

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Achrei - Kedoshim



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Torah Wellsprings - Achrei - Kedoshim

Overcoming the urge for revenge

There are many mitzvos that are taught in this week's *parashah*. Among them are the famous mitzvos, prohibiting us from hating another Yid, taking revenge, and even just keeping a grudge. As it states (*Kedoshim* 19:17-18), לא תשנא אהיך בלבבך... לא תקום ולא תטור את בני עמך.

The Mesilas Yesharim (ch.11) writes, "It is very hard for people's foolish hearts to triumph over hatred and to refrain from taking revenge. When one is disgraced, he feels the humiliation deep in his bones...and to take revenge is sweeter than honey. It's his only relief. One needs to go beyond his nature and not hate those who arouse his hatred, and refrain from taking revenge when the opportunity arises. As well he should forgive and forget rather than carry a grudge. In order to achieve these things, one needs to be very strong and have a lot of willpower. It is only easy for *malachim* who don't have human characteristics, not for human beings... But this is the King's decree...."

It isn't easy to keep these mitzvos, but there are thought processes we can practice, which will make it possible.

(a) Everything is *Bashert*, so there is no Reason to be Upset

Whatever happened had to happen - it was *bashert* - so why do you hate your fellow man? Why do you want to take revenge? It wasn't his fault.

The Chinuch (241) writes, "The reason for this mitzvah [of not taking revenge] is so that one will know that everything that transpires - the good and the bad - are all part of Hashem's plan... When someone harms you, know in your heart that it is because of your sins... Therefore, don't take revenge. The person [who hurt you] isn't the root of the problem; your sins are..."

Rebbe Isaac of Kamarna *zt'l* (נתיב מצותך, נתיב (האמונה 1:4) writes, "The root of all good *middos* is the *emunah* that nothing happens without Hashem. [When one has this *emunah*] he will love his fellow man, even when his fellow man...humiliated him... This person was sent by Heaven to deliver those insults... If it weren't for Heaven's decree, it would be impossible for anyone to harm him - even in the smallest way. Therefore, accept what happens to you with love and joy. This will purify your soul, more than a thousand fasts."

The Gemara (*Yoma* 23.) describes נקמה (revenge) as follows: Someone asks his friend for a knife and the friend replies, "I won't lend it to you, because you didn't lend me a knife when I needed one. This is called taking revenge."

The Chofetz Chaim (על התורה) explains that there is no reason to take revenge on the person who didn't lend you a knife, because it was destined from Heaven that he shouldn't lend it to you.

The Chofetz Chaim compares it to someone who is looking for Reuven. He asks a passerby, "Are you Reuven?" The man replies that he isn't.

Is it logical to be angry with him because he isn't Reuven? Similarly, when you ask someone for a knife and he doesn't give it to you, you should think, "I was looking for a person who can lend me a knife. This wasn't the person I was looking for. There's no reason for anger and hatred."

(b) The Triviality of Olam HaZeh

There is another thought that one can have in mind, which will help him overcome the urge to hate, take revenge, and to hold a grudge:

The Kli Yakar writes:

"It isn't proper to take revenge on a Yid... You are upset...because he...humiliated you, or did something to your money, but these matters aren't so important that they justify you taking revenge.

"One is permitted to take revenge on goyim,¹ because, most probably, their intention is to distance you from Hashem and from His mitzvos, and this is a serious matter. It is proper to take revenge on such matters... [As Chazal say]: Causing one to sin is worse than killing him... But for matters of this world [someone insulted him, etc.], Hashem doesn't want a person to take revenge.

"*Mashal*: A child was playing with blocks and someone came by and broke everything the child built. The child came running to his father, crying bitterly. If the father adheres to his child's wishes, he would kill that person [who broke his house]. But the father doesn't pay attention to his son's shouts and complaints...because the father knows it isn't serious. The child was only playing. It isn't worth making enemies over such matters... Our Father in heaven treats His creations in a similar way. People think that matters of this world are of great importance. If someone touches their honor or wealth, they think it's a catastrophe. They shout to their Father in heaven, requesting that He take revenge. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't always listen to their shouts (when it isn't related to their *neshamah*). In Hashem's eyes, all of Olam HaZeh is like a joke to Him (similar to the toys a child plays with)... But if the harm...will result in *bitul Torah* (loss of Torah study) or with the transgression of mitzvos, Hashem will take revenge."

As the Rambam (*Hilchos Dei'os* 7:7) teaches, there is no reason to take revenge because "שהכל אצל מבינים דברי הכל והבאי ואיני כדאי לנקום עליהם", "For the wise, it is all foolishness, and not matters

worth taking revenge on." Having these ideas in mind will help people conquer their strong urge to hate, take revenge, and to bear grudges.

(c) Give your Fellow Man the Benefit of the Doubt

A third counsel, which helps people avoid hatred, taking revenge, and holding a grudge, is to judge your fellow man favorably.

Many disputes are built on a misinterpretation of what really happened. People quickly jump to conclusions, and are convinced that people are against them, that they hurt them, and the like, but it is often a simple misreading of events.

Consider this story:

Even before their official engagement, the *bachur* told the girl that it is very important for him that the Shabbos candles be lit on time. She told him that she doesn't have a problem with that.

They got married; it was erev Shabbos *sheva brachos*, and the *chasan* told his bride that it was time to light the candles. She told him that she will be coming right away.

It took a few minutes until she was ready. When she came, she saw the candles were already lit and her husband had already left to daven.

She was very insulted. "I told him I was coming. Couldn't he wait a few minutes? Why doesn't he care about my feelings?"

After the week of *sheva brachos* passed, the *kallah* confronted her husband, and asked him about the Shabbos candles. Initially, he didn't know what she was talking about. He said, "I only lit the candles to immediately blow them out" (as this is recommended in halachah). But then they understood that he

1. The Torah says לא תקום ולא תטור את בני עמך, "Don't take revenge and don't hold a grudge to people of your nation." The prohibition is solely to take revenge from Yidden, but it's permitted to take revenge from non-Jews.

lit the candles and he forgot to put them out. He never purposely intended to light the Shabbos candles. All the hard feelings were because of a misconception.

Here's another story:

Almost everyone was quiet during the lecture, but the rav noticed that in the back of the room, two people were conversing the entire time. The rav judged them negatively. After the *drashah* (speech), those two people came over to the rav to thank him for the wonderful *shiur*. The rav asked, "Did you hear anything? It looked like you were speaking the entire time!"

One of them explained, "My friend only speaks English. He doesn't understand Yiddish, so I was translating the *shiur* for him into English."

We often misjudge people and we interpret their words or deeds in ways they never intended. This causes disputes, hatred, a desire for revenge, and grudges. Judging people favorably prevents machlokes-disputes.

Judge Favorably

It states (19:15), בצדק תשפוט עמיתך, "Judge your fellow man favorably." This means, when you aren't certain whether your fellow man sinned or not, give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that he didn't transgress the *aveirah*.

Similarly, it states in *Avos* (ch.1), והוי' דן את כל, האדם לכף זכות, "Judge every person favorably."

The Mishnah doesn't say that one should judge אדם, כל, "every person" favorably. It states one should judge כל האדם "the entire person" favorably. This means one should take the entire person into the equation. Even if you saw someone do an *aveirah*, don't immediately write him off as a sinner

or as a bad person. Take the entire person into consideration, and you will probably find that there is a lot of good in him.

The Mishnah says to judge people לכף זכות, favorably. Literally translated, a כף is a spoon. The Pnei Menachem zt'l told the following *mashal*:

There was once a pot on the fire, filled with diced vegetables. There was also a small piece of meat inside the pot. Someone took a spoon and fished around for a while until he found that piece of meat. This is how we should search for the good in a Yid. Sometimes we have to search and search, but in the end, we will find good and virtue in him.

A spoon is also used to help one put on a tight shoe. This hints that when one doesn't find a merit in his fellow man, he should use a כף, a spoon, and squeeze in a merit in order to find a way to judge his fellow man לכף זכות, favorably.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said, "I like the *pilpul* (in depth) approach to Torah study, because with *pilpul* one can find an answer and an explanation for every Yid." Sometimes, one must be creative, but if one searches he can find a way to find the good in everyone.

Rebbe Yitzchak Eizik of Kalev zt'l said that one should seek with *mesirus nefesh* (with all one's might) to find a way to judge his fellow man favorably. There's a hint in the words, והוי' דן את כל האדם לכף זכות. It's *gematriya* equals שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד. We say Shema with *mesirus nefesh*, and one should employ *mesirus nefesh* to find merit in his fellow man.

When one judges people favorably, he will live well in this world and in the next world. As it states, מו' האיש החפץ חיים אוהב ימים, "Who is the person who desires life and who loves days?" The counsel for him is לראות טוב, to find the good in others.²

2. The Meor Einayim (Chukas) teaches:

Every person knows his own faults, nevertheless, he judges himself favorably and he loves himself. This

The beis medresh in Trisk was packed. Even the women's section was filled to capacity. Two wealthy merchants were standing on the *bimah*, crying copiously. Everyone gathered to hear what they had to say.

"We are business partners, and we run a lucrative business. We were traveling to a fair, distant from our home, and we met a pauper walking on the road with a heavy sack on his shoulders. We were traveling in the same direction, so we offered him a ride with us on the wagon. He was happy to accept our offer, and he thanked us immensely.

"He told us that he is a *melamed* (teacher) who teaches children in a town that was far from his home. That was the only position he found. He was there for several years, until he gathered a substantial amount of money, and now he was traveling home to marry off his daughters.

"When Shabbos was approaching, we stopped at a hotel. We paid for a bed-and-board for the pauper, too. He repeatedly thanked us for our generosity, and we were also glad that we could do this mitzvah.

"Before Shabbos, we hid our large sack of money, so thieves wouldn't find it. No one saw where we hid it, other than the pauper, who was with us in our room. We were certain he was a G-d fearing person, so we weren't concerned if he saw where we put the money.

"On *motzei Shabbos*, we took out our money, counted it, and discovered that two hundred rubles were missing. We immediately suspected the pauper. He was

so poor; it wasn't far-fetched to assume that he would take some of our money for himself, out of desperation. Who else could have taken it? No one else knew where the money was hidden.

"At first, we spoke to him kindly. We explained to him that we know he stole the money, and that we aren't angry with him, but he must return the money. He swore that he didn't take anything. He was insulted that we suspected him.

"We didn't believe him. We began speaking harshly to him. 'After all that we've done for you, how could you take the money? We took you on the wagon, rented a hotel room for you, and then you steal two hundred rubles from us?!"

"He kept on saying that he didn't take the money, so we checked his belongings. The lining of his coat was sewn up with red thread. We opened the lining and found two hundred rubles there, the exact amount that we were missing.

"That's my money,' the pauper said. 'I earned it from the *melamdu* (teaching job). That's all I have, from years of teaching Torah, far from home.'

"We didn't believe him. We asked, 'Isn't it a coincidence that you earned exactly the amount of money that we're missing- not a penny more and not a penny less?'

"The mistress of the hotel heard our loud voices and she came to see what the commotion was about. We told her that we were robbed two hundred rubles, and we showed her the coat with the red thread, where that amount of money was found.

is because he focuses on his good side and considers his bad to be small and insignificant.

The Meor Einayim writes that one should do the same for his fellow man. He should focus on his good and disregard the bad.

He writes that this is hinted at in the words (19:18), *וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעִי*, "Love your fellow man, *בְּמוֹךְ*, as you love yourself." You love yourself, although you know you aren't perfect. This is how you shall love your fellow man.

"The mistress said, 'The pauper asked me for thread on *erev Shabbos*, and I gave him red thread...'

"All the evidence was piling up. We were certain the pauper stole the money. We beat the pauper forcefully, took the money, and left him there in the hotel. We traveled by ourselves to the fair. The pauper remained behind bruised, injured, not to mention humiliated.

"We were not very far from the hotel when a mailman on horseback caught up with us. He had a letter to deliver to me, from my wife. She wrote, 'Before you left, I needed two hundred rubles urgently so I took it out of your bundle. I didn't have time to tell you before you left. That's why I'm sending you this letter...'"

"We realized the great mistake and sin we committed. We suspected, beat, and humiliated an innocent, G-d fearing man, and we stole the money that he spent years to earn, so far away from his home. We rushed back to the hotel to ask his forgiveness and to return the money, but the manager of the hotel told us that the pauper didn't sustain the humiliation and beatings. By the time a doctor arrived, he was already not among the living...

"So, listen, you people of Trisk. We are guilty of killing an innocent man and it is all because we didn't judge him favorably. We went to the Trisker Magid and asked him what we should do in order to do *teshuvah*. The Magid told us that our remorse atoned for a large part of the sins. 'And now,' the Trisker Magid told us, 'accept on yourselves to support the *almanah* (widow) and her children for the rest of your life. When it's time for them to marry, marry them off as you would your own children. In addition,

you must gather all the people of Trisk; men, women and children, the young and the old, and tell them the story. The shame this will cause you, together with the *zikuy harabim* (because people will learn from you to judge others favorably) will atone for your sins."

Rebbe Aryeh Mordechai Rabinowitz *zt'l* was in the Trisker beis medresh when this episode occurred. He heard the story directly from the two merchants. He would often recount this story, and his children repeated it to their children, so we can know how important it is to judge our fellow man favorably.

This is a mitzvah in this week's *parashah*, בצדק תשפוט עמיתך.

The Prohibition of Hatred

It states (19:17), לא תשנא אחיך בלבבך, "Don't hate your brother in your heart." Rebbe Dovid Lelover *zt'l* explained that this implies: Don't hate your fellow man, just because he has a different mind and heart than your own. Just because he sees things differently, this isn't a reason to hate him.

As one wise man said, "When people disagree, they are really agreeing. Each one agrees that Hashem created this person's mind to think this way, and Hashem created the other person's mind to think as he thinks. So, they both agree that they are thinking the way Hashem programmed them to think. Ultimately, they agree, and they aren't arguing at all."

Holding a Grudge

The Torah states, ולא תמור, we shouldn't hold onto our hard feelings against our fellow man. We should learn to forgive and forget and to drop all hard feelings.³

3. The Tashbatz (קמן תסד-תסו) writes, "Take this rule in hand: All the customs of the chasan and kallah are learned from mattan Torah, because [by mattan Torah] Hashem was like the chasan and the Jewish nation was the kallah."

Following this theme, the Pri Megadim (אורח חיים משב"ז תק"ם סק"ד) says the custom of breaking a glass under the

The Gemara (*Yoma* 23.) describes the difference between holding on to a grudge and taking revenge:

"What is נקמה, revenge, and what is נמירה, keeping a grudge? נקמה is when you ask someone, 'Lend me your knife' and he refuses. The next day, he asks you for a knife. You reply, 'I won't lend it to you just as you didn't lend it to me.' This is called taking revenge. What is נמירה, holding a grudge? You ask someone, 'Lend me your knife' and he refuses. The next day, he asks you for a knife, and you reply, 'Here it is. I am not like you, because you didn't lend it to me [when I needed it, but I am lending one to you]."

The Mesilas Yesharim (ch.11) lists various levels of נמירה:

"נמירה, holding a grudge, is also when you do kindness to that person who wronged you, but you subtly remind him the wrong that he did to you, earlier. The *yetzer hara* ignites man's heart, and makes the person want to hint to the wrong that was done to him. If he can't do so openly, he tries to leave at least a slight reminder.

"For example: If you agree to give your fellow man something (although, before, he didn't want to lend it to you), you don't give it to him with a smile on your face. You don't hurt him, but you also don't want to do a great favor for him. And if he needs a lot of help, you don't want to help him. You don't want to sit with him and be his friend. Isn't it enough that you forgave him, and you aren't acting like an enemy? And even if you agree to befriend him, nevertheless, you won't show him as much love as there used

to be. The *yetzer hara* has several other clever schemes with which he lures the hearts of man. Therefore, the Torah writes [in the next *pasuk*] the general rule: ואהבת לרעך כמוך, 'Love your fellow man like yourself.' כמוך means [exactly like yourself], without any difference. Without any tricks or schemes. Like yourself, literally!"

Tzaddikim would go out of their way to help people who harmed them, so they will be certain that they aren't carrying any negative feelings towards their fellow man.

Dovid HaMelech says (*Tehillim* 41:10), גם איש שלימי אשר בטחתי בו אוכל לחמי הגדיל עלי עקב , "Also my friend, who I trusted in him, who ate from my bread, he raised his heel against me..." A few words later, Dovid says, ואשלמה להם. Rav Sadyah Gaon *zt'l* explains that this means, "I will do kindness with them."

Dovid was referring to people who rebelled against him, and he repaid their cruelty with kindness.

The next words are, בזאת ידעתי כי הפצת בי, "With this I know that You desire me." Rav Sadyah Gaon explains: When I have this good attitude, and I am ready to do kindness even to those who wronged me, I know that You desire me [since he has this noble attitude].

As a *yungerman*, the Imrei Emes *zt'l* lived in Biyale, Poland. There was someone in his neighborhood who caused him much trouble and tried to take away his *parnassah*. After the upheavals of World War One many Yidden were left without a home and without food, and that neighbor suffered this fate. The Imrei Emes didn't hold a grudge. He forgave and forgot. He sent him

chuppah corresponds to the breaking the luchos, which happened when Moshe came down from Har Sinai.

The Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* said that it is appropriate to remember the breaking of the luchos at a chuppah. The breaking of the luchos is the origin of forgetting. As the Gemara (*Eiruvim* 54.) says, אלמלי לא נשתברו לוחות הראשונות, "If the first luchos weren't broken, Torah would never be forgotten from the Jewish nation." And forgetting is needed in a marriage. Because if the husband or the wife did something wrong, with forgetting, everything can be washed over and fixed.

food and clothing to help him out during those hard times.

The Imrei Emes's *rebbetzin* said to her husband, "I understand that you want to give him goodness in exchange for all the bad he did to us. But I don't understand why you are helping him *so much!* He didn't do so much bad to us that you should repay him with so much good!"

Reb Meir Alter *zt'l hy'd*, the eldest son of the Imrei Emes *zt'l*, was suspicious of one of his father's "chassidim." This chassid spoke kindly and respectfully to the Imrei Emes, but Reb Meir sensed that he had a concealed, mysterious agenda, though Reb Meir couldn't pinpoint exactly what it was.

One day, the secret was revealed. This man had written two letters. One was for the government in Petersburg. That letter was filled with slander and *lashon hara* against the Imrei Emes. Another letter was penned to the Imrei Emes, in which he sang his admiration and loyalty to the Rebbe.

What did Hakadosh Baruch Hu do? The two letters got mixed up. The letter full of slander came to the Rebbe's house and never reached the government.

Reb Meir came out of his father's office, waving the defamatory letter in his hand. He said, "I always wondered why my father was so kind to this man. But now I understand. He was plotting against my father, and this explains why my father was so kind to him..."

The Belzer Rebbes supported many poor families. When Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zt'l* became the Rebbe, the *gaba'im* came to him with the list of people whom his father supported., He could review the list, and decide whether he wants to continue supporting them. The *gabai'im* were certain that Reb Yissachar Dov would continue doing as his father did, because, he made it his principle to continue in his father's footsteps regarding all matters. But this time the *gaba'im* were surprised, because Rebbe Yissachar Dov crossed out the name of one

of the people on the list. He explained, "This man isn't poor. There is no reason to support him. This man did many bad things to my father, and in order to uproot any bad feelings, my father would send him money. But this man never did anything bad to me, and he isn't poor, so I don't have any reason to support him."

The Divrei Shmuel *zt'l* of Slonim was once sitting together with chassidim, discussing chassidus and *mussar*. One of the listeners disagreed forcefully with everything he said. The Divrei Shmuel was flabbergasted, and thought to himself, "What does this person want from me?" When he realized that this man just wanted to dispute and argue everything that he is teaching, the Divrei Shmuel decided to help him. He purposely said things that weren't accurate, so that this person could easily disagree with him.

The Divrei Shmuel repeated this episode years later to the Beis Avraham, to teach him how one must act with people. He concluded, "Now he is one of my closest chassidim. He is ready to do anything for me." This is because when you are kind to people, you buy their heart and they become good with you, too.

Someone was once suffering as a result of a dispute, and he told Rebbe Hershel of Ziditchov *zt'l* about it. The Rebbe told him, "When two people are pulling with all their strength at two ends of a rope, if one of them lets go, the other person will fall down. If you will stop thinking about this *machlokes* (*argument*), and if you will let go of your hard feelings against him, it will bring about the other person's downfall."

Emunah comes through Hearing

One of the wondrous miracles of *mattan Torah* is that the Yidden's sense of sight was used for sounds. As it states (*Shemos* 20:15), וכל העם רואים את הקולות, "The entire nation saw the voices."

The Bnei Yissaschar explains that this is because sight isn't necessary for *emunah*. For *emunah*, only hearing is needed.

This needs some elaboration, so we quote the Bnei Yissaschar (*Sivan* 5:19):

"My friend, let's think about this: Why did Hashem make the nation see sounds? Every wonder and miracle that Hashem performs has a purpose (such as the miracles of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, *kriyas Yam Suf* and the sun standing still for Yehoshua). All miracles were in order to perform a salvation. But what is the purpose of this miracle? Why, by *mattan Torah*, did sight take over the function of hearing?

"I will explain it to you: We, Bnei Yisrael, Hashem's nation, serve Hashem with *emunah*. That is our legacy from our forefathers. We are forbidden [to believe in Hashem] due to *chakirah* [logical, philosophical evidence].

"In fact, we must also believe in all the words of Chazal. We shouldn't need proofs [to convince us that that they spoke correctly].

"For example, we quote the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 100)..."

The Gemara states that Reb Yochanan was telling his students that in the future, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bring precious stones and pearls that are 30 x 30 *amos* and insert them into the gates of Yerushalayim.

One of the students laughed silently to himself. He thought it was impossible that there will ever be such large gems in the world. He said to himself, "We can't even find gems the size of a small egg. How can there be such large gems in the future?"

But the student soon discovered that Reb Yochanan spoke truthfully. The student was on a ship and he saw *malachim* carving out gigantic pearls and precious stones. The

student asked the *malachim*, "What are these for?"

The *malachim* replied, "In the future, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will place them in the gates of Yerushalayim."

At the next opportunity, when the student saw Reb Yochanan teaching Torah, he came over and said, "Rebbe, continue teaching. You are a fitting teacher because I saw exactly as you told us..."

Reb Yochanan rebuked him harshly. He said, "ריקה, empty man! If you didn't see it with your eyes you wouldn't have believed me?! You mock the sages' lessons!"

The Gemara concludes that Reb Yochanan looked at this student and turned him into "a pile of bones."

The Bnei Yissaschar writes, "Reb Yochanan didn't see the student laughing during the *drashah*. (If he would have, he would have punished him then). So, what caused Reb Yochanan to suspect that the student was mocking the words of the wise? Perhaps the student believed beforehand, and after seeing it, he was convinced that it was true? The answer is that the problem was that the student believed it *more* after he saw it.⁴ When he heard the *drashah*, he wasn't as certain that it was true as after he actually saw it. For this, Reb Yochanan called him, מולגלג על דברי חכמים, that he mocks the words of the scholars... So we see that we must believe in what Chazal say, even regarding matters that aren't related to the foundations of Yiddishkeit. (And even when their lessons seem illogical, as the student said, 'We don't even find precious gems the size of a small egg...') Our *emunah* via hearing should be as strong as if we had already seen. Seeing shouldn't be the reason that we now believe more.

"Now that we know our obligation regarding the belief in the words of Chazal,

4. The truth is, the student had even weaker *emunah*, because he mocked Reb Yochanan's lesson, and thought it was impossible, until he saw it with his own eyes.

we certainly know our obligation for believing the words of the Torah. Especially when the issues are about the foundations of our religion – such as belief in Hashem, believing that He is one, reward and punishment etc. – *chas veshalom* that we should seek to confirm these matters via *chakirah* (philosophical logic).

"Even if one claims that his intentions are *leshem shamayim* (for the sake of Hashem), to strengthen his *emunah*, so that even if goyim will force him to abandon Yiddishkeit, he won't obey them – this isn't a valid claim. Studying philosophy won't strengthen his *emunah*. It's quite the opposite. The Chassid Yaavatz testified that by the Spanish Inquisition, all those who established their *emunah* via intellectual proofs became goyim when they were put to the test. But those who weren't as wise [and they didn't study philosophy], and the women, whose *emunah* was based only on what they received, they sanctified Hashem's name (may Hashem avenge their blood, quickly)."

By the Spanish Inquisition, why did those who based their *emunah* on philosophy and scientific evidence have less *emunah* than those who believed in Hashem with (hearing) *emunah peshutah*?

The Bnei Yissaschar discusses this question:

"The mind doesn't understand this. When something is logically and scientifically proven, it is like seeing it with one's eyes... So why should *emunah* that comes from שמיעה, hearing, be stronger than *emunah* that comes from seeing, via clear, philosophical evidence? My answer is: When one's belief is based on what he heard, [and the chain of "hearing" goes back to] the momentous time

when we *heard* Hashem's voice from the fire [on Har Sinai], and we heard Hashem say ,אנכי ה' אלקיך, 'I am Hashem your G-d', this *emunah* is limitless. It comes from the eternal Hashem. However, when a person's belief is based on human intellect, behold the intellect is limited, [because there's a limit how wise and how sharp a person can be]. Therefore, *emunah* based on intellect is at risk of failing when goyim force someone to abandon religion, since his *emunah* is coming from a place that is limited."

The Bnei Yissaschar elaborates on these ideas and concludes, "By *mattan Torah* it states, וכל העם רואים את הקולות, 'The entire nation saw the voices' and Chazal explain, רואים את הנשמע, 'they saw the hearing.' We asked above, why did Hashem perform this miracle, that the sense of sight should do the service of hearing? The answer is, Hashem did it to teach His children that from the time that the Torah was given, we must believe [with hearing alone, and not with seeing]...because sight doesn't enhance *emunah*. [Therefore, by *mattan Torah*, even the sense of sight was used for hearing, because for *emunah* only hearing is necessary.]

"Because something one sees with his eyes, or something one 'sees' with one's intelligence, isn't called *emunah* (believing). That is called 'knowing.' The sense needed for *emunah* is the sense of hearing, alone."

We cover our eyes when we say Shema (see *Shulchan Aruch* 61:5). Perhaps this is because in Shema we proclaim our *emunah*, and *emunah* is about "hearing," receiving the *emunah* we were taught from our parents and teachers. We cover our eyes, because *emunah* isn't associated with seeing. Only with שמע, hearing.⁵

5. Someone told his friends that he doesn't believe in anything he can't see.

"You're a fool" they told him.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because we don't see your brains, and we also don't believe in something we don't see."

The Blast of the Shofar

In last week's *parashah* (beginning of *Metzora*) the Kli Yakar writes, "Tzaraas doesn't have a natural cure so we should know that Hashem brought it. (A proof [that tzaraas doesn't have a cure] is from the *tzaraas* that Naamon received [see *Malachim 2*, ch.5] and the doctors lost hope to find a cure.) The only solution is *teshuvah*."

If *tzaraas* had a natural cure, people might think that it came naturally and that it leaves through a natural means. There is no cure for *tzaraas*, other than *teshuvah*, so that everyone will know that it was sent by Hashem.

This accurately explains the present situation. A fool-proof cure for the virus has not yet been found. This is so we should know that Hashem sent it. It came because of sin, and the real and primary cure is *teshuvah*.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Taanis* ch.1) teaches:

"There's a *mitzvah* from the Torah to shout to Hashem and to blow trumpets for every danger and tragedy that befalls the community. As it states (*Bamidbar 10:9*), על הצר הצורר אתכם והרעתם בחצוצרות, 'against an enemy that oppresses you, you shall blow trumpets...' This means, for every tragedy and trouble, be it hunger, a plague, locusts, and so on, *beni Yisroel* should shout and blow trumpets... When a tragedy comes, and they shout to Hashem and blow trumpets everyone will know that the plague came because of their bad deeds. As it states (*Yirmiyahu 5:25*) עונתיכם הטו 'Your sins caused it to happen' and therefore, only *teshuvah* will remove the tragedy from them.

"But if they don't shout and if they don't blow trumpets, and they say that this is just a natural tragedy, and that it happened by chance, this attitude is cruel (הרי זו דרך אכזריות), and they won't improve their ways. And then new *tzaros* will come. As it states (*Vayikra 26*), והלכתם עמי בקרי והלכתי גם אני עמכם עמכם בתמת קרי, 'If you will say its natural, I will treat you with anger...'"

This Rambam tells us that claiming a tragedy happened by chance is דרך אכזריות, cruel. The Rambam doesn't call any other sin besides for this one אכזרי, cruel., What is so severe about this sin?

Perhaps, it is because only a cruel person could rationalize that thousands of people are in distress, and many *tzaddikim* were *niftar*, all for nothing. Only someone who by nature is cruel could imagine that Hashem would allow something like this to happen, without any purpose.

There is a purpose, and it is to rouse us to do *teshuvah*. On Rosh Hashanah we blow the shofar to arouse us to *teshuvah*. A great shofar is being blown now, a powerful call, urging us to do *teshuvah*. The shofar is waking us up.

A story is told about a young son who was *niftar r'l*, and at the *levayah* the father (who was still in denial) came over to his son and said, "Shloimele, wake up! Why are you still sleeping?"

Someone came over to the father and said, "Your son *is* awake. Now he is in the true world and he is awake and knows exactly what the purpose of everything is. Those who are living are the ones who have to wake up!"

Praising Hashem Removes the *Tzarah*

The Ruzhiner *zt'l* once heard his daughter moaning. He told her, "One moan brings on the next moan, whereas, if you praise Hashem, one praise brings on the next praise. Therefore, find reasons to praise Hashem, and Hashem will give you many reasons to praise Him."

The Ruzhiner told his daughter the following story:

There was once a wealthy person, but he wasn't the wealthy person from *Pirkei Avos*, איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו, who is satisfied with his lot. This wealthy man was always sad and was constantly complaining about his life. Heaven said, "Do you think your situation is

bad? You have so much good, and you are still crying? You will see what bad is," and he lost all his money. Consequently, he had to go from door to door, begging for food.

Now he had more to cry about. He bemoaned his plight. Heaven said, "Do you think *this* is bad? You will see what bad is" and he got *tzaraas*. Unfortunately, he couldn't even go to people's homes to ask for food, because they were afraid they may catch his contagious disease. He moaned and cried some more. Heaven said, "Do you think *this* is bad? You will see what bad is" and he became hunchbacked and it was hard for him to drink and eat.

This time, he saw that his life was so terrible, he said "Boruch Hashem, at least I'm alive." This was the first time he praised Hashem. Heaven said, "You are praising Hashem. Do you think *this* is good? Now you will see what good is," and his hunchback straightened out. He praised Hashem for this, and Heaven said, "Do you think *this* is good? You will see what good is" and his leprosy was cured, too. Now he could go to people's homes for handouts once again. He praised Hashem. Heaven said, "Do you think *this* is good. You will see what good is." Someone lent him some money. He invested it, and he became wealthy again.⁶

When we praise Hashem, Hashem will give us many reasons to thank Him.

The Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 4) teaches us to praise Hashem for the good, and even for the bad. When one praises

Hashem for the good, the good will prosper. And when one praises Hashem for the hardships, the hardships will end. As the Rabbeinu Yonah writes, "It states (*Tehillim* 76:11), כי חמת אדם תורך שארית חמות תחגור. This means, when a person praises Hashem even during hard times... it blocks the *yesurim* from coming... Similarly, it states (*Yeshayah* 12:1), אורך ה' כי אנפת כי ישוב אפך ותנחמני. This means, I thank You Hashem and I praise you for the afflictions that You send me. I accept them with love [because I know they are for my good]. In the merit that I am praising you for Your wrath, You will withhold Your anger and console me.

"When a person praises Hashem for the good he receives in life [the good will continue], as it states (*Tehillim* 52:11) אורך לעולם כי עשית ואקוה שמך כי טוב נגר חסידך. This means, 'I praise You for the kindness You did for me. And in the merit that I praise You, I hope and trust Your kindness will continue.'

"And it states (*Tehillim* 116:13) כוס ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אֶרַא, 'I raise the cup of salvation and praise Hashem [for the kindness He bestows on me].' And it states (*Tehillim* 116:3-4) צרה ויגון אֶמְצָא ובשם ה' אֶרַא, 'I found distress and agony and I call out to Hashem [and praise Hashem for the troubles]'" because a person should praise Hashem for every situation, for the good and for the bad, for the happy times and for the distressful times, because everything comes from Hashem Who loves us. By praising Hashem for the bad, the bad will cease, and by praising Him for the good, the good will continue.

6. There was a student who was always complaining to his rebbe about the hardships he endured in life. The rebbe realized that his primary problem was his negative outlook. The rebbe invited the student to his home and gave him water to drink. Then the rebbe took a handful of salt and added it to the water. The student didn't want to drink it anymore. Then the rebbe brought his student to a river, threw a handful of salt into the river and asked the student to drink some water. This time the student drank the water.

The rebbe said, "I poured exactly the same amount of salt into the cup as I poured into the river. You didn't want to drink from the cup, but you drank from the river. This is because the river has more water, so the salt isn't dominant. The cup is small, the salt is concentrated, and therefore unbearable. The same thing is with *yesurim*. If you focus on them, the *yesurim* become concentrated and painful. But if you will focus on all the good you have in your life, and even though the hardships will still be there, but they won't bother you as much.

The *Otzer HaMidrashim* (17) tells:

A Torah scholar and a hotel manager were once traveling together, and they met a pauper who was blind in both eyes. The Torah scholar gave him tzedakah and he advised the hotel manager to do the same. The manager replied, "You know this poor man, and therefore you gave him tzedakah, which is the right thing to do. But I don't know him, therefore I won't give him anything."

The Torah scholar replied, "You have free will to do as you choose."

They traveled further and met another person (or, they thought he was a person). This person asked them, "Where are you traveling?"

They told him that they are merchants, traveling for business.

The man told them that he is the *malach hamaves*, and they became very afraid. The *malach hamaves* told the Torah scholar that he has nothing to fear. "I won't take you, because you gave tzedakah to the poor. As it states (Yeshayah 58:8) וְהָלַךְ לְפָנַי צְדָקָה כְבוֹד ה' יִאֱסָפֶךָ, 'Your charity goes before you...' You will live another fifty years." Then the *malach hamaves* turned to the hotel manager and said, "But your time has come. You will come with me."

The manager said, "I came together with this man, and now he will return home and I will die here?!"

"Yes" the *malach hamaves* replied, "because he gave tzedakah, and you didn't."

"I will give tzedakah now."

The *malach hamaves* laughed at this and told him that it was too late. He compared it to someone who didn't prepare for his

voyage at sea, and when he needs help it is too late to get the provisions he needs...

The manager pleaded, "At least allow me a few moments to praise Hashem for all He did for me in my life, before you take me."

The *malach hamaves* replied, "Since you want to praise Hashem, years will be added to your life..."

We learn from this Midrash that praising Hashem adds years to one's life.⁷

Joy Removes the Tzarah

In the previous section, we discussed that praising Hashem removes the *tzarah*. Here, we add, that joy, in general, also removes the *tzarah*.

It states (Yeshayah 55:12), כִּי בְשִׂמְחָה תֵצְאוּ, with joy one gets rid of all *tzaros*. (*Degel Machaneh Efraim*)

It states (Koheles 2:2), וְלִשְׂמֹחָה מִה זֶה עוֹשֶׂה. The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* explained, "Even joy of *מה זה*, over trivial matters, *עוֹשֶׂה*, also makes an impression in heaven."

Rebbe Hershel of Zidochov *zt'l* said, כּוֹלֵם יְהוּ מִשְׁעוּבָדִים, a smile, is *roshei teivos* for *משעובדים*, לעבדתו יתברך שמו, "Everyone will accept the responsibilities of Hashem's service." The letters aren't in order of these words, for that is the test: Even when matters aren't "in order," to also be happy.

The Apter Rav *zt'l* had a lot of mucus in his throat, which caused him immense pain. The doctors said that they have to operate. The Apter Rav's family and friends advised him to rest up before the operation.

There was a simple Jewish man who lived near the hospital, and the Apter Rav went there to rest up.

7. The Midrash also teaches us that tzedakah grants a person life. The Midrash concludes, "[The Torah scholar] helped solely one poor, blind man, and he was granted fifty more years. Someone who gives tzedakah every day and every hour, certainly he will live long. As it states וְהָלַךְ לְפָנַי צְדָקָה, 'Your charity goes before you.'"

Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin *zt'l* came to this simple man's house to visit the Apter Rav and to perform the mitzvah of *bikur cholim*.

The Ruzhiner saw the dedication and devotion with which this simple man was taking care of the Apter Rav. He told the Apter Rav that it would be fitting that this simple person should sit together with them, at the head of the table.

As the simple man sat there, the Ruzhiner asked him how he feels sitting next to them at the head of the table.

He replied, "I feel like a *שושנה בין החוחים*, "A rose among thorns."

The Apter Rav laughed a lot when he heard that.

(The simple person wanted to imply that he feels like a thorn among roses. But with his simplicity and ignorance, he didn't realize that the *pasuk* he quoted expressed the exact opposite: that he is the rose and that he is among thorns... The Apter Rav found this error humorous, and he laughed a lot).

The Ruzhiner said to the simple host, "It would be appropriate that you drink a *lechayim* and give a *brachah* to the Apter Rav."

The man drank a *lechayim* and said, "Hashem should help that it should be by the Rebbe, *צדיק נעזב וזרעו מבקש להם*."

Once again, this simple man didn't realize what he was saying. He thought this was a *brachah* when actually the words mean, "The

tzaddik is abandoned and his children seek bread."

The humor of his error brought the Apter Rav to laughter once again. The laughter brought up the mucus, which the Apter Rav coughed up, and he was totally healed.

Laughter and joy heal. As it states (*Mishlei* 18:14), *רוח איש ילכלל מחללו*. The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* explains, that a person's happiness strengthens him and cures his illness.

A few weeks ago, we noted that the Targum Yonoson's translation for *מחללו* is *כרהניה*, which sounds like corona. Joy is the cure and the protection against this terrible illness, *r'l*.

The Shlah quotes the following Midrash:

"Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael (*Shemos* 3:14), *אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה*, 'The way you will be with Me, I will be with you.' As Dovid said (*Tehillim* 121:5), *ה' צֶלֶל*, Hashem is your shadow. Like a shadow, [which mimics people]: If you laugh, it laughs with you. If you cry, it cries with you. If you show a sad face, or a compassionate face, it shows such a face to you. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is *צֶלֶל*, your shadow. The way you act towards Hashem, that is the way He will act towards you..." Therefore, if you serve Hashem with joy, Hashem will bring happiness to you.

The Abarbenel (end of *parashas Re'eh*) writes, "This is nature: If a person is happy with his portion, he will attain happiness. If a person cries for no reason, he will have sadness his entire life."⁸

8. The Chazon Ish *zt'l* said, "Everyone passes through the seventy, eighty years of life. Some pass by with laughter, and some pass it crying." The choice is up to each person to decide how he wants to live his years.

The Arizal says that a person's face hints to Hashem's holy name. Hashem's name (*יהוה*) is gematriya 26, and the two eyes and the nose of a face hint to that number. This is because the two eyes look like two *י"ד*s, which are gematriya 20, and the nose looks like a *ו"ו*, which is gematriya 6. Together, the gematriya is 26 - the same as Hashem's name.

However, if a person is sad, and his nose is turned down, the nose no longer looks like a *ו"ו*. It looks like a long *ג"ן*, and the gematriya of *יהוה* isn't on his face anymore.

Hashem is Near

A piece of good advice during these hard times is to be happy by remembering that, Hashem is very close to us.

It states (Tehillim 139:8), **אם אסך שמים שם אתה**, **ואציעה שאול הנך**, "If I go up to heaven, You are there. If I make a bed in the depths of Gehinom, behold You are there." Dovid HaMelech is proclaiming that Hashem is everywhere and in every situation.

This *pasuk* also implies that Hashem is even nearer during times of hardships. **אציעה שאול** (a bed in the depths of Gehinom) hints to times of hardships and struggles. At such times, the *pasuk* says **הנך**, "Hashem is here." **כי אם אסך שמים** (if I go up to heaven) refers to prosperous and successful times. (Such as when the batei midrashim and the chaderim are open, and everyone is well.) The *pasuk* says, **שם אתה**, "You are there". *There* connotes at a distance. So, we see that Hashem is even closer to us during the hard times.

Similarly, it states (Tehillim 23), **בנאות דשא**, **ירביצני על מי מנוחות ינהלני נפשי ישוב ינחני במעגלי צדק למען שמו**. These *pesukim* are referring to when life is good and tranquil. Yet, notice that we don't address Hashem, directly. We speak in "third person." For example, we say, **בנאות דשא**, **ירביצני**, "He has me sit on lush meadows..." **ינהלני**, "He leads me..."

Then it states, **גם כי אלך בנאי צלמות לא אירא רע כי אתה עמדי**, "Also when I go in the valley of death, I am not afraid, because You are with me." This time, when we are going through hard times, we speak directly to Hashem, as we say **אתה**, "You..." Because when we are going through hard times, that's when Hashem is closest.

And when Hashem is with us, there is nothing to worry about. Consider the following story:

A group of children went on a trip to the mountains, Suddenly, one of the children on the bus began shouting in panic. The bus was coasting down a steep mountain, and the child didn't see the bus driver, sitting in his seat. The other children on the bus picked up the panic, and they shouted together with him.

One wise child told them, "Don't panic. Everything is fine. I see that the driver is sitting in his seat."

The children calmed down They knew they were in good hands.

Hashem is leading us. We are in good hands. There is no reason to panic.

We pray that Hashem should quickly tell the *malach hamaves* to remove his sword, and then we will rejoice in the miracles that Hashem will perform for us.

It states (Devarim 12:4), **לא תעשו כן להוי"ה אלקיכם**, "Don't do so to Hashem, your G-d." We can explain that the *pasuk* is saying: Don't turn the name of **הוי"ה** that is on your face into **כן**. Because when a person is happy, there is **כ"ו**, the gematriya 26, on his face. And when he is sad and he has a long nose, there's **כן** on his face (two eyes and a long nose). The *pasuk* is saying, "Don't do that to Hashem's name," because Hashem's name **הוי"ה** should always be on his face, and that happens when a person is happy.