

# **TRADITIONAL EDUCATION**



## **ADVICE TO PEOPLE OVERWHELMED BY DIFFICULT FINANCIAL AND SPIRITUAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

**BY**

**RABBY YAACOV ADDES**

**SON OF**

**RABBI YEHUDA ADDES**

For further information:

Rabbi Yehonatan Lev Bochbot

052.289.1556

Israel: 972.52.289.1556

# TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

## Contents

### Introduction

- Chapter 1:** The prime importance of learning with children, and the resources that should go into education.
- Chapter 2:** Why the Torah refers to pupils as sons, and the implications for the teacher.
- Chapter 3:** The need to help all pupils realize their potential, even those who appear to lack motivation or natural aptitude.
- Chapter 4:** The teacher's duty to help gifted pupils achieve their full potential.
- Chapter 5:** How concerned a teacher must be not to embarrass a pupil.
- Chapter 6:** The importance of having the patience to explain the subject matter as many times as necessary for the pupils to understand it.
- Chapter 7:** The tremendous responsibility a teacher has for his pupils' future spiritual welfare.



## 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 י"ן 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 'ח' 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.

## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

---

---

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.

## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

---

---

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 Pappas 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' שבת פ"ה ע"ה 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 עץ חיים, שער כ"ו)

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 he 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 דף** ( **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** - "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 עמ' 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

## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

---

---

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 Elazer 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 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 ) and Rashi's comment on the possuk נפש עמל עמלה לו (צ"ט) - '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.

## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

---

---

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 '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 **וְנִחַ** 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  $\text{י"ח}$  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 **ח"ו** dishearten him and weaken his motivation.

A great deal of **סיעתא 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 הימנו - '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

## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

---

---

the idea we have been discussing here. Their teachers, being great 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  $\text{ה'}$  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 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.

## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

---

---

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

## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

---

---

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 ה"י 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 ה"י - 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.

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.

# **DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES**

**BY**

**RABBY YAACOV ADDES**

**SON OF**

**RABBI YEHUDA ADDES**



**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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

tremendous hardships with which you and many of your associates are challenged.

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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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, ו'ה, 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 הבירוורים - 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 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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 (אורח 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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 ע"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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 י"ח 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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 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.

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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.

- 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.

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 of 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."

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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.)

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 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 **אורה 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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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.

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.

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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 וי"ח 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 ramifications. It was because of them that he was granted permission to go up the mountain and at least see Eretz Yisroel.

5. It is important to understand what Moshe gained by going to the top of the mountain and seeing the Land.

Living in Eretz Yisroel is a mitzvah because it unites the spiritual lights in the soul of a Jew with the spirituality of Eretz Yisroel. As explained previously, (in Chapter 8) the spirituality of every Jewish soul is the spiritual light that comes from Hashem - "Hashem, Yisroel, and the Torah are one." Eretz Yisroel too has its own unique spiritual light, as referred to in the possuk in Parshas Ekev: ארץ אשר ה' אלקיך דורש אותה תמיד: "עיני ה' אלקיך בה וכו' וישב ארץ ישראל, the two spiritual lights - of the Jewish soul and of the Holy Land - fuse together and intensify.

When Moshe Rabbeinu stood on the mountain and saw the whole of Eretz Yisroel, Hashem gave him extraordinary spiritual powers. Without actually being in the Land, his soul

could unite with the spiritual lights of Eretz Yisroel, in a way which strengthened both his own spiritual lights and those of Eretz Yisroel.

6. The whole concept of Moshe Rabbeinu standing on the mountain and seeing the Land was not a natural phenomenon; how could a human being stand on mountain on the other side of the Yarden and see the whole of Eretz Yisroel?

Rashi says that there are psukim at the end of Devarim which describe how Hashem kept the promise He made to Moshe in **וַאֲתַחֲנֶנּוּ**. 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 as 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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

time of תחית המתים. 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: ויהושע בן נון מלא רוח חכמה כי - סמך משה את ידיו עליו - '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: ' **רַב לְךָ** - 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.

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

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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** **ד' 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.

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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. (התקרבות להשם פרק י"ז refer to the sefer)

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: כֹּאֵיל תַּעְרוּג עַל אַפְיֵקֵי מַיִם כֵּן נַפְשִׁי תַּעְרוּג אֵלַיִךְ אֱלֹהִים. צִמְאָה נַפְשִׁי לִקְלַחַי מִתֵּי אֲבוּא וְאֲרָאָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים. "As a deer yearns for deep waters, so my soul yearns for

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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.

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.

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

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.

## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

---

---

In the Gemorah (שבת דף י"ב ע"ב 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.