

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
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Shoftim





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Parshas Shoftim

Bitachon

One of the themes of this week's parashah is bitachon. It states (20:1), **כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה... וּרְאִיתָ סוּם וּרְכָב עִם רֶב מִמֶּךָ**, "When you go to war...and you see horses and chariots, a nation larger than yours, **לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם**, don't be afraid. **כִּי ה' הִמְעֵלְךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם**, Hashem is with you, **אֱלֹקֶיךָ עִמָּךְ**, Hashem is with you, **מִצְרַיִם**, who took you out of Mitzrayim."

The Rabbeinu Yonah writes, "The Torah is telling us that if one sees trouble approaching, his heart should foresee Hashem's salvation, and he should trust in that." Because the pasuk isn't only discussing wars. The pasuk is implying that we shouldn't be afraid of anything at all, because Hashem will help.

People wonder how they will support their family. People are worried about finding shidduchim, health issues, and countless other matters. Life can be frightening. The Torah tells us not to worry. Hashem loves us and He can do anything and everything. Everything will work out. ¹

Rashi writes, **סוּם וּרְכָב**, "[Hashem says] in my eyes, all their horses are like one horse. **עִם רֶב**, they are many, **מִמֶּךָ** in your opinion. But in My eyes, they aren't

many." For Hashem, solving all and any problem is easy.

The Torah's command, **לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם**, "don't be afraid," also means that we shouldn't be afraid of the yetzer hara. With Hashem's help, we can overcome him. People struggle with their yetzer hara, bad middos, and negative tendencies, and they think they will never change. For years, despite their many attempts to improve their character, they've failed. The Torah tells us that we don't have to be afraid. If we continue trying and continue praying for *siyata dishmaya*, we will succeed, because Hashem can do everything.

The Or HaChaim teaches this lesson from the very same pasuk (20:1), **כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אוֹיְבֶיךָ וּרְאִיתָ סוּם וּרְכָב עִם רֶב מִמֶּךָ לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם כִּי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ עִמָּךְ הִמְעֵלְךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם**.

The Or HaChaim explains, "The pasuk is alluding to the war against the yetzer hara. The pasuk is telling a person he shouldn't be afraid when he confronts this war [against the yetzer hara], a battle that is stronger than him. There are two aspects that make this war so difficult and cause people to despair: One is that man isn't trained for warfare, while the yetzer hara is. The second problem is the

1. We say in *Shemonah Esrei* **וּלְמַלְשֵׁינֵינוּ**, where we pray for the curses of those who seek to harm us. Our first request is **אֵל תְּהִי תְקוּהָה**, our enemies should lose hope. Afterwards we say **תַּעֲקֹר** and similar harsh curses. But we begin with **אֵל תְּהִי תְקוּהָה**, because in a way, losing hope is the worst thing, and the origin of all the troubles and disasters that follow.

body embraces and desires everything the yetzer hara offers, such as to steal, to be arrogant, to eat whatever one wants... [And] when a person transgressed the Torah many times the yetzer hara becomes even stronger, as I already explained several times.

“Hashem comes and tells us, **כי תצא** ללחמה וראית בעיניי שכלך סוס ורכב, ‘When you go out to war and in your mind’s eye you see a horse and chariot.’ The horse represents the yetzer hara, which is trained for warfare, while the person isn’t. The **רכב**, chariot, represents the man’s make up, as he naturally desires matters [that are forbidden, or not productive for avodas Hashem. Additionally], **עם רב** the yetzer hara’s strength increased, **ממך**, because of your many sins. Nevertheless, Hashem’s comforts us and says, **לא תירא מהם**, don’t be afraid. Because **כי ה’ אלקיך עמך**, Hashem is with you.

"Although it is true, if you fight with your own strength, you will lose the war. But since Hashem is with you, His strength is great and He will save you. Because when a person desires to be pure, Hashem’s right hand accepts him, and Hashem will weaken his opposition (the yetzer hara). **המעלך מארץ מצרים**... Yetzias Mitzrayim is your sign that you can be strong [because as Hashem saved

you from Mitzrayim, He will help you win the war against the yetzer hara]...”

Similarly, the Yismach Yisrael (Vayishlach 5) writes, “Even when according to man’s perception there is no cure to the ills of his soul, he should nonetheless believe and trust in Hashem’s divine kindness and in the Creator’s endless greatness... And with Hashem’s compassion, He will also help me, the lowest person of all...”²

I heard the following story from a youngerman who lives in Ashdod:

After paying a visit to his father in Bnei Brak, ready to drive back home to Ashdod, he realized that he doesn’t have his cell phone with him. So he returned to his father’s home and looked all over for the phone, but didn’t find it. He got into to his car, and suddenly his phone falls out of his clothes. It was with him all along, and he didn’t realize it. As he began driving home, he saw a bachur standing at a bus stop. It was already late at night; there was no bus service at that hour, so he stopped to see if he could help.

“Which bus are you waiting for?”
 “I live in Ashdod. The last bus just left.”
 “Come with me. I’ll take you there.”

During the ride, the bachur told his story: “Until recently, I was addicted to

2. Someone said to Reb Yisrael Salanter zy’a, “I don’t think I’ll ever do *teshuvah*. I’m set in my ways, and I can’t change.”

Reb Yisrael Salanter rebuked him, “Chazal tell us that when we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah the Satan becomes frightened. He fears that our *teshuvah* has brought the shofar of Moshiach. Even the Satan believes you have the ability to repent. Why don’t you believe it?”

bad sites on the iPhone. My parents hired someone from Bnei Brak to speak with me. Every week, I come to Bnei Brak to speak with him. He is a talented youngster who specializes in overcoming addictions, and he helped me return on the right path. I am just about cured; I threw away my iPhone last week, and have been clean since then.

"Tonight, when I got on the bus to return to Ashdod I saw my friends on the bus with their iPhones. I knew that I wouldn't have the courage to say no to them, and I'd be drawn to watch shows with them. So, I got off the bus at the next stop. I didn't know where I would be tonight, and whether I would make it back to Ashdod, but I knew that I had to get off the bus. I was standing at the bus stop, contemplating where to go, when you came by and offered me a ride home."

This story reminds us that Hashem helps those who tread on the path of teshuvah. We are not in the battle alone. Hashem helps us.

This youngster lost his cell phone (although it was with him all along) so he could be available to help a bachur who was embarking on a new path.

You will gain immensely from your bitachon. As the Rabbeinu Yonah (Mishlei 3:6), writes, "In addition to the reward he will receive for his bitachon in the next world, —which is very great — you will succeed in what you do."

A perfect level of bitachon is to feel absolutely confident that Hashem will help.

The Sefer Ha'Ikrim teaches that just as one is certain the sun will rise in the morning, he should be certain that Hashem will help him.

The Brisker Rav taught, 'בטח בה' trust in Hashem, 'והתענג על ה' and rejoice with the salvation even before it comes, because you are certain that it will happen. ויתן לך ממשאלות לבך, in the merit of your high level of bitachon, Hashem will grant you all your heart's desires.³

3. There were four brothers in a room, each at a different stage in life. The youngest was playing with Legos, and when his tower fell, he began to cry. His older brother by a few years laughed and said to his younger sibling, "When you reach my age, you will know what problems are. I'm in yeshiva, and I got into trouble with the *mashgiach* today... That's real trouble. The Legos are nothing, it's child's play."

An even older brother laughed and said, "Having a problem with the *mashgiach* is small stuff. I'm in *shidduchim*, and yesterday another *shidduch* went down. I know what troubles are."

The oldest brother who was married and had a family laughed at all their problems. He said, "Losing a *shidduch* is also small change. Eventually, your *bashert* will come. Do you have any idea how hard it is to raise children and to support a household? That's a real challenge."

Going to War with Bitachon

Before they went to war, the shotrim told the warriors, *מי האיש הירא ורך הללב ילך*, וישב לביתו ולא ימס את לבב אחיו כלבבו, “Whoever is afraid and he has a soft heart should return home. He shouldn’t cause his brothers to be afraid, as he is afraid” (20:8).

Rashi explains, “According to Reb Akiva, [He is afraid of war]. He isn’t able to stand in war, and see drawn swords. According to Reb Yosi HaGlili, he is afraid because he has aveiros.”

The Gemara (Sotah 44.) states, even if someone spoke between tefillin shel yad and tefillin shel rosh, which is relatively a minor transgression, he should return home.

The Rebbe of Kotzk zt’l asks: a few pesukim earlier (20:3) it states that the cohen *משוח מלחמה* says to the warriors, *שמע ישראל אתם קרבים היום למלחמה על איביכם*, “Listen Yisrael. You are about to come to a war today against your enemies...” Rashi teaches that the beginning of his oration, *שמע ישראל* implies, “Even if the only merit you have is that you say Shema, that is sufficient merit and Hashem will save

you.” We are seeing two opposite ideas. Kriyas Shema alone is enough to be saved, and yet, for the smallest aveirah one should return home. How do we understand this?

The answer is, the main thing is to go to war with bitachon that Hashem will help you. If one says Shema and feels certain that Hashem will save him because of this great mitzvah, it is sufficient. He can go to war and no harm will befall him. But if he doesn’t have that level of bitachon, and he isn’t convinced Hashem will save him, then even for the slightest sin he should return home.

As the Siach Sarfei Kodesh writes, “If a person is courageous and certain that in the merit of Shema alone Hashem will save him, and he has a lot of bitachon on this, then certainly it is sufficient and he will be saved, because he truly isn’t afraid. He trusts that in the merit of Shema, Hashem will save him. However, if someone isn’t certain

Hashem will save him because of Shema, and he is afraid, he must return home from the war — unless he is pure from all sins.”

Everyone laughs at those who complain about smaller problems compared to what they are going through. Dovid HaMelech says, *ה' מה רבו צרי*, “Hashem! I have so many troubles!” Dovid knew what troubles were. (People wanted to kill him, he had to flee, to name a few of his hardships.) Nevertheless, Dovid says, *אם אמרתי מטה רגלי*, even when I fall and I think I will never get up again, *חסדך ה' יסעדני*, Your kindness supports me.” Because Hashem’s kindness always prevails. No matter what one is going through, everything will turn out good in the end.

Also notice that Dovid says, *אם אמרתי מטה רגלי*, “If I say my feet have fallen.” It is only what he says, but he never actually fell. One thinks he has problems, but when everything turns our well he discovers that there was never a problem to begin with.

Temimus

This week we also study about the mitzvah of temimus, as it states (18:13), תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך, "Be complete with Hashem your G-d." The ת of תמים (according to an old custom) is [written] large. The Kotkzer zt'l explains that the large ת hints that there is room for everyone to enter. Everyone can have temimus.⁴ And the large ת hints that one should be wholly with temimus, with all his 248 limbs. No part of his body should be without temimus.

The Baal HaTurim writes that the large ת implies that if you have temimus, it is like you kept the entire Torah from א through ת.

Rashi (18:13) describes the essence of temimus: "Go with Hashem with temimus, trust in Him, ולא תחקור אחר, and don't investigate what the future holds. Whatever happens accept it with temimus, and then you will be with Him and His portion."

One aspect of temimus is to loyally keep each detail of halachah without considering what he will gain. On this note, the holy Rizhiner zt'l told his chassidim the following story: There was a chassid who was cautious never to work before shacharis. Once, he had many furs in stock, and was having a hard time selling them. A messenger from a minister came to the chassid and said he wants to buy the furs, but the chassid hadn't yet davened shacharis and

he didn't want to sell them before shacharis. He didn't want to begin explaining to the messenger that he doesn't do business before shacharis, so he just quoted an exorbitant price for the furs, assuming the messenger would leave. But when he stated the high price, the messenger was prepared to pay it. So, he raised the price even higher. The messenger said, "I see you don't want to sell them" and left.

(Generally, stories like this end with a miracle.)

The Rizhiner told his chassidim, "I see you are silent and waiting to hear the end of the story. But that was the end of the story. His mesirus nefesh to keep halachah is the story that I wanted to tell you. He wasn't thinking about what he will gain from this mesirus nefesh, and neither should you think about what he gained from his mesirus nefesh." This is Rashi's intention, ולא תחקור אחר, "don't investigate to know what the future will be, because that isn't important. We do Hashem's will with a temimus in the present.

Another primary aspect of temimus is to believe Hashem is leading us in the best way, even when one is going through hard times.

The Chofetz Chaim (Shem Olam, Shemiras HaShabbos 3, hagahah) writes, "Man's mind is very small [and he can't understand Hashem's ways].

4. The exception is a *baal gaavah*, someone who considers himself too great. There is no room for him to enter the chamber of *temimus*.

Therefore, he shouldn't ask questions on the way Hakadosh Baruch Hu leads him. One must have temimus and believe that everything Hashem does is for the good, for Hashem never does anything bad. If he will believe, he will certainly merit seeing how everything was for his good. As in the story of Reb Akiva (Brachos 60:).”⁵

The story of Reb Akiva is renowned. Reb Akiva came to a city, asked the residents for a place to stay overnight, but no one took him in. So he had to sleep in the fields. He had a donkey, a chicken, and a candle. The donkey was for traveling, the chicken was to awaken him early in the morning, and the candle was for light to learn Torah. A wind blew out the candle, a cat ate the chicken, and a lion attacked the donkey. For each loss and hardship Reb Akiva endured, he said כל דעביד רחמנא לטוב עביד, “Everything is for the good.”

That night, bandits came and took the entire city into captivity. If Reb Akiva was in the city, his candle lit, or if his chicken and donkey made noises, he would also be taken captive. Reb Akiva said, “Didn't I tell you, everything Hakadosh Baruch Hu does is for the good?” The Chofetz Chaim explains, Reb Akiva believed everything is for the good, therefore he merited to see that it is so.

It states (Shemos 34:23), וראית את אחורי ופני, לא יראו. The Chasam Sofer zt'l explains, וראית את אחורי, when looking back one can see how everything was for the good. ופני, לא יראו, but as matters occur, the good isn't evident. Only in retrospect does one see how Hashem perfectly arranged matters for his good.

We will share some stories on this subject. The purpose in telling these stories is to encourage people to look back at the hard moments they had in

5. It states in this week's *parashah* (20:19,) כי האדם עץ השדה, this *pasuk* seems to compare a person to a tree. The Beis Avraham zt'l explains:

A tree isn't planted in gold and silver. It's planted in the earth. This teaches us that when a person is deep in the earth with many troubles and hardships – either spiritual or material – he shouldn't worry, because from that place one grows the highest.

There was a person who owned a dog; they were always together. When his master suffered a heart attack, and an ambulance came to bring him to the hospital, the dog came along. Even in the hospital room, the dog was at his master's side. They were inseparable. But the doctors refused to let the dog enter the OR. The dog stood near the door and barked and howled, until the doctors felt they have no choice, and they agreed to let the dog in. It sat there next to his master who was put to sleep. The dog was ok with that, but when they took out a knife and began operating on the patient, the dog became vicious and upset. This is because he doesn't know that the operation is for his master's good. It states (*Tehillim* 73:22), ואני בער ולא אדע בהמות הייתי עמר, “I am a fool. I don't know. I am like an animal...” We are like animals who don't know anything, and we don't realize how everything – even those matters that seem bad, are all for our good.

life, and to see whether they can recognize the good that came from it. This will help us to accept the hardships of the present with temimus, with belief that they too are for the good. One day, we will look back and recognize the good in them.

(Even when we look back and we don't find the good that came from a situation, we still believe that it was for the good. Perhaps the good is yet to come in Olam HaBa? But it is certainly for the good, because everything Hashem does is good.)

A woman brought her son to the doctor, because of his high fever. The doctor's face fell when he recognized the deathly illness the child had. He said, "Here is a prescription. Go to the pharmacy and buy the medicine immediately. Your son's life is in danger." This story happened around a hundred years ago, in Williamsburg, New York, when there was no Medicaid or other programs to help the poor. This mother had to scrape together every penny she owned to pay for the doctor. Where would she have money to pay for the medicine? But there wasn't time to waste; her son's life was in danger.

She brought her son home, so her husband could take care of him, and she set out to the pharmacist.

She explained to the pharmacist that she desperately needs the medicine to save her son's life, but she doesn't have any money to pay for it. "Please have mercy on me and on my son. Give me the

medication. I will pay you when I have the money. I promise; it won't take long. I will do whatever I can to pay you back."

The pharmacist had a different idea. He said, "I need some cleaning help in this pharmacy. If you sign a contract with me to work here for free, that will be my payment for the medicine."

She agreed.

The pharmacist immediately wrote out a contract. He took advantage of this poor woman's desperate need for the medicine, and in the contract he obligated her to work many weeks in the pharmacy, as payment for the medicine.

She was so relieved; she didn't really care so much. At least she got the medicine to heal her son.

She was in a rush to get home to give the medication to her son, so she took a short-cut through a crime-ridden neighborhood. One gangster stopped her and demanded all her money. She told him that she doesn't have anything (which was the truth). He grabbed the bag. She pleaded, "It's just medicine. It's worthless for you, but I need it for my son. Please, give it to me."

He didn't hear her. He just wanted to taste whatever was in the bottle, because he thought it was alcohol (which was what he was after in the first place). He took off the cap, and took a large slurp, and immediately spit out the black liquid on her white clothes. Then he smashed the bottle on the ground and left.

She returned to the pharmacist and told him what happened. "Can I see the contract?" she requested.

The pharmacist said, "Oh no! A deal is a deal. It isn't my problem you were robbed. You owe me all the hours of work we agreed on." She told him, "I wasn't thinking of ripping up the document. On the contrary, I want to add onto the document more days of work, so you will agree to sell me another bottle of medicine."

The pharmacist's eyes lit up. This was his lucky day. They added some more weeks into the contract, and he gave her another bottle of medicine.

She wasn't happy with the bottle; it didn't look the same as the bottle the pharmacist gave her before. She opened it, and saw the liquid was red, while the liquid in the first bottle (and now partially on her shirt) was black.

The pharmacist realized that he made a grave mistake. He accidentally gave her the wrong medicine. It would have killed her child instead of healing him.

The pharmacist grabbed the contract and tore it in half. He told her, "You don't have to work for me. The debt is forgiven. Just don't tell anyone that I made this terrible error!"

When the criminal smashed the medicine bottle, she thought her world shattered together with it. In retrospect it this was her salvation. It was a miracle, not a tragedy at all.

In תרפ"ט, Reb Boruch Frankel z'l and a friend came from Europe to America, and worked hard to make the American dream. Every month they sent money to their wives and children who remained behind in Europe, and the rest they kept in savings accounts.

After three years, they had enough money to open their own business in Europe, and decided it was time to return. They were both excited about their future life in Europe, together with their families, and together with their, hopefully, prosperous business.

They bought two tickets on a ship that would be leaving to Europe in about a week, and got busy finishing their preparations and closing their business in America. But then Reb Boruch Frankel's father was niftar. He sat shivah in America, knowing he would miss his voyage. Reb Boruch Frankel planned to buy another ticket after the shivah.

Many people visited Reb Boruch during the shivah, and in one especially busy moment, his business partner came with many documents.

"What are these for?"
 "They are to close our business. We have to sign some documents before we leave. I brought them here to you, so you can sign them."

Reb Boruch Frankel looked at them briefly, everything seemed right, so he signed on all the documents, without checking each one of them. After the shivah, he discovered that one of those documents was giving his partner

permission to take all his money out of his bank account. His partner had tricked him, and stolen all his savings. Now Reb Boruch didn't even have enough money to pay for his own passage back home.

Reb Boruch stayed in America and worked hard for several more years. In תרצ"ד he became a legal American citizen, and that's when he returned to Europe.

Then World War II broke out. As an American citizen, he was able to escape to America together with his family. His business partner was murdered in the Holocaust.

That terrible moment when his partner stole all his money was now viewed as one of the most fortunate moments of his life. It saved his entire family.

Obviously, this doesn't exonerate the partner for his terrible deed, but the awareness that כל מה דעביד רחמנא למב עביד, "Everything is for the good" is a lesson worth learning.

A recent story is another example of how in retrospect one sees that everything is for the good:

The story is about a person who learned a relatively new kind of therapy for children, that includes horseback riding. When he graduated the course, he rented a ranch in the village Aderet, near Beit Shemesh, complete with a barn for the horses, a track for horseback riding, and a small office.

He rented the ranch for a year, and invested in all the equipment he needed to do the therapy. At the end of the year,

the landowner said that from now on he will be renting the ranch on a three-month basis. Every three months they would draw up another contract. That gave the landowner the opportunity to raise the rent four times a year. In spite of this uncommon arrangement it worked fine for several years.

Two months ago, the landowner said that he would be raising the rent very high in the next contract. The renter said, "If I pay that amount, I might as well close my business. All the money I earn will go to the rent."

But the landowner wouldn't lower the price. He gave his tenant a week to make a decision.

The therapist was walking down a street, deep in thought, worried about his future, when he met up with his old teacher who taught him the therapy. The teacher immediately saw his disposition, and asked him about it. The student told him. The teacher said, "There is plenty of room on the ranch where I teach the therapy. You can bring your horses there, free of charge." The therapist was shocked, but he wasn't certain the teacher was serious about it.

He was still debating what to do. Four o'clock on Thursday morning, just a few hours before he had to decide whether he would be staying or leaving, he was woken up by a phone call. It was the police. "There's a fire in Aderet. You must leave the village."

He grabbed his horses and took them straight to his teacher's ranch.

We see how a problem proved to be part of the salvation. He told his teacher about his problems, this paved a place for him to bring his horses, and continue his practice even after the fire.

Because everything is for the good; and when we look back we often merit seeing that it is so.⁶

Judge Favorably

Rosh Hashanah is fast approaching, and everyone is seeking ways to earn a good judgment. The Kedushas Levi advises that we should judge others favorably. When we see someone doing something questionable, we should give them the benefit of the doubt. And, in general, we should see the virtues in others and not focus on their faults. If we will do so, Hashem will judge us favorably as well.

On the pasuk, שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך, the Kedushas Levi writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu judges the Jewish nation on the day of the judgment, בגודל רחמיו וחסדיו, with His immense compassion and kindness. But we must rouse these attributes above. How? When we act with kindness and

judge every Yid לכה זכות, favorably, this rouses the same attribute and attitude in heaven and Hashem will judge all Yidden favorably.

“This is the translation of the pasuk, שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך, this means you should prepare the שופטים, judgment of heaven... ושפטו את העם משפט צדק, by judging your fellow man favorably... Because the way a person acts to others, that is how Heaven will act with him.”

Reb Ben Tzion Feldman shlita tells some stories that teach us to judge our fellow man favorably.

One story happened in the Ponovezh yeshiva during yarchei kalah. Yarchei Kalah is a learning session in bein hazmanim designated especially for baalei batim. Shabbos of yarchei kalah, the gabai called up a wealthy person for maftir. Generally, the custom in Ponovezh was that a chasan got maftir. This week the wealthy guest got maftir, while a chasan got a regular aliyah.

People started talking, “Why did the gabai give maftir to the wealthy person? Just because he has money? The maftir

6. A שבט is a staff used for hitting. A משען is a stick used for support. Dovid HaMelech says (*Tehillim* 23:4), שבטך ומשענתך המה ינחמוני, “Your staff and your supporting stick comfort me.” Because even when one is hit with a שבט, he should know that it really is a משען, his support. This awareness ינחמוני is his comfort.

It states (*Tehillim* 139:8), ואציעה, אם אסק שמים שם אתה, “If I go up to heaven You are there, ואציעה הנך, and if I make a bed in Gehinom, behold You are present.” This *pasuk* is discussing two very opposite experiences. אם אסק שמים, “If I go up to heaven” hints to very good times. ואציעה שאל, “If I make a bed in Gehinom” hints to very difficult times. The *pasuk* is saying that in all situations, good and bad, Hashem is present.

When is Hashem closer? When going through good times, the *pasuk* says שם אתה “You are there.” When going through hard times the *pasuk* says הנך behold You are here.” It seems Hashem is even closer to help him through the hard times.

belongs to the chasan! The chasan is an orphan! The gabai shouldn't have slighted him by giving him a regular aliyah..."

The chasan heard their hushed conversation and clarified the matter. He said, "I asked the gabai not to give me maftir because I am shy, and it's hard for me to say the long haftarah..." Reb Feldman says, "Imagine, had the chasan remained silent. Who would think of this explanation to judge the gabai favorably? We must train ourselves to judge our fellow man favorably, especially since our assumptions are often wrong."

Someone told Reb Feldman that he has a hard time getting along with a neighbor. They don't fight, chas veshalom, but they just don't get along. When they meet, it is always a tense relationship.

He said, "My neighbor's son is getting married, and he gave me an invitation to his son's chasunah. But when I opened the envelope there was no invitation inside! He is hinting to me that he doesn't want me to come to his chasunah. And that's a chutzpah. I'm a neighbor, after all. If that's the way he wants it, I will stop pretending. I will make it a real machlokes ..." Reb Feldman told him, "You must judge your neighbor favorably. Perhaps he forgot to put in the invitation." "Did you ever receive an envelope for an invitation with nothing inside it? Did you ever hear of such a thing?" Reb Feldman admitted that he never heard

of such a thing, "Nevertheless, you are obligated to judge him favorably." Later that day, this man received an invitation in the mail to some other chasunah. He opened the envelope and lo and behold, there was no invitation inside. Heaven was showing him that sometimes people forget to put in the invitation, and he should judge his neighbor favorably.

He saved the envelope, so he could always remember this lesson.

Once, a kollel youngster was marrying off a child, and he gave out invitations to all the kollel members. They opened up the invitation, and saw he was making the wedding in the large Wagshall Hall, which is among the luxurious halls in Bnei Brak.

The kollel members were shocked. This youngster always gave them the impression that he was poor. When extra money came into the kollel, to be distributed among the most destitute among them, he always came forward and claimed he was a worthy candidate, and that he was very poor. How could he afford to make the chasunah in that expensive hall? Was he tricking them all along? Or perhaps, he takes the extra money from the kollel and uses that to rent the most expensive hall in Bnei Brak?

Shortly after this incident, the kollel coffers filled with bonus money, and this youngster came forward. He said, "Now that I'm making a chasunah, I certainly need this extra bonus."

The person in charge of the distribution didn't give him any money.

"Why not? Why am I less eligible than anyone else?"

The person in charge of the distribution replied, "We see you have money. How else are you making a chasunah in Wagshall's large hall?"

The youngerman replied, "If I could tell you the reason, you would understand.

But I can't tell you." And he left.

The following day, the kollel youngerman said to the person in charge of the distribution, "I wasn't able to tell you beforehand, but I can tell you now. I wanted to make the chasunah in Wagshal's small hall. When I spoke to the manager of the hall, he asked me who my father was. I told him. He exclaimed, "Your father saved my life in the Holocaust! I was searching for him for years, so I can repay him." He told me to make the chasunah in the large hall, and he gave it to me for free. He made a condition that I don't tell anyone. Yesterday, I told him that I'm losing money and my respect in the kollel due to this secret, so he agreed that I can tell the story."

Reb Feldman concludes, "The entire kollel heard the story, and were ashamed they suspected him. They learned to judge their fellow man favorably, even when it seems there is no explanation."

And, as the Kedushas Levi taught, by judging others favorably, Hashem will judge us favorably on Rosh Hashanah and grant us, and all Klal Yisrael, a good year.

Chesed

Another way to be acquitted in the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is to become a public person; someone dedicated to helping others. Reb Yisrael Salanter zt'l explained this concept with a mashal:

A wealthy person met an old friend at a very luxurious hotel. This was a hotel that only the very wealthy could afford, and most people didn't stay for more than a few days. It was simply too expensive. He didn't know his friend had become wealthy. The last time he met him, his friend was a poor man from a poor family. He asked him, "How long are you here in this hotel?"

He replied, "I'm here for two years, now."

"Two consecutive years?"

"That's right."

"But how can you afford it? The last time I saw you, you were poor."

"I see you don't understand. I am the janitor here. I have a small room in the hotel where I sleep."

The nimshal is, when one "works here" he can stay around longer. The judgment of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is awesome and fearful. For some the heavenly court will decree life, and for others... For some, the celestial court will decree wealth and tranquility; others will not fare as well. But if a person dedicates himself to helping others, Heaven will judge him favorably for their sake. Hashem wants him to remain in this world and to have all his provisions, so he can continue doing chesed for others.

Therefore, to be judged for a good year, it is recommended to be dedicated to helping others.

The Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuvah, 3:13) teaches, "There are mitzvos in the Torah that most people aren't careful with One is gemilus chasadim. It is a mitzvah from the Torah... Chazal say, the world stands on three pillars: Torah, avodah, and gemilus chasadim... This mitzvah is מן החמורות ומן העקרים הנדרשים מן האדם, among the severest and from the most fundamental principles that Hashem requests from man. As it says (Michah 6), ומה ד' דורש ממך כי אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד, 'What does Hashem ask of you? Only to do justice, and to love chesed.'"

At the end of the parashah we study the laws of eglah arufah. When a murdered man is found in the field, and no one knows who did it, the scholars of the closest town bring a calf to the field, and break its neck there. The scholars then say, ידינו לא שפכו את הדם הזה, "Our hands didn't spill his blood..." (21:7).

Rashi writes, "Does anyone suspect that the scholars...were the murderers?" Why must they say they didn't kill him?

"The answer is the scholars were saying they didn't see him and allow him to travel without food and without an escort."

When a person travels, it is proper to give him some food (צדה לדרך) so he doesn't need to stop to look for food while traveling, which sometimes could be dangerous. It is also important to walk him (for at least four cubits) as this

creates a spiritual protection for the person when he travels. The elders were saying that they weren't guilty of transgressing these points, and therefore, they aren't responsible for the murder.

Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen zy'a explains as follows:

When a person is happy, he has more energy. Therefore, when a person leaves a city, it is important to give him food and to walk him part of the way, as this shows him that people care about him, and he will be in good spirits. If he will be attacked, he will have the energy and courage to escape or to fight back. If the people of the city didn't supply food and levayah, he will feel down, and uncared for. His melancholy feelings could ultimately cause his death, when thieves or murderers meet him and he doesn't have sufficient courage to fight them off.

In addition to food and levayah, there are other ways to make people feel cared for. A smile and a few kind words tell a person that he isn't alone. Now he is empowered to face the challenges of life. If you can make it your business to help people in this way, or in any other way, you will have a merit that could help you earn a good year. Heaven says that you are needed, because so many people need you.

The city closest to the corpse brings the eglah arufah. If the corpse is found exactly between two cities and it is hard to determine which city is the closest, the beis din of Yerushalayim measures the distances, and determines which city is closer.

The Mishnah (Sotah 45:) states three opinions how to measure: "Reb Eliezer says they measure from the dead person's stomach. Reb Akiva says they measure from the nose. Reb Eliezer ben Azarya says they measure from the throat."

Reb Tzaddok HaCohen explains that alluded in this machlokes are three ways to determine who is going through a hard time, and needs support and a kind word. Reb Eliezer ben Azarya says we measure from the throat. This is because one of the basic ways to know who is going through a hard time is to listen to what they say. If they tell you about their hardships, it is a mitzvah to try to help them.

Reb Akiva says that you measure from the nose, because many people conceal what they are going through, and they don't want to speak about it. But you can look at their face. If their nose is turned down, you will know that it is a mitzvah to help them.

Reb Eliezer said that we measure from the stomach, because there are people

who keep everything bottled up in their stomachs. There is no external sign, at all, to know that they are going through hard times. Therefore, we should strive to bring happiness to everyone, because we can never know what our fellow man is going through. Perhaps you can give him a smile and a kind word that will make his day (or his week, year, or life). As it states in Pirkei Avos, "Greet every person with happiness" (Avos 3:12) because you never know who needs it.

Reb Yisrael Salanter zy'a taught that someone who goes around with a sour face is a בור ברה"ר, a pit in a public domain, because he is causing people to be sad together with him. In contrast, those who go around with a happy countenance will be rewarded for all the people who become happy as a result.

The tzaddikim of Ziditchov zy'a said that a שמיכל (smile) is roshei teivos, בולם יהיו משועבדים לעבודתו יתברך שמו devote themselves to serve Hashem.

This is a good counsel for Elul, because לעבעדיג און ווייטער אלול is roshei teivos for לעבעדיג, Happy and happy again.⁷

7. When you smile people smile back at you. The following story demonstrates this: Mr. and Mrs. S. found a home that was large enough for their needs and in the right location, so they were thinking of buying it. "What about the neighbors?" Mrs. S. asked the seller. "Are they friendly?" "Of course," the seller told them. "You won't have any problems in this neighborhood. They are all helpful and caring people." "Good because I don't want to live here if they aren't friendly." A moving truck brought over all their furniture. As Mrs. S. came to the front door, she saw one of the neighbors glaring at her. She quickly called the original homeowner and said, "Why did you trick us. You said that we'll have good neighbors, but now I see the neighbors glaring at us. They are upset moved here."

Gaavah — Arrogance

Haughtiness is a very negative trait. This week's parashah commands the Jewish king that he mustn't be haughty, as it states (17:20), לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו, "So his heart won't feel haughtier than his brothers..." This prohibition applies to all Yidden. As the Ramban writes, "The Torah is hinting here the prohibition against haughtiness. The pasuk says that even a king mustn't be proud and haughty. Certainly, everybody else should be cautious. For a king, gaavah is essentially fitting. Yet the Torah tells that he must be humble and he should consider himself an equal to all his brothers who are lower than him..."

The Ramban continues, "Because gaavah is a disgusting trait (מגונה), and it is disgusting to Hashem (נמאסת), even when a king has gaavah. Pride only belongs to Hashem alone... As Shlomo HaMelech writes (Mishlei 16:5), תועבת ד' כל גבה לב, 'It is an abomination, before Hashem, all those who are haughty.' And it states (Yirmiyahu 9:23), כי אם בואת יתהלל, המתהלל... 'Only with regards to the following can one have pride: the one

who knows Hashem and [knows] that I...do kindness..."

The Sfas Emes asks, why does the Ramban say that this pasuk is the source for the prohibition against arrogance. There are many other references in the Torah that

prohibit arrogance. For example, in parashas Eikev, it states (Devarim 8), פן תאכל ושבעת...וכסף וזהב ירבה לך...ורם לבבך ושכחת את ד' אלקיך, "Lest you [will] eat and be satisfied...your gold and silver will increase...and your heart will become proud and you will forget Hashem..." There are other sources, too. So why does the Ramban say that gaavah is prohibited for all Yidden, from this pasuk, which discusses kings?

The answer is there are two forms of gaavah. One form of gaavah is to feel proud before Hashem, as though he doesn't have to be subjugated before Hashem. As it states, ורם לבבך ושכחת את ד' אלקיך, you became haughty and you forgot Hashem. The other gaavah is when one considers himself greater than others. Parashas Eikev discusses someone who thinks he doesn't need to come onto

The original homeowner told her, "Put a smile on your face, and you will see that the neighbors will smile back."

She did this, and this time the neighbor smiled back at her. She looked closer, and saw that she was looking at a mirror. When she frowned, the mirror frowned, and when she smiled, the mirror smiled back.

The way we treat others, is the way they treat us. Therefore, one of the benefits of greeting others with happiness is that they will respond and greet you with joy, too. You will earn more friends, which is a benefit in itself, and in addition, you may be helping people in a very significant manner.

Hashem for aid. While this week's parashah discusses when one feels greater than his fellow man. As it says, לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו, "So the king shouldn't feel prouder than his fellow man."

A prestigious rabbi was klapping al chet on Yom Kippur. The gabbai was standing nearby and overheard the rabbi's words amidst his tears. The gabbai was astonished; he never knew that the rabbi was such a grave sinner. "Al chet shechatanu lefaneicha... al chet shechatanu lefaneicha..." the list was long.

"I'm not giving him an aliyah today" the gabai decided. "Why should I honor the rabbi, if he is a great sinner?"

At the break before Minchah, this rabbi rebuked the gabbai. "Why didn't you give me an aliyah today, like I receive every year?"

"I just found out about all your aveiros. I overheard your viduy, and I discovered that you are a great sinner. I never knew ... Someone like you doesn't deserve an aliyah."

The rabbi replied, "You're right, I'm a nobody... I'm a sinner... I admit my lowliness before Hashem. But compared to all those people who received an aliyah today, I'm far greater than them..."

So we see that one can be humble before Hashem, but haughty towards others. In this week's parashah, the Torah states the prohibition, לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו, that one shouldn't feel pride over his fellow man either.

One of the benefits of humility is long life.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 92) says, "One should always be humble, and then he will live." And the Gemara (Tamid 32) teaches, "What should a person do to live? He should kill himself (he should humble himself)."

Therefore, regarding the humility of the Jewish king, the Torah says, לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו... למען יאריך ימים על ממלכתו, "[The king] shouldn't feel pride over his brothers... so he will live long on his kingdom."⁸

Overcoming Jealousy

Reb Shalom Mordechai Rubashkin shlita received many letters when he was in prison. It was estimated that 2/3rd of all the mail went to Reb Shalom Mordechai Rubashkin, and 1/3 to the other inmates. His plight touched the hearts of many people, and they would write him letters of chizuk. Cheder children also wrote letters to him.

There was one prisoner who was jealous of Reb Shalom Mordechai. He said,

8. The Chizkuni writes, "The Gemara (*Pesachim* 87) teaches, הרבנות קוברת את בעליה, 'being a rabbinic leader hastens death'. Therefore, a king must find matters that will grant him longevity. This is the reason people shout 'yechi hamelech — may the king live' (*Melachim* 1, 25) when he is anointed."

Perhaps this is also the reason people say *shlita* (may he live long) when mentioning a tzaddik's name.

“You're stealing everyone's letters for yourself.”

Reb Shalom Mordechai showed him the envelopes. His name was written on them. He also showed him the letters. Many of them were written in Yiddish. Obviously, those letters weren't written to the non-Jewish inmates.

The goyishe prisoner didn't agree. He still felt Reb Shalom Mordechai was taking away letters that belonged others.

The Baal Shem Tov zt'l teaches that everything a person hears or sees are all messages from Heaven. So, Reb Shalom Mordechai tried to understand the message Hashem was sending him via this jealous prisoner. What did it mean?

Reb Shalom Mordechai realized that he was also jealous, because he was envious of all the people who are free. “Why me and not them?” he always asked himself. Hashem sent him this gentile to remind him that he shouldn't be jealous. This was his portion, destined from Above. Just as every letter was personally addressed to him, so too, the imprisonment was destined and allotted to him.

The Gemara (Pesachim 8.) states, חור שבין אדם לחבירו זה בודק עד מקום שידו מגעת, “If there is a hole [in the wall] between your apartment and your neighbor's, check [for chametz in the hole] as far as your hand reaches...”

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Bo 8) explains that חור can also mean רוה, earnings, profit. This halachah hints that if one sees his friend is earning a greater

profit than he, this isn't a reason for jealousy or hatred. Recognize that each person gets the portion designed for him. The Gemara therefore says, בודק עד מקום שידו מגעת, he should check as far as he can” and cleanse himself from jealousy.

Kabalah Tovah

Tzaddikim called the resolutions people make for the new year, “A new garment for the new soul for the new year.”

Before Rosh Hashanah, Reb Elyah Lopian zt'l once asked Reb Aryeh Leib Chasman zt'l, “What kabalah should I accept on myself for the upcoming year?”

Reb Leib Chasman replied, “I want you to decide, but make sure it is something you can keep.”

After some time, Reb Elyah Lopian returned and told Reb Leib Chasman what he chose.

“Are you certain you can keep this?”
“I'm certain.”

“Then I want you to do only half of it.”

Someone said to Reb Zundel Kroizer zt'l, “A miracle happened to me, and I want to make a new kabalah to express my gratitude. Which kabalah do you recommend I take on?”
Reb Zundel Kroizer advised him to add just one more minute of Torah study. “If you generally learn from 9:00 to 10:00, learn until 10:01.”

Because one minute of Torah may appear insignificant to us, but nothing is small in Hashem's eyes. And that one good deed, will lead to many others.

An old Yid was niftar in Uzbekistan, and before his demise, he asked his son to transfer his body to Eretz Yisrael, when he is able to.

But as it is often the way of people, things get pushed off, from one year to the next, and the son was already eighty years old, living in Eretz Yisrael, and he realized that if he doesn't carry out his father's will now, he will never get around to doing it.

He hired Reb Mendel Ekstein (who has experience in transporting graves) to bring his father's remains to Eretz Yisrael.

Reb Mendel Ekstein traveled to Uzbekistan, opened the grave, and almost fainted when he saw that the tallis covering the body had remained fresh, after all these years. The tallis is usually first to disintegrate, but miraculously this tallis remained intact. Reb Mendel never saw anything like this before. He was afraid to continue. But

he was hired to do this mission, and it was the niftar's final request, so he took the tallis off to see the body. The skeleton was as he'd expect it to be — the body was totally decomposed. The tachrichim were totally disintegrated, too, just the tallis remained intact.

In Eretz Yisrael, the custom is to bury people without a tallis. But, with rabbinic guidance, this man was reburied with the tallis, because of the outstanding miracle that occurred.

Reb Mendel asked the eighty-year-old son, "Do you have any idea why his tallis remained complete? Perhaps your father was a tzaddik nistar?" The son replied, "The day my father began wearing a tallis, after his chasunah, he made a kabbalah that he would never speak while wearing his tallis. He kept this kabbalah his entire life. Apparently, in that merit, the tallis remained intact."