

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
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Ki Seitzei





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Parshas Ki Seitzei

The parashah begins with the *halachos* related to wars. We know that the Torah is eternal and applicable in every generation. So how should we read this pasuk in our generation, when we don't wage wars against the gentile nations?

Sefarim that follow the path of drush say the first pasuk of the parashah, **כִּי תִצַּח** לְמַלְחָמָה עַל אוֹיֵבְךָ alludes to the war against the *yetzer hara*.

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l* teaches that in our generations, the primary way to read the *pasuk* is following this drush, that the pasuk is discussing fighting a war against the *yetzer hara*. For our generation, this explanation isn't only *drush*; it is *pshat*, the simplest way of understanding the Torah.

At the end of the *parashah*, the Torah discusses the mitzvah to destroy Amalek. Once again, this is a war that we can't carry out today.

According to *drush*, the war against Amalek signifies the war against heresy. It means to implant *emunah* in our hearts. The Torah states (25:18) **אֲשֶׁר קָרָד** בְּרֹדֶךָ, Amalek taught that things happen by chance (*קרד* is from the word *מקרה*), by the rules of nature, or by "the strength of my hand," etc. We must destroy this notion and acknowledge that everything is from Above. In our generation, when we can't literally destroy Amalek, we accomplish the mitzvah by strengthening our awareness that everything is from

Hashem. For our generation, that is the simple (*pshat*) way to understand the meaning of the Torah. Even if we aren't actually fighting a war against Amalek, we are obligated to eradicate the philosophy that Amalek propagated.

The Torah says (25:19), **תִּמְחָה אֶת זְכוֹר עַמְלֵק**, **מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם**, "Remove Amalek's memory from under the heaven..." Amalek wants people should think everything happens "under the heavens." They don't want to believe matters were destined from Above. They explain everything rationally and worldly, claiming that phenomena **מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם**, from under the heaven caused matters to be as they are. We believe that everything is *bashert*, by Hashem's plan.

For example, people ask, "Why did my neighbor earn so much money while I didn't?" Amalek's explanation is because he worked harder, or because he made wise choices. We say that it is because this was Hashem's decree. It didn't happen **מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם**, from phenomena under the heaven, rather it was decreed and planned in heaven above (*Tiferes Shmuel*).

In (*Eichah* 3:66) it states, **וְתִשְׁמַדֵּם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם ה' שְׁמִי ה'**, "Destroy them from under Hashem's heavens." The Imrei Emes *zt'l* explains, we must destroy the notion that things happen "under the heavens," and recognize that everything happens from Heaven above. It isn't because he

did something, or because of the rules of nature. The origin of everything is from Above.¹

Bitachon

This week's *parashah* discusses *ribbis* (23:21-22), the prohibition to lend or to borrow money with interest. The Kli Yakar explains that generally, when a person is involved in a business venture, there is a risk factor, which forces him to rely on Hashem. He realizes he won't succeed without Hashem's help, so he places his trust in Him. This boost in *bitachon* is a significant added benefit that one earns from almost every financial pursuit. Lending money for *ribbis* is an exception. People who earn their livelihood this way don't develop their *emunah* and *bitachon*, because this is a field that has almost no risks, the profits are foreseeable, and one doesn't feel the constant need to turn to Hashem. This is the reason the Torah forbids *ribbis*. It is a source of income that is not conducive for acquiring *bitachon*.

The Kli Yakar writes, "The reason for this prohibition is because it causes people to cast away their trust in Hashem... By all other businesses, one raises his eyes to Hashem, because he isn't certain whether he'll earn money or whether he'll lose. However, when one lends money with interest, his income is set and certain. He's not worried that he

may lose the money that he lent, since he took collateral. Therefore, lending money with interest prevents him from developing *bitachon*. The borrower also transgresses, because he causes the lender to lose his *bitachon*. As it is known, those who lend money with *ribbis* are usually stingy people who don't give much *tzedakah*. That's because they lack *bitachon* [because their profession didn't require them to learn *bitachon*]. Nevertheless, it is permitted to lend money to gentiles with *ribbis*. This is because gentiles are often thieves and difficult people to deal with. Even when the gentiles are subject to the Jewish courts, they always find ways to free themselves from their obligations. Even if a collateral was given, you still aren't confident that you'll get your money back, or that you will be paid the *ribbis*. Therefore, in these instances, the eyes of the lender are turned to Hashem to save him..."

A chassid told Reb Dovid Moshe of Tchortkov *zt'l* about a business deal that came his way. "Rebbe, I will soon be rich. There's a priest who owns a large and very profitable forest, but he is too old to take care of it. He is selling it at a very low price. All my friends and financial advisors are telling me to grab it. They call it 'a deal of a lifetime.'" Then he spoke with the Rebbe about some other matters. At the end of the

1. It also states in this week's *parashah* (23:11), איש כי לא יהיה טהור מקרה לילה. The *pasuk* is hinting to two aspects that make a person impure. One is when he thinks matters happen by מקרה, by chance. The second is when one thinks life is לילה, dark, bad, and they aren't aware that everything is for the good.

conversation the Rebbe said, "And about the forest, I don't recommend you buy it."

The man left the Rebbe's room totally confused. He didn't know what he should do. Everyone was telling him the deal was a windfall, he could make millions. How could he throw away his fortunes with his own hands? He decided to go ahead with his plans.

On the first day that he owned the property, he sent lumberjacks to cut down some trees. A few hours later they came running back to him, and they told him that all the trees they felled were very wormy. The entire forest was infested with termites.

"The Rebbe was right after all" he grieved. "I lost all my money on a worthless plot of land."

He was embarrassed to face his Rebbe,

and to admit that he foolishly didn't listen to his *ruach hakadosh*. After two years had passed, he decided, "I lost my money, should I lose my Rebbe as well?"

He came to Tchorikov and said, "Rebbe! I know I sinned. I shouldn't have bought the forest. I should have listened to your *ruach hakadosh*."

The Rebbe replied, "It wasn't *ruach hakodesh*. When you spoke to me about this business opportunity, I noticed that you didn't once say '*be'ezras Hashem*'. You were so certain you would make a lot of money; you didn't think you need to pray or to have *bitachon*. But success is always solely with Hashem. It is impossible to succeed without Hashem. When I saw you took Hashem out of the equation, I advised you not to buy the forest. How could you earn money, if you aren't relying on Hashem's help?"²

2. A wealthy person was speaking with Reb Elia *zt'l* (student of the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*) about his immense wealth, and he was saying he would never become poor. "Let's say my leather business doesn't do well, I still have the lumberyard. And if my lumberyard doesn't prosper, I can still earn money on my store..." He had so many sources for revenue; he felt it was impossible he would ever have financial trouble.

"Don't say that," Reb Elia said. "*Parnassah* is a *galgal hachozzer be'olem*, like a turning wheel. Today one is rich, but there is no guarantee for the future. The wheel of fortune can always change."

Reb Elia met this wealthy man years later. By that time, he had indeed become a pauper. "You were so right," he told Reb Elia. "One of my sources of revenue was a bridge. The bridge was sturdy, but there was a limit to how much it could hold. Nicolai's army marched over it with cavalry and heavy equipment. The bridge couldn't hold the weight. It collapsed, people died in the river below, and there was a great financial loss, too. I knew that I had to run away. I went home, filled a bag with *shtaros* (money documents) and clandestinely crossed the border. When I was settled, I looked at my bag of documents and realized I took the wrong papers. What I took was totally worthless. I've been poor ever since..."

Going out to War

Reb Yitzchak Hutner *zt'l* writes the following in a letter: "We have a bad habit when we discuss the greatness of *tzaddikim*. We begin at the end; with the great levels they reached. We skip the many years they had great battles with their *yetzer hara* and with their *middos*. This lends the impression that they were born *tzaddikim*.

"For example, everyone praises the *shemiras halashon* of the Chofetz Chaim, but who speaks about all of his struggles, ups and downs he had until he reached this level. This is merely one example of thousands... The problem is that when a *bachur* has strong desires to grow in *avodas Hashem*, and he is confronted with challenges, tests, and setbacks, he thinks he can never reach those levels of *tzaddikim* he wants to emulate. He thinks the definition of someone going in the right path is someone who has peace from the *yetzer hara*... He thinks that if he has challenges, there is no hope for him. But that is ridiculous... Know, my friend... you will definitely fall again. There will be battles that you will lose. But I guarantee you that in the end you will leave the battle wearing the crown of success. The wisest of all men said, *שבע יפול צדיק וקם*, 'a *tzaddik* falls seven times and gets up.' ... The wise understand that the *tzaddik's* 'getting up' [and the levels he attained] are *because* he fell seven times. I beg you, don't imagine the *tzaddikim* as people who are at peace with their *yetzer tov*... Realize that when the *yetzer hara* burns inside you and you struggle to overcome him

these are the moments you are most similar to the *gedolim*; even more than the moments when you are at peace with the *yetzer hara*..."

Because the path of *avodas Hashem* is strewn with struggles and battles. It isn't meant to be easy. And if we keep on trying, in the end we will succeed.

Someone complained to the Tiferes Shlomo *zy'a* that he has many ups and downs in his battle with the *yetzer hara*. "Why can't I make a decision to be good, and stick to it?"

The Tiferes Shlomo explained to him that this is what the battle against the *yetzer hara* is all about. Sometimes you win, sometimes the *yetzer hara* wins. The main thing is to pick yourself up again and to continue the fight.

He taught this lesson from the *pasuk*, *כי תצא למלחמה*, "when you go out to war..." It doesn't state, *כי תצא לנצחון*, "When you go out to win." The goal is to fight, and to not give up when you lose.

The Baal Shem Tov *zy'a* taught (*Bamidbar* 13:20) *והתחזקתם*, make yourself strong and courageous when you serve Hashem. *ולקחתם מפרי הארץ*, get encouragement from fruit. A fruit seed rots in the ground, and then a tree grows from it. Similarly, whenever one falls from his *avodas Hashem*, he can pick himself up and potentially grow and become even better than before.

In *Shacharis* we say, *המה ברעו ונפלו ואנחנו קמנו ונתעודד*, "They stooped and fell, while we got up and were encouraged" (*Tehillim* 20). The *pasuk* doesn't say that

we don't fall. It states that we fall, but we get up again. Because the goal is not that we should never fall. Rather that we should get up and try again.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* taught, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves *hischazkus* (when one strengthens himself to do Hashem's will) even if it lasts only for a moment."³

Rebbe Gedalyah Moshe of Zvhil *zt'l* asked someone why he wasn't going to listen to a certain *mussar drashah*. The man replied, "Even if the speech inspires me to do *teshuvah*, it won't last for long. Soon afterwards, I will be myself again." The Rebbe told him, "If someone's drowning at sea, and someone swims up to him and says, 'I can save you for a half hour, but then you will fall into the sea again,' would he accept the offer? Of course he would. So why shouldn't you also seek to do *teshuvah*? Even if it only lasts for a short while, it is also worthwhile." And there is always the possibility that this time he will maintain the *teshuvah*.

Compassion

It states in this week's *parashah*, לא תחרוש בשר וחמור יחדו, "Don't plow with an ox and a donkey together" (22:10). The *Daas Zekeinim MiBaalei HaTosfos* explains: "The reason for this prohibition

is because an ox is מעלה גרה, chews its cud, and the donkey will have *tzaar*, distress, when he hears the ox chewing."

The *Chinuch* (550) writes, "The reason for the prohibition is *tzaar baalei chaim*. Because it is known that animals are very distressed when they are together with animals of other species. It certainly bothers them to work together with another species... (As we see birds flock together with their species.) [Thus, it is *tzaar baalei chaim* to have an ox work with a donkey.]

"The wise should learn *mussar* from this and shouldn't appoint two people, with totally different natures to work together. Similarly, if two people are different in the way they act; such as a *rasha* with a *tzaddik*, or a respectable man together with a lowly person [they shouldn't be asked to work together on a project]. If the Torah forbids working with animals of different species, certainly this will cause even greater distress to people, because they have intelligence."

In review, the *Daas Zekeinim MiBaalei HaTosfos* says that the donkey has distress when it hears the ox chewing its cud. The *Chinuch* says animals are distressed when they are forced to work with an animal of a different species.

3. The Beis Ahron *zt'l* writes, "One should rejoice immensely and consider every deed that he does for *avodas Hashem* very precious. He should decide in his heart that he won't sell it for all the money in the world. Even one word, thought, or deed, even if it was only for a moment, will never become lost, and will accomplish a lot for him, and perhaps for all Yisrael. What can be a greater joy than this; that he accomplished the purpose of his creation? He should do whatever he can, and seek to do more and more, both small deeds and great ones. As the saying goes, 'whatever one grabs at a market sale, is worthwhile.'"

Both explanations teach us compassion, to be sensitive to the needs of animals, and all the more so, we should be considerate and compassionate to the needs of human beings.

The Torah says (23:4-5), *לא יבא עמוני ומואבי*, *בקהל ה' גם דור עשירי לא יבא להם בקהל ה' עד עולם*, "An Amoni and a Moabite may not join the Jewish nation. Also the tenth generation, don't bring them into [marriage with] Hashem's nation, forever."

The reason this prohibition is written explicitly in the *pasuk*: *על דבר אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ומים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים ואשר שכר עליך בלעום בן בעור...לקללך*, "For they didn't welcome you with bread and water when you were traveling as you left Mitzrayim, and because they hired Bilaam...to curse you."

The Sefer HaChinuch (561) explains, "The Torah teaches that we should hate Amon and Moav in our hearts because they are so corrupt and cruel. They didn't even offer bread and water to a large travel weary nation, when they were passing near their borders. Additionally, they hired Bilaam to curse them.... Amon and Moav chose to behave in an abysmal, corrupt manner, without concern that other nations will

discover their bad nature and lowliness... It is impossible for them to repent, since their evil ways are so ingrained. Such people aren't fitting to join the holy Jewish nation."

Once again, we learn the importance of having compassion.

Reb Alter Samilovitz *zt'l* once saw a young girl crying on the curb. "What's the matter?"

"My friend said my dress isn't pretty."

"Let me see," Reb Samilovitz said, as he put on his glasses. "Go home and tell your mother that I say you have a pretty dress."

The girl's face immediately brightened, and she ran home to tell her mother. Reb Samilovitz said to the person walking with him, "The Midrash says, 'Just as Hashem removes tears from all faces (see *Yeshayah* 25:8) so shall you remove tears from all faces.' I followed in Hashem's ways, to remove the tears from a young girl's face."⁴

Reb Yaakov of Tolichan *z'l* was a Stoliner chassid who composed many nigunim for the Stoliner chassidim. Once, Rebbe Asher Stoliner *zy'a* requested, "Sing me one of your latest compositions."

4. Once, after using the *mikvah* on Friday afternoon, Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zy'a* asked his *gabai* to bring him cake and coffee. The *gabai*, Reb Shalom Fogel *z'l*, was surprised, because the Belzer Rebbe ate very little, and he never requested this before. When Reb Shalom brought it to the Rebbe, the Rebbe said, "Bring them to So-and-So who is now in the beis medresh. When I was in the *mikvah*, I overheard him say, 'After a hot *mikvah* like this one, all that's missing is a cup of hot coffee with a piece of cake,' and I want to grant him his wishes."

Reb Yaakov sang a song that he had recently composed, but the Rebbe told him that he had a different song in mind. Reb Yaakov sang another recent song, but the Rebbe told him that this also wasn't the one that he wanted to hear. Reb Yaakov Tolichaner said, "Apparently, the Rebbe has a particular song in mind. Tell me which one you want to hear and I will sing it."

The Rebbe replied, "Last night, at 3:00 a.m., you came into the beis medresh and saw that it wasn't heated. So you went out in the freezing snow and cut wood for the furnace, so the *talmidei chachamim* could learn Torah in comfort. As you worked, you sang. That's the song I want to hear. It's a beautiful song."

Tefillos

Shulchan Aruch (581) states, נוהגים לקום באשמורת לומר סליחות ותחנונים מר"ח אלול עד יום"כ, "Those [who follow the Sephardic *minhagim*] have the custom to awaken early to say *selichos*, from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur."

Reb Shmuel Vosner *zt'l* explains this custom has two parts: (1) to awaken early (2) to say *selichos*.

The Rema writes, ומנהג אשכנז אינו כן, "This isn't the Ashkenazic custom."

Reb Vosner *zt'l* explains we don't have the custom to say *selichos* (the entire Elul) but it *is* our custom to awaken early. That part of the custom is for everyone.

Elul is an ideal time for *tefillos*. As the

Tur (581) writes, כל המוסיף לבקש רחמים זכות, הוא לו, "Whoever davens more [in Elul] it is his merit." It will help him earn a better judgment on Rosh Hashanah, the day of judgment.

The Shaarei Teshuvah (581) writes, "I saw some rabbanim who were always studying halachah, but during Elul they would stop a little bit from their studies to say *tachanunim* (prayers to Hashem)."

Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* (*Imrei Pinchas* 427) said, "During Elul, it is permitted to say *Tehillim* even in the beginning of the night." Because although we aren't saying *selichos* yet, we should turn to Hashem with *Tehillim* and other forms of *tefillah*.

We should also seek to improve the standard *tefillos* of Shacharis, Minchah, and Maariv.

A counsel to improve those *tefillos* is simply to come on time and to remain until the end. Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach wittily called עלינו "Tefilas HaDerech" because people say it while walking out. Some leave even earlier. They say ותשאני רוח "A wind carried me away" (in ובא לציון) and they are already outside the beis medresh.

Similarly, some only enter the beis medresh when the *tzibur* is saying כי בא סוף (in Oz Yashir), and they have to put on their talis and tefillin and rush through the *tefillah*. They probably also skip some parts. It is therefore strongly recommended to come on time and to

remain until the end. You won't have to skip or rush, and you can daven with *kavanah*.

The Trumas HaDeshen would say Baruch She'amar for almost an hour, each day in Elul.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 60.) states, "Until [a pregnancy] reaches its fortieth day, pray that the child be a boy." After forty days, the gender was determined in the womb, and praying for a boy won't change anything.

The Shaar HaMelech (1:5) teaches that this Gemara hints to the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur. One should pray these days, and turn the female (*midas hadin*) and make it masculine (*midas harachamim*).

The Meiri (*Chibur HaTeshuvah*) teaches, "One should attempt to pray a lot before Rosh Hashanah, so he will come to Rosh Hashanah with a pure heart."

Fishermen placed bait in a net. Fish took the bait, and were captured inside. One fish said to its friend, "We were such fools. We should have grabbed the food and quickly swim away." The fish didn't know that when it ate the bait, it was already caught in the net.

The *nimshal* is, people rebuke themselves throughout the year for every foolish choice they make. They don't realize that when they made their choice, it was already after the decree. On Rosh Hashanah it was decided and determined that they must make those mistakes and go through those hardships. The time to

save yourself is *before* Rosh Hashanah, in the month of Elul. Later in the year, he is already within the trap.

We can explain the importance of *tefillah* this month with the following *mashal*:

The *melamdim* of yesteryear were very strict with their students. Fathers (then and now) are kind and compassionate with their children. If a *melamed* was too strict with a student, the compassionate father would ask the *melamed* to be kinder with his son.

Once, there was a father who home-schooled his son. During the daytime, when the father played the role of *melamed*, he was very strict and demanding of his son. At night, he acted with his son with a lot of compassion and love, like a father.

One night, the son said to his father, "Perhaps father, you can speak with my *melamed*, and ask him to be kinder to me?"

The *nimshal* is, during Elul, Hashem reveals Himself as a compassionate Father. Rosh Hashanah, the judgment is with the attribute of *din*, harsh justice. We pray in Elul that Hashem's compassion should be expressed in Tishrei as well.

This is hinted at in the *pasuk*, ה' הושיעה ה' המלך יעננו ביום קראנו, we request ה', Hashem's attribute of compassion should influence that also when it will be ה' המלך, Hashem's attribute of harsh justice, Hashem should answer us and save us.

Cheshbon HaNefesh

Elul is also a time for making a *cheshbon hanefesh*. One should think: What did I do this year that is worth keeping up, and what needs improvement?

But people are very busy, and they don't find time for *tefillos* and for introspection.⁵

The shofar of Elul awakens us to remember the importance of *teshuvah* and tefillah, and urges us to make use of this precious month.

The Shevet Mussar (27) gives the following *mashal* (with slight variations):

Someone walking down the street came across a deep pit. He peered inside, and saw three hungry lions, pacing back and forth, hungry and angry.

“Roar!” the man shouted down at them. They roared back. He took some dirt, and threw it at them and watched the lions become wild in their frenzy. He gave an even louder roar to tease the lions. Suddenly, he slipped. His life passed before his eyes as he fell down towards the lions below. At the last minute, he was able to grab on to a bunch of grass that grew on the pit's wall. His life was saved—for the time

being. The lions jumped to reach him, but he was high enough, and out of their reach. The man shouted, “Does anyone hear me? Is there anyone outside the pit? Come and save me!”

Suddenly, two weasels appeared; a gray one and a black one. They were eating the clump of grass that he was holding onto. He shouted at the weasels: “Get away! Don't you realize that my life is dependent on this clump of grass?”

The *nimshal* is, the new year is approaching and we don't know what the new year will bring. Hashem gave us Elul. If we hold on to Elul firmly, we can be saved. But the distractions and obligations of life gnaw away at this life source. People have to work; they have other needs, and there isn't time left for *tefillos* and introspection. We risk losing this most desirable opportunity. We must shout at all our distractions, “Elul is my only hope! Don't make me lose Elul!” The shofar in Elul proclaims, “I know you're busy, you have a lot to do. But don't miss the lifeline I'm handing you. Grab on to Elul. Say some *Tehillim*, take the time to reflect on your life to see what you need to do to improve.”

The Dubna Magid *zy'a* told the following *mashal*:

5. Many people are afraid of introspections, because they don't want to discover their faults. Therefore, they seek to always be busy, and never to be alone with their thoughts. One of the modern trends in traffic control is the traffic circle. Instead of idling at a red light, traffic moves slowly around the traffic circle, each vehicle turning off where it wants to go. Someone explained that this is because people are afraid to just wait at a traffic light, without doing anything, lest they have a moment for self-reflection. They therefore keep moving, so they don't have a moment to think.

A young lad worked as a currier for a lucrative business. Every day, before closing time, his boss would send him to the bank to deposit all the money earned that day. The lad didn't know that every day a thief was following him, hoping to find a way to steal the package.

The thief thought, "How I can get the money? I can't just grab it away or threaten him with a gun because there are always many people around."

But a thief never gives up; he came up with a plan. On the way to the bank the lad always passed a tailor shop.

So, the thief went to the tailor, and said, "I work for a very wealthy man. He asked me to order a suit for him."

"How can I make him a suit if he isn't here to measure him?"

"My boss is very busy. He doesn't have time to come. He asked me to find someone who has a similar build, and to measure that person."

"What will he do if it isn't exactly the right size?"

"He will pay you anyway. He says that it is worthwhile for him to buy the suit in this manner."

As they were speaking, the lad passed by with his bundle of money. The thief said, "Do you see that boy? He is exactly the size of my boss." He didn't wait for the tailor to respond. He sprang forward to catch up with the lad.

"Please help me. It will only take a moment." And he explained to the lad that he wants him to go to the tailor, so his measurements could be taken.

The lad checked his watch. There was plenty of time before the bank closed, so he agreed.

The tailor fitted the lad with a half-finished suit and started to take measurements. The lad put his money-bag down. The thief quickly grabbed the money-bag and ran out the door. The lad shouted "Thief!" and tried to run out the door after him, but the robust tailor held him with two strong arms. "You can't leave my store wearing my material."

If the lad knew that someone was out to steal his money-bag, he would never put the bag down. But he didn't know.

The *nimshal* is, Elul is a treasure, because if we will take advantage of this month, to fill it with tefillos and *teshuvah*, we can earn so much in the upcoming year. We must be reminded that a thief, the yetzer hara, is trying to take Elul away from us. We blow the shofar to remind us that there's a thief, and we shouldn't let go of the treasure that's in our hands.

Tefillah* is the Primary *Hishtadlus

A *kollel yungerman* honored one of his relatives to be the *mohel* for his son. The unexperienced *mohel* accidentally cut into the flesh. The doctors who checked the child said the child would survive, but his future was at stake. Reb Meilech Firer (a renowned medical referral expert) told the family about a doctor in America who could help them, "But it will be expensive. You'll need \$250,000." This sum was way

beyond the *kollel yungerman's* abilities. They didn't know how they would raise that money.

The father went to his *kollel* worried, not knowing how to proceed. He told his *chavrusah* that he needs \$250,000.

His friend replied "Let's go and שריי אױם א מנחה (shout our hearts out by Minchah) and Hashem will help."

They went to a *beis medresh* where people didn't know them and they both davened *Shemonah Esrei* for forty-five minutes. When they finished *Shemonah Esrei*, the father received a phone call from Reb Meilech Firer, "Did you do anything yet?"

"I didn't begin," the father replied. "I just finished davening *Minchah*."

"Good" Reb Firer said. "The doctor is coming to Eretz Yisrael to teach his techniques to doctors here. He will do your operation for free, covered by the national insurance. And you will even be paid, if you permit other doctors to watch the operation with a closed-circuit camera."

This story happened on a regular day. When we pray in such a manner in Elul, our *tefillos* will be surely answered.

The father thought he had to do great *hishtadlus* to raise the \$250,000, but he davened *Minchah*, and that is the primary *hishtadlus*.

People think *parnassah* comes from their work; that doctors heal with medicine, that *shidduchim* are done by *shadchanim*, and so on. Actually, behind every

salvation there's a *tefillah*, because nothing happens without *tefillah*. The Ben Ish Chai, *zy'a* explained this point with a *mashal*:

Someone was attacked by a fierce bear in the forest. He quickly grabbed a stick and began hitting the bear. The bear fell to the ground, dead. He kissed his stick. He thought it saved his life.

Then he sees someone climbing down a tree. Smiling this man says, "Do you really think your stick killed the bear? The stick didn't do more than scratch the bear. I shot the bear with my gun from the tree."

This *mashal* reminds us that it isn't our *hishtadlus* that helps us. It is *tefillah*.

As the *Mesilas Yesharim* (ch.21) writes, "It isn't *hishtadlus* that helps. It is an obligation... a tax all mankind must pay... After one does his obligation, Hashem's blessings can come"

The Ben Ish Chai elaborates:

Shimon and Levi (Yaakov Avinu's children) fought against Shechem. Two people against an entire city, and they won the war because Yaakov davened for them. As Yaakov Avinu said, ואני נחתי, "I will give you Shechem... which I conquered...with my *tefillos*" (*Bereishis* 48:22, see *Rashi*).

Shimon and Levi made their *hishtadlus*. They convinced the people of Shechem to circumcise themselves, and on the third day, when they were very weak, Shimon and Levi attacked and won the war. But the *hishtadlus* didn't win the war; Yaakov's *tefillos* did.

The *Zohar* teaches that there are three forms of *tefillah*: תפילה למושה, תפילה לדוד, and תפילה לעני. The most powerful is *tefillah le'ani*, the pauper's *tefillah*.

The Sar Shalom of Belz zy'a asked, so why do people go to tzaddikim to daven for them? They should go to a pauper, since תפילה לעני is the highest form of *tefillah*.

The answer is, תפילה לעני is a mindset. It is to realize that we are "poor" and we can't do anything without Hashem. Tzaddikim understand this well, and therefore their *tefillas* are very effective.

The Power of Speech

Chazal (*Moed Katan* 18.) say, ברית ברותה, לשפתים, "An oath has been set for one's lips." Whatever one says takes effect. Similarly, the Gemara (*Brachos* 19.) says, לעולם אל יפתח אדם פה לשמן, "A person should never open his mouth for the Satan." He shouldn't say something that the Satan could cash in on and take advantage of, because it might take effect.

There was a *levayah* in Vilna for a *talmid chacham*, who was the rav of a nearby town. A renowned *maggid*, who often gave *hespedim* (eulogies) at *levayos*, stood up on a chair to begin his *hesped*, but the chair slipped, he fell, and was brought to the hospital.

There was another *talmid chacham* who lived in the town of the demised rav. He

came to Vilna for the *levayah*, and after the *levayah* he went to the home of Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky zt'l to speak with him *divrei Torah*.

After conversing in Torah for some time, Reb Chaim Ozer asked him why he came to Vilna. The man replied that he came for the *levayah*. Reb Chaim Ozer suddenly became very serious and he asked, "Did the *maggid* say a *hesped*?" "Actually, he stood up on a chair to be *maspid*, and the chair fell from under him. It was a terrible scene. He was rushed to the hospital. So, the answer to your question is no, he didn't give a *hesped*."

Reb Chaim Ozer became pensive again for a few moments, and then he said good bye to his guest.

Reb Chaim Ozer's family overheard the conversation, and wanted to know why it was important for him to know whether the *maggid* gave a *hesped*, and why did he suddenly become so pensive.

He replied:

"The *niftar* and the *maggid* once came to me for a *din torah*. During the heat of the debate, some unkind words passed between them, and the *maggid* said, 'After 120 years (when you are *niftar*) don't expect me to be eulogize you.'

"This is what he said, and Heaven made certain he kept his word." Because ברית ברותה, לשפתים, what a person says, can come to be.⁶

6. After Reb Chaim Ozer's *petirah*, people found a list of the *kabalos* he took on himself before Rosh Hashanah. One of them was to speak less. למעט בדיבור.

The Shelah (*Balak* 17) writes, “A person must be very cautious שלא יפתח פיו לשטן. Because even when this wasn’t his intention, his words draw the matter onto himself. An example is Balak, who said (22:6), לכה ארה לי, ‘Go curse me...’⁷ Balak’s words sounded like he was asking that Bilaam should curse him. In the end, Bilaam indeed cursed him.”

The Special Hour

The Arizal teaches: Every day has a special hour. All tefillos said in that hour will be answered. The problem is, we don’t know which hour it is.

Perhaps therefore the Gemara says, הלוויי יתפלל אדם כל היום כולו, “If only a person would pray the entire day.” If he prays all day long, he will certainly merit saying tefillos during that special hour, when all one’s requests are answered.

The Otzer Niflaos HaTorah (*Matos*) writes that this lesson is hinted at in the Mishnah (*Avos* 4), אין לך אדם שאין לו שעה, “There isn’t a person who doesn’t have his hour.”

It states (*Bamidbar* 30:3), ככל היוצא בפיו יעשה. The Midrash connects this *pasuk* with לא ידע אדם את עתו. The Otzer Niflaos HaTorah explains, ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה, everyone has a unique hour when everything he says will take effect. Therefore, one should pray the entire day, because לא ידע אדם את עתו, man doesn’t know when that hour is.

Lashon Hara

It states in this week’s *parashah* (24:9) זכור את אשר עשה ה' אלקיך למרים בדרך (24:9), "Remember what Hashem your G-d did to Miriam on the way, when you left Mitzrayim."⁸

The Rambam elaborates that Miriam’s transgression was very slight. She almost didn’t do anything wrong. Yet she was punished severely. And this teaches us the severity of *lashon hara*.

As the Rambam (*Tumas Tzaraas* 15:10) writes, “Think about what happened to the *nevi’ah* Miriam when she spoke [*lashon hara*] on her brother Moshe. She was older than Moshe. She raised him. She risked her life to save him from the Nile. She didn’t say anything derogatory about him, other than that she erred to compare him to other prophets. And Moshe wasn’t angry with her that she spoke about him. As it states (*Bamidbar* 12:3), והאיש משה ענו, מאד. Nevertheless, she was immediately smitten with *tzaraas*. *Kal vechomer* the people who are fools and *resha’im* and they speak all types of severe *lashon haras* [how great will be their punishment]! ... This is the ways of the *resha’im* and scoffers (*leitzim*): First they speak foolishness... then they discuss the faults of *tzaddikim*... then they speak against *nevi’im*... and then they speak against Hashem.... But the conversations of the kosher Yidden are solely words of Torah and wisdom. Therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu helps them....”

7. The words of the *pasuk* are לכה ארה לי את העם הזה, “Go curse for me this nation.”

8. According to the Ramban, remembering this incident is one of the 613 mitzvos of the Torah.

The Chofetz Chaim (*Shaar HaTevunah* 12) discusses the severity of Miriam's punishment. One aspect is that she was punished while they were traveling. As it states, זכור את אשר עשה ה' אלקיך למרים בדרך, "Remember what Hashem your G-d did to Miriam on the way, when you left Mitzrayim." Why does the Torah emphasize that she was punished בדרך, while traveling? The Torah tells that the entire nation had to wait seven days before they could continue traveling, because they were waiting for Miriam to be cured. At that time, everyone heard about Miriam's *tzaraas* and her *lashon hara*. It was very embarrassing for her. But *lashon hara* is so severe, that the punishment comes immediately, without delay.

Consider the following analogy:

A father and son were on a train. The son was hot and the father was cold. The son was repeatedly opening the window, to cool off, and the father was repeatedly shutting the window, because he couldn't take the cold. This went on for quite a while. The father said, "When we get home, I'll punish you." But the father didn't punish him while traveling, because one of the tenets of *chinuch* is: Don't punish your child in front of others. Nevertheless, Miriam's punishment came even while they were

traveling, because of the severity of *lashon hara*. The Torah therefore emphasizes that Miriam was punished בדרך, even while traveling, so we can understand the severity of *lashon hara*.

The Torah also emphasizes that the punishment occurred בזאתכם ממצרים, when they left Mitzrayim. Why is this factor important to remember?

The Chofetz Chaim replies that this is to remind us that Miriam didn't have who to learn from. They had recently left Mitzrayim, the punishment of the *meraglim* who spoke *lashon hara* on Eretz Yisrael took place later. She had no way of knowing how severe *lashon hara* is. One might claim that her punishment should be more lenient or maybe postponed, for how should she know the severity of *lashon hara*? Nevertheless, she was punished severely and immediately because of the severity of *lashon hara*.

The Chofetz Chaim concludes, "Everyone should learn a *kal vechomer* from this...and be aware of the severe punishment that comes to those who speak *lashon hara*."⁹

The Punishment for *Lashon Hara*

Students of the Arizal say, the punishment for speaking *lashon hara* is to be *megulgal* (reincarnated) in a dog.

9. Another explanation why the Torah emphasizes that Miriam was punished after they left Mitzrayim is to show that the punishment occurred at a time of immense joy. Generally, when someone is very happy, he overlooks the wrongdoings of others. Nevertheless, because of the severity of *lashon hara*, Hashem didn't overlook the *lashon hara*. (See a similar commentary in *Chofetz Chaim al HaTorah, Ki Seitzei, baderech*.)

The Chida writes that it is hinted at in the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 32:42), ויקרא לה נבה, לשון הרע ל"ה. The word ל"ה stands for לשון הרע. The pasuk says, ויקרא לה נבה, the result of *lashon hara* is נבה, barking, because he becomes reincarnated in a dog.

The Chofetz Chaim ז"ל writes that he heard from Reb Dovid Tabil (the Nachlas Dovid) ז"ל who heard from Reb Chaim Volozhiner ז"ל who heard from the Vilna Gaon ז"ל, that once, when the Vilna Gaon was in galus (wandering from place to place) his wagon driver rode his horses into a field, so the horses could eat there.

But the landowner was there. When he saw the horses grazing on his produce, he ran to stop this theft. The wagon driver saw the owner coming, and immediately fled from the scene. When the landowner arrived, only the Vilna Gaon was on the carriage. The landowner assumed he was guilty and responsible for bringing the horses into the field, so he began hitting him. The Vilna Gaon repeated this incident and added that had he told the landowner that it wasn't his fault, the landowner would stop hitting him. But then he would be transgressing the sin of *lashon hara*, as it would be implied that the wagon driver is guilty. And then, all of his merits wouldn't protect him from becoming a *gilgul* in a dog.

I heard from a tzaddik that שלם בית (without the ו"ו) is *gematriya* א-להי נצור לשוני, "Hashem guard my mouth..." Because guarding one's speech at home is a *segulah* for *shalom bayis*. Many

disputes could be averted when people are cautious with their speech.

Those Who Guard their Tongue are granted the Power of *Tefillah*

Those who are cautious with their speech have a very special strength of *tefillah*. This is alluded in the words, לא יהל דברו, don't sully your words, and then, ככל היוצא, whatever you ask for will occur.

As it states in *Sefer Chassidim* (תחשצ"ה), "Whoever speaks the truth and doesn't want to think or speak falsehood, all his words — and even all his thoughts — will take effect. This is proven from the Torah, *Nevi'im*, and *Kesuvim*."

The Avnei Nezer (*Shem Mishmuel* מצות תר"ע) teaches: When one only speaks Torah and mitzvos, and doesn't profane his mouth with forbidden speech, his mouth becomes like a *kli shares*, the utensils of the Beis HaMikdash.

One of the features of the *keilim* of the Beis HaMikdash is that when items are placed inside them, they become holy. Similarly, due to the holiness of his mouth, his *tefillos* will be holy and take on a much stronger effect. All his prayers will be answered.

Pray for Spiritual Success

When you pray during Elul, and throughout the year, add requests to succeed in *avodas Hashem*, because such *tefillos* are always answered.

Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 59.) state that after the Churban Beis HaMikdash, the gates of heaven were locked and it is hard for our *tefillos* to go up. "Nevertheless," Reb Yisrael Salanter ז"ל says, "it is tried and

proven that there is one *tefillah* that is always answered—in all times and situations. That is when one prays that Hashem help them with their *ruchniyus*” (*Michtav MeEliyahu* vol.4, p.77).

The Sefer Chassidim (131) writes, “If a person asks for something that will be a praise to Hashem, such as to learn Torah or the like, and he pours his heart out, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will accept his *tefillah*, even if he doesn’t have any merits and good deeds.”

The Kli Yakar (*Devarim* 3:23) writes, זה דבר אמיתי ששורת הדין נותן שימלא ה' משאלות לבו 'יען כי אינו חפץ כי אם את אשר חפץ ה' “It is right that Hashem should answer his requests, because he is asking for what Hashem wants too.”

Chazal say, הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים, “Everything is in Heaven’s hands, except for *yiras Shamayaim*.” The Rebbe of Kotzk *zt'l* explains that when one prays for material matters, Heaven decides whether it is good for him to receive this or not. But when one prays for Torah, mitzvos, and *yiras Shamayim*, his requests are always answered, because that is unquestionably a good thing.

Chazal hint to this when they say, הכל בידי שמים, everything is up to Heaven to decide whether to give it or not, חוץ מיראת שמים, the exception is when one prays for *yiras Shamayim*, because Hashem will certainly give it to him.

Reb Aharon Yosef Luria (*Avodas Pnim*) discussed the order of blowing the shofar: תקיעה שברים תרועה תקיעה. He explained that תקיעה has two translations:

It can mean to move, as in ותקע כף ירך יעקב, “Yaakov's thigh was dislodged” (*Bereishis* 32:26), and it can mean to establish and to fix well in place, as it states, ולבן תקע אהלו, “Lavan set up his tent” (*Bereishis* 31:25). The first *tekiyah* implies that one should move in the right direction and improve his ways. But when he sees how hard it is to change his ways, comes *shevarim teruah*. These sounds imply to a crying and broken heart, praying to Hashem to save him and help him improve. And when one prays, he will succeed. Therefore, we blow the final *tekiyah*, which this time means fixed securely in place. Because due to his *tefillah*, he will succeed to improve and change his ways.

Pray to be Protected from the *Yetzer Hara*

We should also pray to be protected from the *yetzer hara* and to be clean from sin.

At the end of *birchas hashachar* we say, ואל תביאני לא לידי חטא ולא לידי עברה ועון ולא לידי נסיון, “Don’t bring me to sin, or to tests...” It is repeated that the greatest *hislahavus* (fervor) seen by Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* was when he said these words. (Reb Eliezer Dovid Friedman *shlita* repeats this in his father’s name, who went to Rebbe Yissachar Dov.)

Also, his son, Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l*, said these words with extra *kavanah*, and with tears, like a son begging from his father. (Heard from Reb Elimelech Ashkanazi *zt'l* who heard the Rebbe pray in this manner by *birchas hashachar*, one weekday morning).

In this week's *parashah* (22:23-24) the Torah tells that if a נערה המאורסה, halachically engaged woman, is profaned in the city, והוצאתם את שניהם אל, "Bring both of them to the gates of that city and stone them. את הנערה על דבר אשר לא צעקה בעיר, the girl because she didn't shout in the city..." Her shouts could have saved her, therefore she is punished for not shouting.

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* says that similarly, one will be held responsible for his sins if he didn't shout out to Hashem, and pray that Hashem save him.

It states (*Amos* 4:13), ומגיד לאדם מה שיחו, "it will be told to a person about speech." The Gemara (*Chagigah* 5) explains, אפילו, "Even his light conversations...will be repeated to him in the judgment."

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* explains: *tefillah* is called שיחה. The Gemara is telling us that in the future, heaven will tell him שיחו, how much of his punishment could have been avoided, had he prayed to Hashem.

Speaking During Davening

One of the miracles in the Beis HaMikdash was that the wind didn't disperse the pillar of smoke that rose from the *mizbeiach*. The smoke rose straight up, like a column.

The Avodas Yisrael (*Avos* 5) explains, "The Beis HaMikdash down below is directly underneath the Beis HaMikdash above. When the smoke of the *mizbeiach* went straight up, it went into the upper

Beis HaMikdash and that brought down *shefa*, bounty, to all worlds. If winds would disperse the smoke, it wouldn't go straight up. That was the miracle. It is written (*Yechezkel* 11:16), ואהי להם למקדש, *בועט*, and *Chazal* (*Megilah* 29.) explain that implied is that the batei knesiyos and the batei medreshos of *galus* are miniature Batei HaMikdash. Each beis kneses and beis medresh is thus, certainly, beneath its parallel beis medresh and beis kneses in heaven. The *tefillos* from below go straight up to the beis kneses above it, in heaven. Therefore, we must be careful not to speak at all during the *tefillah*, for when one speaks *devarim beteilim* it is like interrupting his conversation with the King. He turns away from the King and says, 'My master, the King, I don't want to speak with you anymore. There's something else I prefer to talk about.' That pushes the *Shechinah* away, *chas veshalom*. Moreover, the *tefillos* of the other *mispallelim*, who are davening with *kavanah*, aren't accepted because of those who speak..."

The Sefer *Vavei HaAmudim* (10) writes, "Every man and woman who sits in beis kneses...shouldn't speak idle talk, [certainly not] during *tefillah* and *kriyas haTorah*... For how long will we have this stumbling block, in every city!? And we aren't able to rebuke them! They've become so accustomed; they think it's totally permitted. Woe to them and woe to their souls! How will their *tefillos* go up? They are sullied with all types of excretion. How could such prayers that simultaneously display their sins possibly

help them? It is proper for every community to appoint people to enforce that there should be no speaking during the *tefillah*. They should warn and embarrass those people publically. That will reveal Hashem's honor in the world. Everyone will see and be afraid, and they won't sin anymore. They will put a muzzle over their mouths in *beis kneses*, and they won't speak idle talk."

Yesh Nochlin (written by the father of the Shlah *zt'l*) writes, "I swear, from all the bad sins, I didn't find anything worse than this sin, because what does the speaker gain? It is unlike theft, adultery, eating non-kosher, and the like, which the *yetzer hara* at times becomes strong and brings a person to sin because the human body desires those pleasures. But there isn't a strong *yetzer hara* for speaking. What's worse is that this sin is never performed alone. There are always at least two people. Thus, he causes others to sin, too. And what I consider to be most bitter is that they are making light of Hashem's honor in public, at the holy time which was designated for praising Hashem..."

Amen Yehei Shmei Rabba

Reb Yishmael ben Elisha was once in heaven and he was shown rooms that show terrible decrees. He said, "How can anyone endure all of this?"

He was then brought to a higher room, and he saw even greater *tzaros*. "How can we possibly endure them?" he asked.

Heaven replied, "When Klal Yisrael say *amen yehei shmei rabba* all of these *gezeiros* are ripped up."

Shulchan Aruch (56) states, "One should have *kavanah* when answering Kaddish. One should say it loud, and one should run to listen to Kaddish."

The Mishnah Berurah explains, "One should answer in a loud voice because this helps concentration, and...this annuls bad decrees. Nevertheless, one shouldn't say it in such a loud voice that it will cause others to laugh at him, because then he will be causing people to sin. One should run to listen to Kaddish, because answering "'*amen yehei shmei rabba*' is a מצוה גדולה מאוד, a very great mitzvah, greater than *Kedushah* and *Modim*..."

The Baal HaTanya said, "The *malachim* would give away everything, just to be able to say *amen yehei shmei rabba*."

The Gemara says that "when we say '*amen yehei shmei rabba*...' Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "Fortunate is the King who is praised in His home with these words. What did the Father gain by sending His children into exile? Woe to the children who were banished from their Father's table" (*Brachos* 3.).

The Gemara (*Brachos* 57) teaches that when a person sees himself in his dream, saying *amen yehei shmei rabba mivorach*... he is a *ben olam haba*. The Yaavatz adds, "If this is the reward for answering Kaddish in a dream, how great will be the reward when one says these words while awake!"

The Mishnah Berurah (56:1) writes, "Chazal say, 'Whoever answers *amen*

yehei shmei rabba mivarach בכל כחו, with all his strength, his *gzar din* is torn up.' The *rishonim* explain that כל כחו means [to say it]...with heart and soul. One shouldn't merely say the words, while his heart isn't there. He should also listen to what the chazan is saying, so he will know on what he is answering amen..."

The Mishnah Berurah adds, "Certainly, one must be extremely careful (צריך ליזהר מאוד מאוד) that he doesn't speak in the middle of Kaddish or *Kedushah*. It states in *Masechta Derech Eretz* that Reb Chamma found Eliyahu with thousands of donkeys carrying אף ודומה (wrath and anger) to punish the people who speak during these times... The Sefer Chassidim writes, 'There was a chassid who saw another chassid (who was

already *niftar*) and he saw that his face was green. 'Why is your face green?'

"It is because I would speak when the chazan was saying ויכולו and מנגן אבות and by Kaddish.'

"The *sefer Matteh Moshe* repeats the following Midrash: A *chacham* came to his student in his dream, and the student saw that he had a blemish (כתם) on his forehead. The *chacham* told him that it was because he wasn't careful not to speak when the chazan said Kaddish..."

Now that we are days before the days of judgment, we recommend saying *amen yehei shmei rabba* with *kavanah*. Among the many benefits is that it tears up all negative *gzar dins*, and it arouses Hashem to bring the *ge'ulah*. May it be speedily in our days.