You!’ And Hashem sent Yeruba’al (Gideon) and Bedan (Shimshon) and Yiftach and Shmuel; and He delivered you from the enemies surrounding you, and you sat in security, and you feared Him...”

J. The above verses reveal that the many miracles that *Bnei Yisrael* merited throughout history, including those which transpired during the wars in *Sefer Shoftim* and *Sefer Shmuel*, resulted from their heartfelt prayers. (These prayers were linked with a deep-seated commitment to repent fully and return to Hashem, as quoted above, ‘We sinned... And now, save us from the hands of our enemies and we will serve You.’)

K. Many a tale in *Tanach* relates of individuals who merited extraordinary miracles and salvation in the merit of heartfelt, tearful prayer.

Perhaps the most famous example is the prophetess Chana, mother of Shmuel *HaNavi*, who spilled her heart in poignant prayer in what became known as *Tefillas Chana* (Chana's Prayer). It was this hour of earnest supplication that rent the heavens and blessed her with a son as remarkable as Shmuel *HaNavi*, whose spiritual stature and prophetic powers earned him the status of *Rabban shel Nevi'im* (Teacher of the Prophets). Indeed, the only prophet in history to surpass him was Moshe Rabbeinu who merited speaking face-to-face with Hashem. (See *Kisvei Ha'Ari*, *Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh* 1b; *Sha'ar Hagilgulim*, Preface 22 36a; beginning of *Shmuel A*, which describes that Shmuel *HaNavi* was of the greatest of all prophets, second only to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and the prophetic powers of all the prophets who followed him were drawn from his spiritual strength. Prior to the era of Shmuel *HaNavi*, heavenly barriers blocked the bestowal of prophecy to the lower world; yet Shmuel overcame these barriers and unleashed a bounty of prophecy. Thus, with her prayers, Chana not only merited a son as spiritually great as Shmuel *HaNavi*, but she also indirectly restored prophecy to the world, as well.

L. In *Shmuel A* 1:15, Chana describes her prayer to Eli *HaKohein*: "And I spilled my soul before Hashem."

Chana's prayers rose passionately from the depths of her heart until they burst out in tearful entreaty. Her prayer, by definition, was a 'spilling of the heart.'

The Jewish soul derives from an exceedingly lofty, holy place, directly beneath Hashem's Throne of Honor. When the soul descends to the lower world and fuses with the corporeal body,

it still maintains its spiritual connection to Hashem, albeit in a far weaker form than the intense connection that previously existed. During times of prayer—when one is directly communicating with Hashem Yisborach—the soul regains this connection to Hashem as it overflows in its craving to cleave to its Upper Source—Hashem.

M. In *Sefer Ma'ase Ish Toldos* Vol. 7 p. 19, the Chazon Ish emphasizes that focused prayer harbors the potential to annul any evil decree. He would often comfort the brokenhearted with the assurance, “Hashem awaits your prayers!” [Although in most cases, it is also necessary to take physical action to bring about results; one must, first and foremost, place his belief and trust in Hashem and pray from the bottom of one’s heart.

N. *Igros Chazon Ish* describes prayers as a ‘*matte oz*—a staff of strength,’ a powerful tool that he can exploit to change his path in life. This lesson can be applied to daily life, as people who face a specific challenge in life often feel that that the problem engulfs their very being, their entire life. Thus, every Jew must be aware that prayer harbors the potency to transform every aspect of life; prayers and supplication to Hashem Yisborach can change one’s entire world.

It is possible that the Chazon Ish’s metaphor for prayer, a staff of strength, alludes to the Splitting of the Sea, a miracle that resulted from *Bnei Yisrael’s* heartfelt prayers but was executed by Moshe *Rabbeinu’s* staff, as written in *Parshas Beshalach* 14:16: “And, you, raise your staff and stretch out your hand upon the sea and split it.” Verse 19 continues, “And Moshe stretched out his hand upon the sea...” Verse 26 describes the

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water returning full-force upon the Egyptians: “And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Stretch out your hand upon the sea, and the waters will return.’” Verse 27 continues, “And Moshe stretched out his hand.”

O. *Sefer Ma’ase Ish* describes an experience of intense connection with *Hakaddosh Baruch Hu*. Page 14 relates, “He was still in that apartment when I visited him. It was early in the night; and he sat there in the yard, absorbed in staring at the night sky. I discovered him in a state of awe and *dveikus*, his eyes were streaming with many tears, and he did not sense that we were standing there beside him for a long time.”

P. Page 15 adds, “And he would regularly tell me when there was a thorny section in the *Halacha*, ‘*Nu*, will we be up all night? [to learn and toil in Torah all night long, until we understand it.] For, how can I climb onto my bed until I find a place of understanding in the complete Torah of Hashem?’ And I heard this from him many a time.”

Q. See *ibid* for inspirational anecdotes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPILATION OF TOPICS AS LISTED IN PREVIOUS  
CHAPTERS:

Part I: Verses in *Tehillim*

A. *Tehillim* 132 begins, “A song of Ascent. Remember, Hashem, for Dovid all his afflictions, how he swore to Hashem and vowed to the Mighty One of Yaakov. ‘Surely, I will not come to the Tabernacle of my house; surely I will not rise onto my bed. Surely I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for Hashem, a Dwelling Place for the Mighty One of Yaakov.”

B. *Gemara Brachos* 3b elucidates that Dovid *Hamelech* abstained from sleep to a dangerous degree (see there for expanded explanation and commentaries) in order to fulfill his personal vow that he would neither rest nor slumber until the *Beis Hamikdash* would be built; and the *Beis Hamikdash* was never built in his lifetime.

C. According to the verse above, Dovid’s vow also included abstaining from entering his own home, although he must have surely done so at some point in time. *Rashi* elucidates that his words ‘Until I find’ refer to the actual site of the future *Beis Hamikdash*, as opposed to the actual building. [The *Malbim*, however, maintains that Dovid’s vow applied until the *Beis Hamikdash* was fully built; see there to resolve the question of how Dovid entered his home during his lifetime.]

D. *Tehillim* 84:3 states: “My soul longs and faints for the Courts of Hashem; my heart and flesh will cry to a Living G-D.” *Rashi* elucidates: “Longs and desires for the Courts of Hashem as they were destroyed; and upon the exile, he said, ‘My heart and soul will cry—pray—because of this.’”

## Part II: Points from Contemporary *Sefarim*

A. The *Shl”a* relates that the *Maggid* (Angl) who appeared to the *Beis Yosef* said, ‘If you could only grasp one in the millions and billions of agonies that the *Shechina* suffers, you would have no joy in your heart and no laughter in your mouth when you recall this.’ (See there for complete message.)

B. Rav Yaakov Emdin, zt”l, wrote in *Siddur Beis Yaakov* in the Laws Pertaining to *Tisha B’Av* Vol. 6 Letter 16 regarding the obligation to mourn the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*: “In my opinion, this is the most obvious and compelling reason for the many destructions and atrocities that we have suffered in the exile, in all places; we have been chased by our necks, and never left alone, as the mourning has disappeared from our hearts.”

C. Rav Yehonasan Eibschitz wrote in *Sefer Ye’aros Dvash* regarding the month of *Elul* and the blessings, ‘*Binyan Yerushalayim*’ and ‘*Tzemach Dovid*,’ that one must weep ceaselessly, as it is the very purpose of our life.

D. The *Alschich*’s poem in *Tikkun Chatzos* states, “In the House of Israel, I have witnessed an outrage; there is no one who places this on his heart...” (See there for complete text.)

## CONCLUSION

A. To conclude, it is apt to cite the words of *Chazal* in *Maseches Taanis* 30b and *Bava Basra* 60b: "All who mourn Jerusalem will merit seeing in her joy, as written, 'Rejoice for Jerusalem and exult in her all who love her; delight with her in joy all who mourn for her.'" [This verse is quoted from *Yeshaya* 66:10 and is read as the *Haftara* on *Rosh Chodesh*.]

*Talmud Yerushalmi* on the above states that *Yeshaya* apparently prophesied these words on the final day of his life, shortly before he was killed as described in *Maseches Yevamos* 49b. [This is also cited by *Rashi* in *Taanis* 26b. See also *Divrei Yaakov* in *Bi'urei Aggados* on *Taanis* *ibid.*]

B. *Kabbalah* teaches that one who genuinely mourns the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and beseeches Hashem to rebuild it can also merit an aspect of the indescribable spiritual radiance of the *Beis Hamikdash* even in this day and age of exile. As expressed in Chapter 1 of this booklet, the spiritual radiance of the *Beis Hamikdash* surpasses anything that one can fathom, as it is a radiance that derives from the *Shechina* itself. The *Shechina* that was present in the *Beis Hamikdash* automatically led to the *Shechina* dwelling in the heart of each and every Jew and also forged an intense spiritual connection between every Jew and *Hakaddosh Baruch Hu*. Although the absolute realization of this connection can only be experienced and achieved when the *Beis Hamikdash* is rebuilt, a Jew can merit drawing a minute aspect of this bond whenever he mourns and expresses his inner longing for the *Beis Hamikdash* through

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prayer. And of course, the extent to which one grieves upon the destruction and implores Hashem to rebuild His House is the extent to which he will merit forging a deep, permanent connection with Hashem Yisborach.

## Glossary

<i>Amos</i>	Handbreadths
<i>Anshei Knesses HaGedolah</i>	Great Assembly
<i>Aveira/os</i>	Sin(s)
<i>Bas kol</i>	Heavenly voice
<i>Beis Hamikdash</i>	Holy Temple
<i>Bnei Yisrael</i>	People of Israel
<i>Chazal</i>	Sages
<i>Dveikus</i>	Cleaving to Hashem
<i>Eretz Yisrael</i>	Land of Israel
<i>Hakaddosh Baruch Hu</i>	The Holy One Blessed Is He
<i>HaKohein</i>	The Priest
<i>Halacha</i>	Jewish Law
<i>Hamelech</i>	The King
<i>Hanavi</i>	The Prophet
<i>Hislavavus</i>	Spiritual exhilaration
<i>Kappores</i>	Covering of the Holy Ark
<i>Klal Yisrael</i>	People of Israel
<i>Kruvim</i>	Cherubs
<i>Mishkan</i>	Tabernacle
<i>Mitzvah/os</i>	Commandment(s)
<i>Mitzvah d'oraysa</i>	Commanded by the Torah
<i>Rosh Chodesh</i>	First of the Month
<i>Sefarim</i>	Holy works
<i>Shabbos</i>	Sabbath
<i>Shechina</i>	Divine Presence
<i>Shemone Esrei</i>	Silent Prayer
<i>Simcha</i>	Joy
<i>Tanach</i>	Holy Scriptures
<i>Yetzias Mitzrayim</i>	Exodus from Egypt

**DARCHEY AVRAHAM**

**BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR**

**CHAPTERS FROM THE LIFE HISTORY OF  
HARAV AVRAHAM CHAIM ADDESS OF BLESSED  
MEMORY,**

**AN OUTSTANDING TZADDIK WHO HAD VAST KNOWLEDGE OF BOTH  
REVEALED AND HIDDEN BRANCHES OF TORAH LEARNING**

**INTRODUCTION**

The following life history of HaRav Adess is derived from several sources. These include, first and foremost, my father, Hagaon HaRav Yehuda Adess shlit'a, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivath Kol Yaakov and grandson of the author. Further details were provided by other reliable people who were acquainted with HaRav Adess either directly or indirectly. Yet another source of information was a letter written by HaRav Adess' sons and printed in the sefer, פרי עץ הגן. Written works, published by Torah scholars of repute who were personally acquainted with HaRav Adess, were also consulted.

Whatever I have written here has been culled from authoritative sources and every effort has been made to ensure that all the details are accurate.

## **BIOGRAPHY Of The Author**

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I can not but feel that I am totally inadequate to do justice to the personality and greatness of HaRav Address, hampered as I was by the distance of 80 years that have elapsed since he left this world. Nevertheless I feel that the few chapters I have written here are still preferable to making no mention at all of HaRav Address' life history. I sincerely hope that all readers will be positively influenced by them, and that they will prove to be a source of inspiration for people who are striving to improve their Torah-learning and service of Hashem.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **HIS LIFE HISTORY**

HaRav Avraham Address, of blessed memory, was born in the year 5617, (1857). His father was HaRav Yitzchak Entebbe of blessed memory; the family sometimes used Entebbe as an alternative surname. It is possible that they were descended from HaRav Avraham Entebbe, author of a number of scholarly works including the well-known **ישב אהלים** and others.

He was not yet twenty years old when he married the daughter of HaRav Moshe Swede, of blessed memory. HaRav Swede was a Rabbi in Aram Tzova (Syria) and very famous for his great Torah scholarship, in particular for the profundity of his Torah knowledge.

HaRav Address passed away in Jerusalem on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Av in the year 5685 (1925).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HIS AMAZING DILIGENCE IN LEARNING**

1. From his earliest youth HaRav Avraham Address was recognized for his remarkable studiousness. His whole life was one of uninterrupted learning, and until the end of his days his outstanding diligence continued to be his greatest asset and the most notable aspect of how he studied the holy Torah.

2. It is known that for quite a number of years he did not sleep at nights during the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur. Instead, he would stay awake and learn throughout the night. He used to learn together with HaRav Yitzchak Sherim, of blessed memory, who was a contemporary of his.

3. In the sefer פרי עץ הגן, his disciple, HaRav Yaakov Katzin, of blessed memory, wrote about HaRav Address. After all the superlatives he used to describe his life, he concludes with a description of his studiousness, and I would like to quote from it:

"Literally every Jewish person witnessed it and can confirm that no-one ever saw him when he was not studying Torah - any time; day, night, Shabbath, weekdays, Festivals. He was not a person who spoke a lot. However when matters of Torah and fearing Hashem were concerned, he was a מעין המתגבר, a 'spring from which the waters never cease flowing', and always had more and more to expound on the subject. Thus we see how HaRav Address was in possession of all the good traits listed by our Sages."

4. It must be added that for many years his devotion to Torah was despite dire poverty and constant hunger. It is difficult or impossible for us to understand how much he suffered from illnesses and other forms of hardship, yet never did it affect his Torah learning in any way.

5. In several places in the Gemara our Sages say that the Torah exists and thrives only within a person who gives his life for it - אין התורה מתקיימת אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה. HaRav Address was the very personification of this concept. His life was Torah; he

quite literally drew all his vitality from learning Torah and serving Hashem.

6. For days on end he could be seen sitting in the Beth Kneseth known as the **בבא תמא** in Jerusalem. He would remain there learning uninterruptedly from morning till night, one tractate of Gemara after another.

He learnt the Talmud Bavli and would go over what he had learnt many times. On one occasion he made a siyum to celebrate having completed the whole Talmud Bavli. He explained that the learning had not been part of his regular learning schedule but a separate schedule of reviewal that he had taken upon himself to learn every day between Mincha and Ma'ariv. In that short time every day, he had been through the entire Shas and was celebrating with a siyum. It ought to be noted that in that particular Beth Kneseth there was only a brief interval between the two services.

7. HaRav Avraham Douek, shlita, grandson of HaRav Shaul Douek, of blessed memory, recalls that as a child in Jerusalem he received blessings from many of the great Rabbis living there at the time. One notable exception was HaRav Avraham Address; he had always been afraid to approach him. Whenever he saw him, he was so deeply engrossed in his learning that he felt that it was wrong to interrupt him. Even when HaRav Address was walking on the streets, he said, his mind was still so absorbed in the Torah he was learning that you could see his lips constantly moving. Consequently, even when he saw HaRav Address going along the road, HaRav Douek was reluctant to go up to him and disturb him.

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In the sefer פדה את יעקב, HaRav Avraham Monse wrote about HaRav Avraham Address: "I once saw him going on his way home.... his face was shining brightly..... I followed him until he came to his house and went into the forecourt. I saw his lips moving as he spoke to himself; I don't remember exactly what he said, but I remember that he was quoting verses like, ' ישתבח 'מה רבו מעשיך ה' - שמך מלכינו - May Your Name be blessed, our King,' and others in a similar vein, all demonstrating how real was his fear of Hashem and his total love for Him; every minute or so he would look upwards and gaze at the heaven."

## CHAPTER 3

### A GREAT TORAH SCHOLAR

1. He was an extremely great Torah scholar. My father, shlita, once quoted HaRav Ezra Attia, of blessed memory, (Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivath Porath Yosef and one of HaRav Address' disciples) as saying that: "If this whole room - and they were in a big room - were filled with seforim from the floor to the ceiling, it could not contain all your grandfather's Torah knowledge. He excelled in particular in learning in depth, בעיון."
2. In the introduction to the sefer יעקב חרות HaRav Attia relates an incident concerning HaRav Address that impressed him deeply: He was once sitting learning with a colleague in a Beth Medrash when HaRav Address came in for a sefer and noticed that they were working on trying to clarify a certain topic. He himself was not involved in that particular subject at the time, yet without hesitation, outlined to them several principles which made it easier for them to understand the subject under discussion.
3. From this incident we can see that however much importance he attached to in-depth learning, it did not prevent him gaining extensive knowledge of all other areas of Torah at the same time. He expended a great deal of effort on that aspect of learning as well.
4. HaRav Address was never able to afford to buy many seforim of his own. An arrangement he had with a bookseller enabled him to learn from seforim which he might not have been able to

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obtain otherwise. The bookseller would lend him seforim overnight - a time when customers do not come to buy - and HaRav Address would return them in the morning. Thanks to his phenomenal memory he memorized the contents, and after a single night had the knowledge at his disposal for future reference, even if he did not have access to the sefer again.

## CHAPTER 4

### HIS MANY DISCIPLES

1. Before he was even twenty years old he had many pupils who learnt Torah from him. We know that by the time he came to Eretz Yisrael (5655 - 1895) he had already been teaching for 18 years in Aram Tzova. Many of his disciples themselves became noteworthy Rabbanim and Chachamim in Aram Tzova. In the sefer פרי עץ הגן it says that almost the majority of the important rabbis of Aram Tzova of that period were disciples of his. The author of the sefer also adds a list of those rabbis. Another list of HaRav Address' disciples can be found in the introduction to the sefer חדות יעקב.

2. His sons were also his pupils, and they later became great Torah personalities in their own rights. They are listed here in the order of their seniority:

The oldest was HaRav Yitzchak who was considered a genius in Torah learning. He passed away in the year 5676 (1916) when he was still a young man. In spite of his youth, he had already reached an extremely high spiritual level, as affirmed by the great men of Jerusalem of that generation.

His sons HaRav Ezra and HaRav Moshe were both on the staff of Yeshivath Porath Yosef.

His son, HaRav Yaakov, was one of the deans of the Yeshiva, and was also an active member of committees working to ensure that no changes were wrought in the educational institutions of

Sephardic Jewry. At the same time HaRav Yaakov became one of the leading Dayanim in Eretz Yisrael too.

Similarly HaRav Address' son-in-law, HaRav Aharon Raful, was a member of Yeshivath Porath Yosef's staff as well as being a Dayan.

His son HaRav Yaakov left many unpublished manuscripts. In 5761 (2001) Yeshivath Porath Yosef printed some of them in a sefer named שו"ת חדות יעקב . In the introduction to the sefer, details concerning the life histories of both HaRav Avraham and HaRav Yaakov Address can be found. There are many more manuscripts as yet unpublished and others which have been mislaid over the years.

Anyone who knows of the whereabouts of any writings or manuscripts written by HaRav Yaakov Address is requested to contact Yeshivath Kol Yaakov in Jerusalem, and Hashem will surely reward him well for doing so.

3. His illustrious disciple HaRav Ezra Attia, of blessed memory, must also be mentioned. He was the head of Yeshivath Porath Yosef, and all the students who learnt there were pupils of his. Recently a sefer of his writings, עלה עזרא , was published.

HaRav Ezra was very closely attached to HaRav Address. He said that during the first years after HaRav Address passed away, he missed him so much that every night when he remembered him, he would weep bitterly.

HaRav Ezra once told a grandson of HaRav Address: "Your grandfather was like an angel; just as the seas occasionally spew

forth a precious stone on to the shore, so your grandfather was a precious gem sent to grace our generation."

HaRav Ezra used to approach HaRavAddress and request his intervention whenever a situation arose that required sincere prayer. This happened frequently since the power of his prayers was amazing; many instances of salvation and relief can be accredited directly to his prayers.

(It should be mentioned that HaRav Ezra was also a disciple of HaRav Avraham Address' son HaRav Yitzchak, and in the sefer **פדה את אברהם** he quotes what HaRav Ezra told him about his learning schedule with him. For more details refer to the above sefer, pages 419-420.)

4. The above-mentioned disciples of HaRav Address all taught many disciples of their own, and they in turn guided the next generation. It can truly be said that a high proportion of the Torah leaders of Sephardic Jewry today owe their Torah and greatness to HaRav Address.

5. It would be appropriate to quote here from the writings of the Vilna Gaon: He explains that not only does a master give over Torah knowledge to his pupil; he also brings into existence additional elements of spirituality that the disciple did not possess beforehand. They combine with the spirit of holiness of the disciple's soul and embellish it.

Thus we can understand why the Gemara **חגיגה** uses such compelling terms when advising us of the importance of learning from a rabbi who is a great Tzaddik. And why the title of "a Rabbi who is like an angel of Hashem" is an appropriate description. The greater the master, the greater will be the

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holiness of the soul that his disciple receives. This was the secret of HaRav Address' success - he brought forth so much holiness which was passed on to his pupils; they absorbed it into their souls and it raised the standard of their Torah-learning tremendously.

It is a lesson for everyone to learn: Many of us want to learn Torah and teach others how to become great Torah scholars. Every effort must be put into learning Torah as thoroughly as possible, and to put all the time at one's disposal into the efforts. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the fact that the standard and the achievements of the pupils will also be affected - and in no small measure - by the righteousness and spiritual greatness of the Rav from whom they learn. The greater the Rav, the more success his disciples will see in their Torah-learning.

## CHAPTER 5

### HIDING HIS GREATNESS

1. HaRav Address was a very unassuming person and spent his whole life trying to avoid acclaim and honor. His humility was extreme. He treated every single person, great and small alike, with the same degree of respect and utmost modesty. His humility is mentioned in the sefer פרי עץ הגן : Every day he would try to improve on the humbleness of his behavior and he treated everyone he met in a truly exemplary manner.

2. HaRav Ezra Attia said that when HaRav Address passed away, he was asked to eulogize him. He was reluctant to do so since he was aware of HaRav Address' aversion to hearing himself praised during his lifetime. How could he now disregard HaRav Address' wishes?

HaRav Address appeared to him in a dream and told him that he need not have any misgivings: It was only while he was alive that he had to fear the sin of pride and avoid anything that might lead to it. Such considerations, he explained in the dream, are irrelevant once a person has left this world.

3. In the sefer פרי עץ הגן, mention is made of someone referred to as Rav Aharon. He was well-acquainted with HaRav Address, and knew about many of the wondrous things he had done in his life. After HaRav Address passed away and his sons were sitting shiv'a for their father, Rav Aharon came to visit them and told them that he could tell them about a number of miraculous events in which HaRav Address was involved. However, he said

that he was not sure whether he was permitted to speak about these matters, since HaRav Address had always forbidden him to do so when he was alive. The sons explained to him that now that their father was not living, the reasons were no longer applicable and there was nothing to prevent him talking about the things he knew. He proceeded to tell them several remarkable anecdotes concerning HaRav Address, a number of which are quoted in the above sefer and any readers who are interested can refer to it for the particulars.

4. HaRav Address never allowed himself to be photographed. His reasons for being so particular about it were probably based on kabbalistic sources (see פתחי תשובה ביו"ד סימן קמ"א ס"ק ק' בשם 'יערות דבש ח"א דרוש ב'), and possibly also because he preferred to keep himself as unknown as possible.

I think it was my father who told me that HaRav Chaim Leib Auerbach of blessed memory, Rosh Yeshivath Sha'ar Hashamayim, once took a photograph of him without him being aware of it, because he thought that it was important to let future generations know what the Tzaddik had looked like. Yet after HaRav Chaim Leib passed away and a thorough search was made for the picture, no trace of it could be found anywhere: It was quite clear to everyone that it was the hand of Hashem acting in accordance with the wishes of a Tzaddik who wanted no picture of his likeness to remain in existence.

5. See also later what is written about his having Ruach Hakodesh, and what Hagaon HaRav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld said about the lengths to which he went to disguise the fact.

## CHAPTER 6

### A KABBALASTIC SCHOLAR OF REPUTE

1. He was well-versed in the Torah of Kabbalah. In that field of Torah-learning too he achieved greatness, and the leading kabbalistic sages of the era greatly revered his opinions when matters of Kabbalah were under discussion.
2. A debate among the leading Torah giants of the time is mentioned in the Shabbath volume of the Rashash's siddur. HaRav Yedidia Refael Abulafia and HaRav Sasson Parsiedo differed in their opinions about the 'kavanoth' - the devotions one ought to put into the Shabbath prayers, and whether or not they should be similar to those for the weekday prayers in certain respects. In the siddur mentioned above are quoted the proofs by which the controversy was finally resolved. From what is written in the siddur, it is clear that HaRav Avraham Address and HaRav Chaim Shaul Douek were consulted and that significance is attached to the approval that they gave.
3. HaRav Yaakov Katzin writes in the sefer פרי עץ הגן: As well as his pre-eminence in תורת הנגלה - the revealed and explicit branches of Torah learning - HaRav Address also penetrated deep into the kabbalistic branches of learning. He delved into the works of the Ari Hakadosh and the Rashash of blessed memory - the siddurim of the Rashash were favorites of his - until he understood them with all their "roots and branches." He used to pore over these writings day and night, but always did so in hidden places and unbeknown to other people, because "wisdom comes together with modesty."

In the same place, HaRav Yaakov writes that HaRav Address was one of the founders of Yeshivath Hamekubalim, the Yeshiva of Kabbalists for the Sages of Aram Tzova in the Bucharim neighborhood of Jerusalem. He also comments that during his whole life HaRav Address was known to pray using the 'nusach' - the wording of the prayers - found in the Rashash's siddur.

4. In the above sefer HaRav Address' sons also dwell on their father's kabbalistic knowledge. They said that they had heard him say that there was not a single sefer of Kabbalah, neither in printed nor in manuscript form, that he had not been through and studied in detail from beginning to end.

(I also heard that it was well-known that he used the Rashash's approach when teaching Kabbalah to others, and that he preferred to say his prayers according to the version in the Rashash's siddur. Yet for himself he also studied the kabbalistic writings of many others of the world's Torah giants, and achieved a rare degree of proficiency in them.)

5. Even more than the greatness in Kabbalah that he achieved through diligent study, is that which he was granted through Ruach Hakodesh. The holy spirit of understanding Kabbalah, which he was given as a direct gift from Hashem, was the main source of his supernatural achievements in reaching the lofty heights of understanding Kabbalah.

See more on the subject in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### HIS RUACH HAKODESH

1. Although unknown to the general public, the extraordinary power of his Ruach Hakodesh and the clarity of his spiritual insights were known to the greatest men in Jerusalem of that epoch. However most of the stories concerning these matters of spiritual nature disappeared from the world together with the passing of those great men. HaRav Address himself never wanted the stories publicized. We only know of them because when he passed away there were great men who, without saying more than a few words, let it be known that HaRav Address had been in possession of tremendous spiritual powers and that he had Ruach Hakodesh.

2. The little that we of the later generations are privileged to know, is from his sons' letter in פרי עץ הגן and other incidents which they told about their illustrious father. Most of that aspect of HaRav Address' life will remain forever secret.

When his sons were sitting shiv'a after their father passed away, HaRav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the famed Rabbi of Jerusalem, came to them and told them: "Your father had Ruach Hakodesh, but he concealed it so that you were not aware of it." It is obvious that although his sons were aware of the fact that their father had Ruach Hakodesh, HaRav Yosef Chaim considered the little they knew to be negligible in comparison to all that he knew about HaRav Address' greatness in the realms of spirituality.

3. A very small amount of what is known on the subject is all we can hope to convey to the reader. His son HaRav Yaakov Address refers to his father's Ruach Hakodesh in a letter that is printed in פרי עץ הגן .

(The section of the above sefer between pages 65-73 was quite obviously written by HaRav Address' sons. As far as I know, the manuscript in HaRav Yaakov's handwriting is still in existence. HaRav Yosef Address, a son of HaRav Yaakov, also says that he heard the incident mentioned by his father.)

The following is a quotation from that letter: In the year 5679, close to the time of my marriage, I was speaking to my venerable father, and I told him about a dream I had the night before. In the dream, I saw a majestic looking Rabbi whose whole appearance radiated splendor and glory. I knew that it was the great master, the Rambam, of blessed memory, and I kissed his hand and he blessed me. My father proceeded to tell me about his appearance and his demeanor in great detail. The description fitted so exactly to the vision I had seen in my dream, that I was amazed. I asked my father from where he knew what the Rambam looked like. He answered: "Know my son, that at night when my soul elevates itself and goes up on high, I see all the righteous Tzaddikim and I recognize them all - the Rambam, the Rif, the Rosh, the Rashba, the Ran, etc. and the Ari, the Rachu, and the Rashash. May the merit of all those great men watch over us. On one occasion I saw the Rashash of blessed memory in a dream, and he said to me that I must exert myself and strive to understand his writings and to explain them to others."

4. From the above anecdote we see the greatness not only of HaRav Avraham Address himself, but also of his son HaRav Yaakov; already in the year 5679 when he was only about twenty years old, he saw the Rambam in a dream and received a blessing from him - and he saw him so clearly that the next day he was able to describe him with great accuracy.

In connection with the above, I would like to mention another incident that I heard about from my father. It also concerns HaRav Yaakov and took place at about the same time - just before HaRav Yaakov's marriage:

Due to their extreme poverty, an evening meal was not served in HaRav Address' house at that time - and it is surely unnecessary to add that the other meals of the day were also very frugal. HaRav Yaakov used to learn at night with one of the rabbanim of the Harrari-Raful family. The Harrari-Rafuls had more means than HaRav Address, and in their house they did eat a meal in the evening. HaRav Yaakov would come to his learning partner's house, join him for the meal, and then they would go to learn.

Later HaRav Yaakov became engaged to marry one of the daughters of the family. During the whole period of their engagement he avoided coming to the Harrari-Rafuls house before he went to learn. Instead, he would go directly to the Beth Medrash where they used to learn, even though it meant that he did not eat anything. He was afraid that if he went to the house he might inadvertently catch sight of his fiancé, and he did not think it was fitting for him to do so. My father said that he thinks it very possible that it was due to his extreme caution

in this matter of tzniuth, even at the cost of going hungry, that he was found worthy of seeing the revelation in his dream as cited above.

5. Anyone who is interested in reading more of the little that is known of the stories involving HaRav Address' spiritual powers, should refer to the sefer פרי עץ הגן (pages 63-74) See what is written (p.64) about an acquaintance of HaRav Address who once asked him about great people of their own times who have Ruach Hakodesh and was answered as follows: "My friend, I will tell you of a wonderful matter concerning a Yemenite Tzaddik who appeared in the Beth Knesseth of the מכוונים in the Bucharim neighborhood not long ago. He used to conceal his greatness and tried to act as if he were a simple person. Yet, during the Days of Awe and on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, I saw a pillar of heavenly fire resting over his head: Before the year was over, the Tzaddik had passed away and left this world. May his merit protect us. I can imagine that a Tzaddik of such spiritual caliber must have had Ruach Hakodesh."

6. Another awesome incident is related in פרי עץ הגן by HaRav Yaakov Katzin (p.73): "I feel it a sacred obligation to tell about the righteous Tzaddik; I myself was present and heard it with my own ears. It was before Yom Kippur, at the beginning of the year 1929) תרפ"ט), and I was concentrating with utmost concentration on the spiritual realms of the Yom Kippur prayers and their kavanoth, and trying to perceive the truth with my own limited human understanding.

The Tzaddik said to me: 'My son, this is the actual truth of how it is, and I say it without any doubts whatsoever because I

look with my eyes and see the all the 'lights' ( - obviously he was referring not to the physical light and sight that we know, but to spiritual realities totally beyond our comprehension) I see these things in the World Above arranged exactly as I told you and it is patently clear this is the truth of how it is.'

Thus spoke the Tzaddik; only few words, but from which we can learn a great deal about his amazing familiarity with matters of holiness and purity as well as his great modesty. May his memory protect us."

(This is the most remarkable of all the stories about his Ruach Hakodesh, and I have heard great men say that if the facts had not been written by a reliable person, we would not be aware that such greatness still existed at all in a generation not so very far from ours. It should be pointed out that although HaRav Yaakov Katzin, who wrote the above, was relatively young at the time, he was nevertheless known to be one of the principle disciples of the great Kabbalists in Jerusalem of that era. In his later years he learnt and taught Kabbalah to others. He was also the chazzan with the סידור הכוונות for HaRav Shaul Douek - a position he could not possibly have filled without an extremely high standard of comprehensive and accurate knowledge of Kabbalah, especially at a young age.)

7. The great rabbis of Jerusalem of the last generation, and his son HaRav Yaakov among them, knew of another instance which confirms that HaRav Address was blessed with Ruach Hakodesh.

HaRav Yehuda Petaya, זצ"ל, published יין הרקח which is a sefer explaining the אידרות (- part of the Zohar) according to the teachings of the Ari Hakadosh. When HaRav Yehuda came to

Eretz Yisrael from Bavel (Iraq) in 1905) (תריס"ה) HaRav Address went to visit him and said to him that he knew that he had written a sefer explaining the אידרא. He requested him to make haste to publish it, and said that if money were the problem he would provide it. HaRav Yehuda asked him from where he knew about the sefer, for he had kept its writing very secret and there were very few people in the world who knew about it. HaRav Address answered that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai had appeared to him and informed him of the sefer's existence, and asked him to hasten its publication.

In the introduction to the sefer יין הרקח - the edition published after HaRav Yehuda Petaya's death - HaRav Yaakov verifies the account.

8. There were other remarkable aspects to HaRav Address' personality. His understanding of people's souls was extraordinary; he knew who they had been in previous gilgulim and the deeds they had done then. He knew what they were meant to rectify in their present gilgul, and what happened to them in their lives now as a result of their behavior in the past. He was also aware of what would happen to them in the future.

Not everything can be written here, and therefore I will not elaborate on the subject.

9. There is a sefer written by an extremely learned sage of that generation which is so holy that it may not be printed, nor may it even be circulated as it is in manuscript form for individuals to read. In it too, I think, reference is made to HaRav Address' above mentioned ability to understand about gilgulim.

10. I heard from a grandson of HaRav Yehoshua Sharbani that when the Ben-Ish-Chai passed away in 1909) תרס"ט), HaRav Yehoshua was in Eretz Yisrael. The Ben-Ish-Chai appeared to him in a dream and told him that he had departed from the world, and asked him to say a hesped for him in Jerusalem: First HaRav Avraham (Address) will eulogize him, he told him, and afterwards he - HaRav Sharbani - should. HaRav Yehoshua went to HaRav Address to tell him the dream. Before he could even begin speaking, HaRav Address said to him: You need not tell me anything for I know; I will say a hesped first, and then you will.

CHAPTER 8

THE POWER OF HIS PRAYERS

1. The manner in which he prayed was remarkable too. I quote from the sefer פרי עץ הגן: Everyone knew that to hear him lead the prayers on Shabbath and the Festivals, and especially during the Days of Awe, was a very moving experience. His prayers aroused the spiritual awareness of whoever heard him, and awakened all the congregants to fear Hashem and to intensify their love for Him. The way he chanted the prayers too, had in it a pleasantness that made the heart of the listener rejoice at the same time as rousing the spiritual fires of the soul.

2. Many are the tales told of the wonders he performed with the power of his prayers and the effectiveness of his blessings. HaRav Ezra Attia mentioned the subject on several occasions, and commented that he himself had been involved in a number of situations where HaRav Address' powerful prayers and blessings brought benefit and relief.

3. From HaRav Yehuda Tzadka's biography we learn how much the great men of the time esteemed HaRav Address' prayers: HaRav Ezra Attia once told HaRav Tzadka that after HaRav Address passed away he had been very troubled about the future. Now that HaRav Address is not with us any more, he said, he did not know to whom he could turn when a situation called for someone who knew how to pray, and whose prayers would be accepted. (He was answered in a dream that henceforth he should go to HaRav Yehoshua Sharbani.)

4. I heard from several descendants of HaRav Yehoshua Sharbani that the birth of a child in their family was never a straightforward matter. It was always considered a life threatening situation accompanied by great fear and trepidation. The family used to go to HaRav Address and ask him to pray for them, and the danger would be averted. Once when they did not do so (I do not remember whether HaRav/Address had already passed away at the time, or whether for some other reason he was not available) and then unfortunately a tragedy did happen רח"ל.

5. See in the sefer פרי עץ הגן more about the incredible power of his prayers which continued even after he left this world. People went to pray at his gravesite, and those prayers too were often answered in a miraculous fashion.

CHAPTER 9

THE LAST DAYS OF A TZADDIK

1. In the month of Av of the year 1925) (תרפ"ה HaRav Address was walking along the road, when he was suddenly hit by a passing bus. He was immediately taken to the Sha'arei Tzedek hospital, and there he lay for a few days.
2. After several days of suffering, he returned his pure soul to his Maker on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Av.
3. Close to the time of his death, he told his sons that he did not want the bus-driver to be sued.
4. He added that he has nothing whatsoever against the driver, and blessed him that he should be granted longevity and have a good life. (I heard that the blessing was indeed fulfilled; there are men in Jerusalem who remember who the bus-driver was, and they say that he passed away at a ripe old age.)
5. Those who were present when his soul departed from his body say that it was awe-inspiring to see how lucid his mind was as he left this world, and to see the wonderful way in which he strove to cleave to his Creator.

CHAPTER 10: HIS WRITINGS

1. It is reported that he was in the habit of writing Chiddushei Torah. HaRav Shalom Rafal, of blessed memory, related that remembered occasions when he saw HaRav Address learning, and it was clear that he was concentrating on some complex matter

which he was finding difficult to resolve. When this happened, he would go up to the nearby Aron Hakodesh and pour out his heart in prayer. Upon finishing his prayers, HaRav Raful would see him return to his place, sit down, and proceed to clarify the subject in writing.

2. Today, however, nothing is known of the whereabouts of those manuscripts, and we appeal to anyone who does know anything about them to contact Yeshivath Kol Yaakov in Jerusalem; either copies or originals of anything written by HaRav Address will be greatly appreciated. Anyone who does so surely deserves to be well rewarded by Hashem.

3. Nevertheless a small amount of HaRav Address' Torah writings did get printed, mostly in Kabbalah seforim. In the sefer **שערי רחמים** of HaRav Rachamim Sherim זצ"ל he is quoted dozens of times. Similarly in **אור לבנה** of HaRav Yaakov Katzin you will find many ideas of his in the realms of the Torah of Kabbalah. In the Rashash's siddurim - for Shabbath, for Succoth, for Rosh Hashana and for the Ten Days of Penitence - are important notes attributed to HaRav Address. Some are quoted in his name; others are brought down as having been said by 'one of the Rabbanim of the Yeshiva' and we have it from reputable sources that the rabbi referred to is HaRav Address.

It must be stressed that several of the concepts are fundamental and significant principles concerning the 'kavanoth' - the meaning of the prayers according to Kabbalah.

Other than his kabbalistic writings, very little of his Torah exists in print; a few short lines are printed at the end of the

sefer שו"ת דברי שאול with reference to the time of saying תפילת טל ומטר in other countries.

4. The above mentioned writings of his have been collected and published in the sefer תורת אברהם. Explanations have been added in several places, since HaRav Address sometimes spoke very concisely and his words could be difficult to understand without clarification.

Anyone who is familiar with the writings of the Ari Hakadosh, but not with the Torah of the Rashash, will find that the explanatory notes serve an additional purpose, for they include introductions from the Rashash's Torah which facilitate understanding HaRav Address' ideas.

## CHAPTER 11

### HIS GRAVESITE

1. HaRav Address is buried on the Mount of Olives. His son, HaRav Yaakov, used to tell about the miraculous way in which people were saved and their prayers answered after they came to pray at his gravesite. Some of the stories have been printed in the introduction to the sefer יעדות יעקב.

2. There was a time when the Arabs controlled the Mount of Olives and did a vast amount of damage to the graves there. Many tombstones disappeared; some were uprooted from their places, others were covered with dirt.

For many years the site of HaRav Address' burial place was unknown. All that was known was that he was buried near the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh. Recently, however, the gravesite was rediscovered, and it is indeed in close proximity to that of the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh. There are pious Jews who still go there to pray, in particular on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Av, the day on which HaRav Address passed away. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh passed away, and on that day too people visit HaRav Address' gravesite, since as mentioned previously, the two are in the same area.

## CHAPTER 12

### AN EXAMPLE TO EMULATE

1. No doubt anyone who reads HaRav Address' life history will find himself overcome with a keen desire to emulate his ways and to strive towards similar lofty heights of spirituality.

With that aspiration in mind, the first step is surely to discover how he earned the powers to achieve as much as he did in his lifetime. From all that is written above, the answer must be obvious; HaRav Address' greatness can be attributed chiefly to his remarkable diligence when learning Torah, and to the tremendous efforts he put into perfecting how he served Hashem through prayer.

2. However, about that itself we are in need of instruction: We need guidance to teach us how to learn diligently, and how work on the skill of praying with concentration and meaning. My father - who heard from his father, HaRav Yaakov Address - told me that his grandfather's principle strength was in the **מדת היסוד** - perfection in matters of holiness and modesty.

3. Similarly, in the sefer **אנא עבדא**, the Chazon Ish, of blessed memory, is quoted as having said that the reason for man coming down to this world is primarily to rectify and perfect his level of holiness. Success in achieving this goal in life, he says, is determined by the intensity of the efforts one puts into learning Torah.

4. A similar idea is quoted in the sefer **מעשה איש**.

5. The Vilna Gaon explains the underlying principle: (ref. ביאור הגר"א לתיקוני זוהר ריש תיקון כ"ג) He says that everyone's purpose in life is to perfect the מדת היסוד, - and that involves perfection in matters of holiness and modesty, as mentioned above.

6. There is a Medrash in Parshas VaYeshev about the Splitting of the Sea - cited by our Sages in other places too - which quotes the verse in Tehillim: הים ראה וינוס, הירדן יסוב לאחור "The sea saw and fled, the Jordan river turned back." The Medrash asks: What did the sea see that caused it to flee? and answers that it saw "the coffin of Joseph."

The Medrash connects the word וינוס with the words וינס החוצה used in the Torah when Joseph fled from the temptations of the evil inclination in the guise of the wife of Potiphar. The reward for Joseph's holiness and modesty was that the sea split for all the People of Israel.

7. The Tikunei Zohar, as quoted by the Vilna Gaon, goes even further and there it says explicitly that if Joseph had succumbed to temptation, the sea would not have split, and the whole of Am Yisrael would have drowned in the Yam Suf. In that case, they would not have stood at Mount Sinai and would not have received the Torah, nor would they have come to Eretz Yisrael and built the Beth HaMikdash. It follows, therefore, that it was due to superior standards of holiness that Am Yisrael were deemed worthy of receiving the Torah and building the Beth HaMikdash.

APPENDIX

1. At the same time as HaRav Avraham Address there was another very great Kabbalist from Aram Tzova living in Jerusalem: HaRav Shaul Douek

HaRav Douek authored several seforim, and one of them איפה שלימה includes an approbation from the famed author of the למחלה ואחלמה לשם שבו, HaRav Shlomo Eliyashiv, of blessed memory. In it he praises the author in superlative terms even though HaRav Douek was still comparatively young at the time, not yet fifty years old. Another of HaRav Douek's seforim בניהו בן יהודע-also includes HaRav Eliyashiv's written approval in which he praises the author and extols the contents of the sefer.

2. There was a very close bond indeed between HaRav Address and HaRav Douek. They frequently prayed in the same Beth Medrash, and regularly explored the depths of the holy Torah together as study partners. HaRav Avraham Douek, shlita, a grandson of HaRav Shaul Douek, told me that he had been worthy of seeing those two great men, and he remembers that they were so close to each other that they were like members of the same family.

3. He said that the difference between the spiritual level in their times and the standards now is so vast, that it could even be said that today it is as if there is a different heaven and a different earth.

4. He also said that he remembers that after his grandfather and HaRav Douek passed away, he used to attend the prayer services in their Beth Medrash together with the great men of

the next generation. After the services on the Yamim Noraim, he recalls how sorrowfully they used to discuss the drastic change. He remembers them saying to each other that the prayers and services could not be compared to the spiritual inspiration that had been evoked when the two great Tzaddikim were still with them.

5. HaRav David Harrari-Raful used to relate that once on Yom Kippur, after the evening services, he saw the two Tzaddikim sitting by themselves in the Beth Knesseth and discussing matters of the loftiest nature. They requested him to leave, but when he asked to stay and told them that that he would not disturb them, they consented. He remembers that they were speaking about trusting Hashem being the most important thing in life.

We should try to understand in which way they meant that trusting Hashem is of paramount importance in life. Quite simply it surely means that when a person has total trust in Hashem, he can spend all his days and nights concentrating on learning Torah and praying to Him. He is not distracted by worrying about how to obtain the physical necessities of life, since he trusts Hashem to provide him with whatever he needs.

Yet it could be that they meant more than that. A person always has desires in life, everyone according to his own situation. Someone whose trust in Hashem is ingrained in his heart, knows that everything is from Him and his desires are always directed towards Him. Instead of wishing that things should be as he desires, his wishes automatically become a desire that Hashem should give them to him. Consequently he is

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always close to Hashem in his thoughts and his wishes, and this is an extremely high standard of spirituality.

In Mishlei (chapter 22 verse 19), the Vilna Gaon elaborates on the significance of trust in Hashem. It is clear from the way he writes that he is not referring only to trusting Hashem to provide his needs so that he can be occupied solely with Torah and Tefilla; the actual trust itself is the commendable trait which is of utmost importance.

The same concept could apply to the above interpretation of the words of HaRav Address and HaRav Douek.



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