

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Bamidbar



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Torah Wellsprings - Bamidbar

Individual Mission for Each of Us

Rebbe Yitzchak of Radvil *zt'l* (Or Yitzchak) writes, "...the Torah tells us that the nation had flags to help each tribe recognize where their camp was located, just like an army that has flags so that everyone will find his camp. But it can't be that this is what the flags are about."

In this week's *parashah* the Torah elaborates on the flags of the Jewish nation. As it states (*Bamidbar* 2:2-10), *איש על דגלו... דגל מחנה, דגל מחנה ראובן* and so on. There are certainly great lessons and meanings associated with the flags; but what are they?

The Midrash (*Tanchuma* 14) states, "Hashem came to Har Sinai with 22,000 *malachim* who were divided by their groups and by their flags. When the Jewish nation saw them they said, 'If only we could have flags like them... If only Hashem showed His love to us [by giving us flags].' ... It states (*Tehillim* 20), *נרננה*, 'We will rejoice with Your salvations; with Hashem's name we will raise our banner. May Hashem grant you all your requests.' Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'ימלא ה' כל משאלותיך. You desired flags, I swear that I will fulfill your requests.' Hashem immediately demonstrated His love for Bnei Yisrael and He said to Moshe, 'Make flags for them because they are yearning for them... In the future, I will redeem them in the merit of the flags.'"

We wonder: Why do the *malachim* have flags? And why did the Yidden yearn for

flags? What special love was shown to them when Hashem gave them flags?

Tzaddikim explain that the flags remind us that everyone is different. In heaven, the *malachim* are divided into four primary groups, which are represented by four different flags. Each camp of *malachim* serves Hashem differently. Malach Michoel's camp serves Hashem with love, Malach Gavriel's camp serves Hashem with fear, and so on. The Jewish nation, too, was divided into four camps, and had four flags, which teaches us that each division serves Hashem differently.¹

The four categories of Klal Yisrael have sub-divisions and sub-sub-divisions, until it reaches the point where each *Yid* is his own division and he serves Hashem in his own unique, individual way. One shouldn't consider himself as an insignificant pawn in Hashem's army, because each *Yid* plays a primary role in Hashem's service and is given an important mission that only he can accomplish.

Rashi (1:1) writes, *מתוך חיבתן לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה*, "Because Hashem loves the Jewish nation, He counts them all the time. When they left Mitzrayim, Hashem counted them. After they fell by the *egel*, they were counted to know how many remained. The Mishkan was established on the first of Nisan, and on the first of Iyar Hashem counted them." Hashem counts every *Yid* because each *Yid* is important and is responsible for his individual mission.

1. The Shlah HaKadosh (*Bamidbar*) writes, "The Arizal used to say: just as there are four camps [of *malachim*] in heaven, similarly, there are four camps within Klal Yisrael, and they each have their own *minhagim*. They are: *איטליא, קטלוניא, אשכנז, ספרד*, Spanish, German, Catalanian, and Italian Jews, and each should remain by their flag and do their *minhag*."

The Shlah concludes, *אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים*, which means, all these communities have valid and true approaches of serving Hashem.

Overcoming Jealousy

People often say, "I wish I could be like that person... If I would be like him, I would serve Hashem so much better." But everyone must know that he is in the situation that is best for him. Each person is given his personal set of circumstances, personalities, challenges, talents, etc. that he needs in order to recognize Hashem and to sanctify His name in this world.

Shevet Levi is comprised of three families: Gershon, Kehos, and Merari, and each family was counted individually. The Midrash (*Naso* 6:10) states, "After Kehos was counted separately, and Gershon was counted separately...the Torah combines [the total sum] together (and tells us that there were 8580 Levi'im - see *Bamidbar* 4:46-49). This is so we shall know that Hashem loves them all the same."

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Igra d'Pirka* 96) explains, "Although Kehos's work was more exalted than Gershon's and Merari's (as Kehos carried the *aron*), and Gershon's service was more exalted than Merari's (because Gershon carried the drapes that covered , and surrounded the Mishkan), nevertheless, when Merari's family does the service that is incumbent on them, it is just as special to Hakadosh Baruch Hu as Kehos's family's service..." Therefore, there is no reason to be jealous of others. You have potential to do a service that is just as precious as everyone else's.

The Bnei Yissaschar concludes, "Don't be jealous of your fellow man, not even with regards to *avodas Hashem*. Be happy with the mission Hashem gave you... As we say, והאופנים וחיות הקודש מתנשאים לעומת השרפים. This implies that the *malachim* אופנים aren't jealous of the higher *malachim* הקודש, and the *malachim* חיות הקודש aren't jealous of the higher *malachim* שרפים. Rather, the אופנים and חיות הקודש are מתנשאים consider themselves elevated and important, לעומת שרפים, even when they measure themselves against the higher and more exalted *malachim* - the שרפים."

The Tiferes Shlomo *zt'l* explains, if your goal is to serve Hashem, you will be happy and satisfied with the role that Hashem gave you. If your goal is to acquire honor for yourself, you might not be willing to accept your portion.

For example, consider a person who works many hours a day to support his family, and he only has one free hour per day to learn Torah. He might think, "I anyway won't become great in Torah, so what's the purpose?"

However, if fulfilling Hashem's will is the focus of his thoughts, he tells himself, "This is what Hashem wants from me, and I will do the best I can." And when he does what is incumbent upon him, he is very precious to Hashem.

Use Your Talents for Hashem

Reb Meir Shapiro was asked to represent the Jewish community in the Polish parliament. Reb Meir Shapiro asked the Rebbe of Tchoortkov *zt'l* whether he should accept this position. This is what the Rebbe wrote to him:

"I received your letter and I will tell you my opinion, my counsel:

"A person can determine his life's assignment and the service that Hashem wants from him by paying attention to the talents with which Hashem endowed him. Hashem granted you a sharp mind, the acuity to delve into Torah and to draw out beautiful diamonds, and to teach students... You already have many special students. If you will accept this government position, it will detract from your *avodas hakodesh*. On the other hand, in this political role as a representative you will be able to do a lot of good for the Jewish community. Therefore, my advice to you is the following: Don't do any *hishtadlus* towards attaining this governmental position. And if the Agudah committee asks you to take on the position... accept it."

The Psikta writes the following:

כבוד את ה' מהונך ממה שחונך
 "Honor Hashem with what He granted you. If Hashem gave you a son, circumcise him. If He gave you a house, put on a mezuzah and erect a gate, *maakah*, on the roof. If He gave you a yard, build a sukkah there. If He gave you sheep, sanctify the first born and give the first shearing to the *kohen*. If he gave you an animal...observe the mitzvos of not plowing with an ox and donkey together and the laws of *kelayim*. If Hashem gave you gold and silver...give a tenth to *tzedakah*..."

And if Hashem gave you a talent, use it for Hashem's service. As the Midrash states, "If you have a beautiful voice, daven at the *amud*..." As it states (*Mishlei* 3:9), כבוד את ה' מהונך, "Honor Hashem with the talents He gave you."

The *Navi* (Malachim 1, ch.21) says that King Achav said to Navos the Yizraeli, "Give me your vineyard because it is near my home and I will make it into a vegetable garden. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard. And if you prefer money, I will pay you for the field."

Navos refused. He said, "Chalilah that I should give away my father's inheritance."

Achav was very upset. "He lay in bed, turned his face to the wall, and he didn't eat bread.

His wife, Izevel, told him, "Go eat bread and be happy. I will get you Navos's vineyard."

She wrote a letter to the judges that two witnesses should testify that Navos "blessed" (cursed) Hashem. The court complied, and Navos was killed by *skilah*, stoning.

Navos was killed in a corrupt, cruel, and illegal way, yet it is also certain that his death was destined from heaven. As we explained many times, even when a person harms you, it is also from heaven. Nothing happens without Hashem's word. Thus, it is

certain that Navos was destined to die. What did Navos do to deserve the death penalty?

Chazal explain that Navos had a beautiful voice. When he was עולה לרגל (to the Beis HaMikdash for the *yomim tovim*) everyone would gather to hear him sing. One yom tov, he decided that he won't go to Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdash. That time, he didn't use the special talents of singing that Hashem gave him, for Hashem's service. Therefore he was punished and killed.

As the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei*, התקל"ב) says:

"Reb Elazar Hakapar's nephew, Chiya, had a beautiful voice. Reb Elazar Hakapar would tell him, 'Chiya, honor Hashem with the talent Hashem gave you. Navos had a beautiful voice, and when he went to Yerushalayim for the *yomim tovim*, everyone would gather around to listen to him sing. One year, he didn't go to Yerushalayim, and dishonest people gave false testimony on him and he was killed. Why did this happen to him? It's because he didn't go to Yerushalayim to honor Hashem with the talent that Hashem granted him.'"

It states in the *Aseres HaDibros* (*Shemos* 20:6), לא תשא שם ה' אלקיך לשוא כי לא ינקה ה' את אשר ישא שמו לשוא, "Don't carry Hashem's name in vain, because Hashem will not forgive those who carry Hashem's name in vain." The *Netziv zt'l* explains that this *pasuk* is referring to the unique talent that Hashem grants everyone. Some sing well; some are good Torah teachers; some are talented story tellers; and so on. The talent is called שם ה', Hashem's name that is bestowed on the person. The Torah is saying that one mustn't carry this talent לשוא, for no purpose. כי לא ינקה ה' את אשר ישא שמו לשוא, because Hashem won't forgive him for doing so. If you were granted a talent, use it for Hashem's service.

Where your Heart Pulls You

There is another way to know what the mission is that Hashem wants you to accomplish; and that is by following your

heart. If your heart is pulling you to perform a certain type of good deed, this might be a sign that this is your life's calling. Hashem placed this desire into your heart because Hashem wants you to excel in this area.

Every person has his mitzvah that speaks to him. Some are enthralled with the merit of *kiruv rechokim*, some understand the importance of *bikur cholim*, some yearn to encourage others, and so on. These yearnings are often an indication of what Hashem wants from that individual.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 118:) writes, הִתִּי לִי דְקִיִּמַת גַּ' מְעוֹדַת שַׁבָּת, "I deserve reward because I fulfill the mitzvah of eating the three meals on Shabbos."

Reb Yehudah said, "I deserve reward because I daven with *kavanah*."

Rav Hunah (son of Rav Yehoshua) said, "I deserve reward because I never walk four *amos* without a head-covering."

Rav Sheshes said, "I deserve reward because I keep the mitzvah of tefillin." (He wouldn't walk four *amos* without tefillin - *Rashi*).

Reb Nachman said, "I deserve reward because I keep the mitzvah of tzitzis." (He wouldn't walk four *amos* without tzitzis - *Rashi*).

Rav asked Rav Yosef (son of Rabba), "What was your father most cautious with?"

"It was tzitzis. Once, he was climbing a ladder and a string of his tzitzis ripped off. He didn't come down until it was fixed."

Abaya said, "I deserve reward because whenever I see that a scholar completed a *masechta* I make a *yom tov* for the *chachamim*." (Abaya was the *rosh yeshiva* and he made a celebration for the students - *Rashi*).

Rava said, "I deserve reward because when a Torah scholar comes before me in a *din Torah*, I don't lie my head down until I find a merit for him."

The Netziv (*Haamek Davar* 15:39) explains that all these scholars were talking about the particular mitzvah in which they excelled.

The Netziv writes, "If someone will ask you: Which approach of Torah study should I follow, and which mitzvos should I focus on the most? Reply (*Koheles* 11:9), והֲלֹךְ בְּרוּךְ לִבְךָ, 'Follow your heart.' Wherever your heart pulls you is a sign that your mazal understands that this is a good way for your soul."

This rule also applies to approaches in Torah study. There are many approaches, and there are many focuses. The heart's pull to a certain section of Torah is a sign that Hashem wants him to excel in that realm.

Shevet Mussar (1:13) writes, "I am giving you something you should chase after; it is life for your soul and a necklace around your neck: Your primary study in Torah should always be in what your heart desires. If it is in Gemara, let it be Gemara. If it is in *drush*, let it be *drush*. Or whether it is the path of *remez* or *kabbalah*. As it states (*Tehillim* 1:2), כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' הִפְצִו. This hints that Torah study is dependent on הִפְצִו, what he wants to study. As the Arizal (*Shaar HaGilgulim* 3) teaches: "There are people who desire the path of *pshat* in Torah. Some want *drush*, or *remez*; there are those who want to study *gematriyos*; and there are those who want to study *kabbalah*. [These different desires] depend on the reason he came to the world this time as a *gilgul*. In his previous lives, he accomplished for his soul by learning the other parts of Torah. It isn't necessary to study all parts of Torah in every *gilgul*."

The Shevet Mussar concludes, "Don't pay attention to those who will be opposed to you when they see you desiring to study *pshat*, or *drash*, etc., and they will ask you, 'Why are you spending all your days immersed in this section of Torah? Why don't you study other sections? It is because you came to the world for the parts of Torah that you want to study.'"

You Will Get What's *Bashert* for You

The *gabbai* of Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorka *zt'l* was extremely poor, and he was wearing ripped shoes in the winter. With snow all

around, this was not a simple situation. The Rebbe spoke with *baalei tzedakah* and raised money, so that the *gabbai* could buy new shoes. The Rebbe placed the money in a drawer, in his room.

The poor *gabbai* found the bag of money and he couldn't overcome his *yetzer hara*. He took the money for himself.

The Rebbe of Vorke investigated as to how the money got lost, until he concluded that the *gabbai* took it. The Rebbe told him, "Fool! If you would have waited, you would have gotten the money in a permitted way." Because the money that is destined for you, will come to you. If you won't try to take it in forbidden ways, it will come to you in permitted ways.

This lesson is also taught by the Ben Ish Chai (*Nifla'im Maaseicha* 71). He tells a story of a yeshiva *bachur*, who would go to his yeshiva every night at around midnight. On his way to yeshiva he passed the house of a wealthy, young widow who lived there with her maid. One night, he saw that the door to their house was left open. He went inside with the intention of stealing some money for himself. At first, the young widow and her maid were sleeping. But when he broke open the safe, they woke up from the noise. Nevertheless, they pretended to be asleep because they were afraid that the thief might be armed.

In the last minute, *baruch Hashem*, the yeshiva *bachur* overcame his temptation and stopped himself in his tracks. He thought, "If the money is destined to come to me, it will come to me in permitted ways. If the money isn't destined for me, I will have to lose the money that I steal- perhaps even by becoming ill and having to pay medical bills... Why do I need this trouble?" With these thoughts in mind, he left the house without stealing anything.

In the meanwhile, the widow realized that it wasn't safe for her to live by herself. She went to the yeshiva and asked the *rosh yeshiva* to suggest a *bachur* who has a lot of *yiras Shamayim* and would be fitting for her to marry.

At that time, this *bachur* was learning with *hasmadah* in the beis medresh and the *rosh yeshiva* pointed him out to her. "He is a baal *yiras Shamayim*!" he told her.

They married, and as he predicted, the money that was destined for him came to him in a permitted way.

These ideas remind us of a story that happened with Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil² *zt'l* soon after his chasunah:

Rebbe Shlomke's father, Rebbe Mordechai of Zvhil *zt'l*, would give the young couple a coin, each day, so that they could buy their groceries and whatever else they needed.

One day, Rebbe Shlomke told his wife, "We believe that *parnassah* comes from Hashem and not from my father. Therefore, I decided that we shouldn't go to my parent's home to receive our daily allowance anymore. Let us trust in Hashem, and He will support us in other ways."

A week passed, and they didn't have money. Rebbe Shlomke said to his *rebbetzin*, "I think I made a mistake. Hashem chose to give us *parnassah* through my father, so who am I to say that I want Hashem to send me *parnassah* a different way?"

So, she went to her in-law's home. Her father-in-law said, "You weren't here for an entire week; take a whole ruble this time."

On the day that his wife received a ruble from her father-in-law, two businessmen came to Zvhil to speak to the Rebbe, Rebbe Mordechai of Zvhil. Afterwards, they went to Reb Shlomke's home, to wish him *mazal tov* on his recent marriage. While they were

2. Rebbe Shlomke's *yahrtzeit* is 26th of Iyar, on the *sefirah* יסוד שביסוד.

speaking to Reb Shlomke, one of the businessmen took out a ruble and played with it, tossing it from one hand to the other. Reb Shlomke understood that he was planning to give him the coin as a wedding gift.

The entire time that they were speaking, the businessman played with the coin, but when the conversation ended, the businessman put the coin back into his pocket and left the house. He forgot to give it to Reb Shlomke.

Just then, Reb Shlomke's *rebbetzin* returned and showed Reb Shlomke the ruble she received from his father. Reb Shlomke told her that Hashem just showed him that had they passed the test and held onto their *bitachon*, they would have received the ruble through other channels. But since they took a ruble from their father, they didn't receive it the other way.³

Because whatever is *bashert* for you will happen.

A storeowner once told Reb Shlomke of *Zv'hil zt'l* that he was worried, because someone opened up a store directly across the street from his store. Reb Shlomke listened to his concerns but didn't respond.

The man said, "I heard a story about a tzaddik who wanted to help a pauper. The tzaddik broke off a piece of wood from his table, put it into water, and it immediately grew fruit. This was an omen that the chassid would become wealthy. Perhaps the Rebbe can do that for me, too?"

Rebbe Shlomke replied, "There are things we must believe in and there are things we aren't obligated to believe. I am not obligated to believe that the story you just told me is

true. Perhaps it never happened. But we are obligated to believe that Hashem gives *parnassah* to everyone, and no one can take away the *parnassah* that is *bashert* for him. I see that you believe in matters that you don't have to believe in, while you don't believe in what you must believe in..."

The Gemara (*Yoma* 38:) says, אין אדם נוגע מן המוכן לחבירו אפילו כמלא נימא "One doesn't touch that which is destined for his fellow man, not even by a hairsbreadth." No one can take away the *parnassah* that is destined for you.

The Ben Ish Chai *zt'l* (*Ben Yohayada*) explains this Gemara with a story:

One summer a new vacationer came to spend a few days at a camping resort. He stuck a peg deep into the ground to set up his tent, and the peg hit something hard. He dug it up and found an old jug, filled with precious gems. Who knows how many years or centuries it lay there, hidden in the ground! Now all that wealth was his.

Every year, people pitched their tents around that spot—often they were just a few inches away from the jug – but they never found it, because it wasn't destined for them. The gems were destined for this specific person who found it.

The Ben Ish Chai writes, "This is what the Gemara means when it says, אין אדם נוגע מן המוכן לחבירו אפילו כמלא נימא, 'One doesn't touch that which is destined for his fellow man, not even by a hairsbreadth.' All those before him didn't *touch* the place where the jug was buried, since it was destined only for him."

Taking Pleasure in Wise Ways

The Ben Ish Chai writes "I am going to reveal something that most of the world

3. A father asked someone to tutor his son. The tutor agreed, but he wasn't certain that he should take money for it, since he already had sufficient *parnassah* in other ways. He asked Rebbe Shlomke for his opinion. The Rebbe replied that if he was offered money, this means Hashem was offering him the money. Why shouldn't he accept it? The Rebbe elaborated, "If Rebbe Ahron of Belz would give you an expensive coin as a *segulah* would you accept it? Of course, you would. Well, now Hashem is offering you money, why shouldn't you take it?"

suffers from, and I, the servant, am among them. It happens to Torah scholars as well as to businessmen."

He bases his lesson on the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 26) which teaches, *מחשבה מועלת*, "Thoughts ruin." Thinking about something causes it not to happen.⁴ The Ben Ish Chai tells a story, to explain why this is so.

There was once a Jewish merchant who would wake up early each morning and go to the Arab market to buy eggs and poultry, and then sell them at the Jewish market, for a small profit.

One day, he decided that it was time for him to change professions and earn more money. The work he was doing was too hard, and the profit was too little.

He went to the Arab market and bought around a thousand eggs, which he carried on his head. He also bought two bags filled with live chickens, which he cast over his shoulder. He thought to himself, "This time, I will not sell them in the Jewish market. I will bring all the eggs and live chickens to my home and place the chickens on the eggs to make them hatch. When they hatch, I will raise the chicks until they will lay eggs of their own... Within a few months I will have two-hundred-thousand chickens! I'll sell each chicken for a silver dinar, and I'll have 200,000 silver dinars. Then, I'll leave this business and I'll buy sheep, and ship the wool to London..."

He imagined himself becoming very wealthy. He thought, "The Jewish community will certainly appoint me *rosh hakahal* (community president). When the king comes to our city, I will be called on to greet the king."

He imagined how he would bow down before the king. He lowered his head. The

eggs crashed to the ground and the chickens fell into a pit and they all died. All his dreams ended right then and there.

This is because *מחשבה מועלת*, thoughts ruin. Plans cause things not to happen.

What is the explanation?

The Ben Ish Chai explains that this merchant was destined to attain the joy of wealth, and he received the joy of wealth *in his imagination*. Therefore, he lost the opportunity to attain the joy of actual wealth.

On Rosh Hashanah it is decided how much pleasure a person will have that year. If a person derives pleasure from thinking about wealth, he might lose out on actually attaining the wealth. *מחשבה מועלת*, his imagined joy might take the place of their true fulfillment.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 55) teaches, "When one has a good dream, his happiness, causes the dream not to materialize. When one has a bad dream, his anxiety, due to the dream, causes the dream not to happen." The Ben Ish Chai explains that the good dream foretold that success would come to him. But that goodness and joy was exchanged for the happiness he received from the dream, itself. The bad dream foretold bad tidings. His distress from the dream took its place, and now the bad dream doesn't have to happen.

Therefore, when one has a good dream, or when one has a good plan, be wise and don't dwell on the happiness that you are expecting. Rather, be happy when the dream, or your plan, actually transpire.

The Ben Ish Chai writes, "It needs to be clear to a person that these thoughts are the *yetzer hara*, causing him to lose out on all the goodness that could have been his..."

4. Rashi explains, "When one thinks, 'I will do such-and-such, and thereby I will earn such-and-such amount of money,' such thoughts cause that it will not occur. This is also true for Torah. For example, when one says that by this specific date, I will complete such-and-such amount of *masechtos* [this type of thinking causes that it will not happen]."

Therefore, one should be strong and push away those thoughts from his heart and mind."⁵

Spiritual Pleasures

There was once a prince who derived immense pleasure from riding his horse. The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said, "The mazal of this prince is to be the king over a large nation. But he is exchanging that pleasure for the enjoyment of riding his horse."

The Beis Avraham (*Miketz*) brings down this story to explain that a person is granted a limited amount of pleasures in this world. He decides which ones he wants to experience. Experiencing one pleasure prevents him from enjoying other pleasures. As it states (*Bereishis* 43:31), ויִתְאַפֵּק וַיֵּאמֶר שִׁמּוֹ לֶחֶם, when a person holds back from unnecessary pleasures this will grant him *parnassah*.

The greatest pleasures are spiritual pleasures. If one refrains from unnecessary materialistic pleasures, he can get appreciate, instead, the great pleasure of Torah and mitzvos.

One of the translations of קדושה (*Devarim* 23:18) is a person who designates himself to sin. קדושה also means holiness. Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* explains that this is to teach us that when one avoids קדושה, taking forbidden pleasures, he will merit immense pleasure from Torah and mitzvos, through matters of *kedushah*.

The Gemara (*Kesubos* 104.) discusses Rebbe's (Reb Yehudah HaNasi's) spectacular wealth and success and tells that at the time of his *petirah*

(demise), he raised his hands and said, "You know that I toiled before You with all my ten fingers in Torah and I didn't take pleasure from this world, not even with my small pinky." This seems like a contradiction. If he was wealthy, honored, successful, and so on, he must have enjoyed this world?

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil explained: Rebbe was destined to enjoy a certain amount of pleasure so Heaven gave him goodness, in order that he could derive pleasure from it. But Rebbe didn't want to take part in that enjoyment. Heaven then sent him more kindness and goodness. Perhaps now he will receive the pleasure that is destined for him to receive. But once again, Rebbe didn't want to take pleasure from it. He only wanted to find pleasure in Torah, *tefillah* and mitzvos. Heaven sent him more and more measures of kindness, but still, he refused to allow those materialistic pleasures to affect his life. This was the secret to Rebbe's immense wealth and success. Heaven had to continuously send him more and more goodness, so that he could receive his quota of pleasure, but Rebbe refused to take it for himself.

Exchanging Sorrow and Hardships for Easier Measures

Just as pleasures of this world take away from other opportunities of pleasure, similarly, distress and hardships in this world can save a person from worse kinds of hardships.

Once, Rebbe Shlomke's granddaughter (wife of Rebbe Mordechai of Zvhil) was wearing

5. Rebbe Shlomke once saw a person who was searching for honor in an exaggerated way. Rebbe Shlomke told him, "When a *neshamah* comes down to the world, it comes along with a quota of pleasure. These pleasures are divided among his needs: Some degree of pleasure goes towards *nachas* from children, *parnassah*, health, honor, and so on. But if you will take so much pleasure from honor, you are limiting yourself from attaining pleasure in the other areas."

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil would say in the name of the Magid of Mezritz *zy'a* that פרי"ם, פירות, fame, spells, פרי"ם, the fruits of the Satan. Rebbe Shlomke said, "I know that the *pirsum* I receive hurts me yet I accept it so I can impart *emunah* to Yidden."

ripped shoes. Rebbe Shlomke's *rebbetzin* showed this to her husband, expecting him to immediately give money towards buying new shoes. But Rebbe Shlomke said, "This distress will save you from the distress of childbirth."

This granddaughter was pregnant at the time. When she gave birth, she said that she never had such an easy childbirth.

Someone once came to Rebbe Shlomke, complaining to him that he just lost a lot of money. The Rebbe replied, "Instead of blessing you that you should find the money, I bless you that you should have a child." This man was childless for many years. In the merit of this blessing he bore a child.⁶

Rebbe Shlomke's granddaughter (wife of Reb Elazar Adlar *zt'l*) was diagnosed with the dreaded disease shortly after her wedding, and the doctors said that there was nothing they could do to save her. They told her that she has a few weeks to live.

She went to her grandfather, Rebbe Shlomke, who told her to take on three things, and in their merit, she will have a *refuah sheleimah*. (1) She shouldn't wear jewelry for two years. (2) She shouldn't ever kiss her children. (3) She shouldn't go to her children's *chasunos*. She accepted these challenges and was immediately cured. The logic behind this counsel is, as we explained, that by limiting one's pleasures in this world, he removes greater suffering.

Shame

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhill *zt'l* would often speak about how much one gains when he doesn't answer back when he is humiliated. He said that this saves a person from many

troubles and punishments and at times even from death. The distress and humiliation of the shame frees him from having to endure other kinds of pain.

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhill *zt'l* was once at the Kosel, and he was sitting among the paupers (as he would do at times). Someone came by and gave a small coin to everybody. This man didn't know Rebbe Shlomke, and he thought that he was a pauper like all the others, so he gave Rebbe Shlomke a small coin. When the man left, Rebbe Shlomke gave his coin to the man sitting next to him. "Why didn't you tell him that you aren't poor?" the man asked.

Rebbe Shlomke replied, "I didn't want to lose out on the opportunity to experience shame."

Once, Rebbe Shlomke's granddaughter told him how she and her family were suffering from immense poverty. They almost didn't have bread to eat. Rebbe Shlomke advised her to daven at the Kosel. In that era, the Kosel plaza was just a small area, and her shouts and loud prayers disturbed one of the women standing nearby. "*Sha! Sha!*" The lady kept shouting at her, but she didn't pay attention to her and she continued crying and praying.

When she left the Kosel, this lady asked her, "Do you think the entire Kosel is yours? Why can't you daven silently...?" And she disgraced her some more in this manner.

Rebbe Shlomke's granddaughter bore the shame in silence; she didn't answer back.

On the way home, she found a Napoleon coin, which could support her family for half a year.

6. Once Rebbe Shlomke's daughter-in-law (wife of Rebbe Gedalyah Moshe) told Rebbe Shlomke that she doesn't have enough money for Shabbos. The Rebbe replied, "What's wrong with bread and herring." In other words, she had enough money for that, and that is sufficient. She asked, "But for others, you give regular fish and foods for Shabbos."

The Rebbe replied, "What different does it make, what others have?"

She came to Rebbe Shlomke and said, "Baruch Hashem, Hashem heard my *tefillos* and sent me the money. But why did I have to undergo all that shame?"

Rebbe Shlomke explained, "The shame was the beginning of your salvation. Embarrassment removes all troubles and hardships. After you were shamed, you were able to find the money."

Guard Your Eyes

Many blessings come from guarding ones eyes.

The Rokeiach (*Hilchos Kedushah*) writes, "If you will guard your eyes you will merit being like Yosef who ruled over the land."

The Maalas HaMidos writes, "Whoever had an opportunity to do an *aveirah* and he refrains –because he loves Hashem, and not because he is afraid of people – he will merit to be raised to greatness. The proof is from Yosef who became the ruler because he passed the test with Photiphar's wife."

It is written (*Kohelos 7:10*), אל תאמר מה היה שהימים הראשונים היו טובים מאלה כי לא מחכמה שאלת על זה, "Don't say 'The past days were better than the present because that isn't a wise statement.'"

The Beis Avraham of Slonim *zy'a* repeated this *passuk* at his *tisch* one Friday night in Teveria, and he explained (with immense *hislahavus*), "It's wrong to say that there used to be *tzaddikim* and today there are no more *tzaddikim*. Because when a Yid walks on the street, and he guards his eyes he is *almost* like the *tzaddikim* of the past."

A few minutes later, the Rebbe repeated this same explanation again, only this time

he added that those who guard their eyes are *just like* the *tzaddikim* of the past.

A few minutes later, the Rebbe repeated this idea a third time, and this time he shouted, "When one walks in the street and guards his eyes, he is *greater* than the *tzaddikim* of the past."

Reb Avraham Estralenski *zt'l* (a Polish Yid who lived in Eretz Yisrael) said to the Beis Yisrael of Gur, *zt'l*, "Things are different here, than what I remember from Poland. I remember the *batei midrashim* being open day and night, with scholars studying there all hours of the day..." He was saying that he doesn't find this in Eretz Yisrael.

(In addition to the annihilation of millions of our people, the Holocaust also destroyed an atmosphere of Torah and holiness that's hard to replicate.)

The Beis Yisrael replied, "I say that when a Yid walks down Rechov Yaffo and he guards his eyes, he's greater than those *tzaddikim* who were up all night long studying Torah." ⁷

Don't Harm Others

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil would say: "In heaven, you will only be asked two questions: (1) Did you guard your eyes? (2) Did you guard your mouth from causing harm to another Yid?"

Reb Avraham Fisher *Shlita* told me that when he was a child, he was once playing with the cats outside Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil's *zt'l* home. The Rebbe came out of his house and warned him to be cautious not to hurt the cats.

7. Guarding one's eyes also means not looking at people in a negative way.

Many people came to visit Reb Isser Zalman Melzer *zt'l* on Chol Hamoed. Reb Isser Zalman had a small piece of paper with him that said, עיניך לנבחה יביטו ועפעפך יישירו, "Your eyes should see straight; and your pupils should look at the truth..." (*Mishlei 4:25*). This *pasuk* was his reminder to judge the people who came to him favorably. He explained, "Hundreds of people come to visit me on Chol Hamoed. Some come from long distances. It isn't fair if I look at them negatively and think about their faults. These words remind me to judge people favorably..."

If we must be cautious not to harm cats, how much more cautious do we have to be not to harm our fellow man with our words.

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* had an open-door policy; everyone was welcome in his home. One of his steady guests was Reb Yaakov: a tall, very overweight, unlearned Yid, who also had a terrible odor. He wasn't permitted to use the local *mikvehs* because of the way he smelled, but he was welcome at Rebbe Shlomke's home.

Once, while World War II was raging, Rebbe Shlomke said, "If the people of Yerushalayim would have permitted Reb Yaakov to use the *mikvah*, the Yidden in Europe wouldn't suffer so much."⁸

There was a *bachur* from Chevron who slept in Rebbe Shlomke's home. He asked the Rebbe to wake him up at six in the morning.

"I can't do that," the Rebbe said.

The *bachur* woke up at six o'clock the next morning and saw that the Rebbe was already sitting at his table, learning Torah.

The following night, the *bachur* asked Rebbe Shlomke to awaken him at six in the morning.

"I can't do that," Rebbe Shlomke replied.

The *bachur* awoke at six and saw that Rebbe Shlomke was already awake.

Later, that night, the *bachur* asked Rebbe Shlomke why he can't awaken him, since he sees that the Rebbe is awake anyway at that

time. Reb Shlomke handed him some money and said, "If you want, buy yourself an alarm clock, but I can't wake you up. Upon awakening in the morning, people feel uncomfortable. I don't want to cause another Yid distress, even for a short moment."

Reb Pinchas Koritzer's friend once fell ill, and when Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer visited him, the rebbe had him promise that he would return to this world, after his demise, to report what happened to him in heaven.

After his friend passed away, he appeared to Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer and said, "I never caused pain to my fellow man, and as a reward, it was decreed that I would die without pain. I heard a doctor tell me that to recover from my illness, I must sleep deeply for a very long time. I didn't realize that this sleep was my death. Then I heard the doctor say, 'Place him on the floor; he needs to warm up.' I was placed on the floor, as is done to the dead, but I still thought I was alive. The doctor told people to take me outdoors to get some air. This was actually the funeral. Until I was buried, I didn't know that I had died. It was a perfectly painless death. After I was buried in the ground, the angels came. They wanted to punish me because 'there is no tzaddik in the world, who...never sinned.' However, since I never hurt another Yid, angels of mercy arrived and brought me straight to Gan Eden."

Reb Yaakov Yitzchak Weiss *zt'l* (the Rav of Yerushalayim, author of *Minchas Yitzchak*) was married three times. This is his inspirational story, which he himself related:

8. Rebbe Shlomke's home was open to all. People said that the only way it was obvious that he was the *baal habayis* was that when someone would come in, he would ask him, "Do you want bread and jam?"

Once, an unstable person came to Rebbe Shlomke's place, and Rebbe Shlomke, as usual, offered him bread and jam. The deranged man retorted, "You can eat bread and jam! I want pita with eggs."

Rebbe Shlomke went to the grocery (perhaps this was the only time he went to the store himself), bought pita and eggs and fried them for his guest. After the man finished his meal, he asked, "And what about the jam?"

Rebbe Shlomke brought out the jam, and asked him how much he wanted.

"The entire jar," the man replied, and Rebbe Shlomke gave it to him.

A *shidduch* was suggested for him. The girl lived far away, and it was hard for his parents to travel there, so they sent a *shaliach* to check out the girl and her family, to determine whether the girl was a fitting match for their son. The *shaliach* returned and said that it was a fine match and Reb Yaakov Yitzchak was engaged.

The Weiss's traveled to the *kallah's* hometown for the *chasunah*. That was the first time Reb Yaakov Yitzchak's mother saw the *kallah*, and she was very disappointed. It wasn't a proper match for her son at all. She wanted to terminate the *shidduch*. According to halachah it was permissible to do so (because the *shaliach* was sent to make an appropriate *shidduch*, which this wasn't) but Reb Yaakov Yitzchak said, "Perhaps with time I will divorce her. But right now, I don't want to embarrass her."

They were married and had one son, Reb Berish. His wife was killed during war. At his second marriage, Reb Yaakov Yitzchak remarried to the daughter of the Rav of Vasloy *zy'a*. Later, he married the daughter of the Imrei Chaim of Viznitz *zy'a*, but he didn't have children from either of them. His only child is Reb Berish, born to the woman he didn't want to shame.

Reb Yaakov Yitzchak testified, "Doctors told me that it was impossible for me to bear children. Berish was a miracle. I am certain that I merited this child as a reward for not embarrassing a Jewish girl."

The Tests of This World

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvil *zt'l* told the following:

When a father travels overseas, he looks out for things that he can bring home for his children. He looks for something new, something that the family can't buy at home. An item that can be gotten in a local store, near their home, won't be special for his children.

Similarly, when a person is *niftar*, the *malachim* are waiting to greet him and hope that he arrives with something that they don't have in heaven. The *malachim* never experienced the struggles of the *yetzer hara*. They never experienced failure, time and again, and the hardship of moving forward despite the obstacles one is facing. These are the types of deeds the *malachim* are looking forward to seeing. These are the actions that are so precious in Heaven.

A student of the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* had a custom not to sleep alone in the *succah*. Once, he was looking for someone to sleep with him in his *succah*. One person said, "I'll sleep in your *succah* if you promise me that I will be with you in Gan Eden."

This wasn't a simple request, but the *tzaddik* needed him, so he agreed to those terms.

Shortly afterwards, that man fell ill. The *tzaddik* visited him and said, "If you will absolve me from my promise, and if you will not obligate me to bring you to my place in Gan Eden, you will recover from this illness. Additionally, if you absolve me from this obligation, you can ask for either longevity, wealth, or good children, and I will grant it to you. But if you don't relieve me from my promise, you will die..."

The man replied, "If you give me all three - longevity, wealth, and good children - I will absolve you from your promise."

The *tzaddik* agreed.

Rebbe Chunah of Kalishitz *zt'l* told this story at his *tisch* and he asked one of his outstanding *chassidim*, "What's your opinion? Did he choose wisely?"

The *chassid* replied, "In my opinion, he chose foolishly. He had the opportunity to be with this *tzaddik* in Gan Eden, and he gave it away."

Rebbe Chunah disagreed. "I think he acted wisely. Because as long as a person is alive, he can do *mitzvos* and he can reach

the heights of the holy *avos*. But after one's passing the opportunity is lost."

Serving Hashem means to live in a world where there are struggles and challenges and despite them all, to serve Hashem. After one's demise, the struggles and hardships don't exist. Therefore to live is always the preferable option, because it is in this world that *avodas Hashem* actually takes place.

The Divrei Chaim, the Sanzer Rav *zt'l*, asked a *grammer* (someone who says jokes and rhymes at weddings) to get up on a table and say *grammen*. The *grammer* wanted to say the following renowned rhyme: דער חתן הייסט ניסן און ד'הויזען זענען געריסען איהם געריסען "The *chassan's* name is Nisan, and his pants are ripped..." But he got stage fright in front of the Rebbe and chassidim, and he said, ניסן איז דער נאמען פון דעם, חתן און ס'איז איהם צוריסען ד'הויזען. The translation is the same, but chanted in this order, it sounded odd, and everyone laughed. They weren't laughing because of the funny line; they were laughing at his error.

Tzaddikim say that this is what happens when we serve Hashem. Because of the enticements of this world and of the *yetzer hara*, we don't get matters exactly right. We try our best, but because we are humans with limitations, we get things slightly wrong. These moments bring joy and laughter in heaven.

Kedushah

One of Reb Shlomke's outstanding traits was his caution regarding *kedushah*. (Tzaddikim said that the day of his demise, שביסוד יסוד, in *sefiras ha'omer* alludes to his perfection in יסוד, *kedushah*.)

Towards the end of his life he had an excess amount of fluids in his body which caused him immense pain. He would lie in bed, holding on to the bedposts, his face all red, and in excruciating pain. Dr. Kook (who treated many *gedolei Yisrael* in that era) told Rebbe Shlomke that he can ease the pain and remove the liquids from his body with an easy procedure.

When Rebbe Shlomke heard what the doctor planned to do, he shouted, "Not on this holy body!" The doctor told him that he would use gloves, but the Rebbe didn't want to hear of it. He suffered immense pain until he was *niftar*.

The Beis Yisrael of Gur *zy'a* heard about this and said, "According to halachah, the procedure was certainly permitted. But Rebbe Shlomke chose to follow the Gemara that says (Nida 13) "מושב תבקע כריסו ואל ירד לבאר שחת" The Beis Yisrael said that since Rebbe Shlomke was *niftar* because of his *yiras shamayim*, it's a *segulah* for *yiras shamayim* to speak about his ways and to visit his *kever*. (For the first few *yahrzeits*, the Beis Yisrael would go to Rebbe Shlomke's *kever*.)

The Rav of Yerushalayim, Reb Yosef Tzvi Dushinsky *zy'a*, said that the *kedushah* of Rebbe Shlomke was comparable to the *kedushah* of the *tana'im* and *amora'im*.

Every year, at the *yahrtzeit seudah* for Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a* would relate that he was present at Rebbe Shlomke's *teharah* (the cleansing before the burial). "Generally, there's a bad odor in the room, but this time we smelled *besamim*." Rebbe Moshe Mordechai asked Rebbe Shlomke's son, Rebbe Gedalya Moshe, (who was also present at the *teharah*) whether Zvhiller chassidim have the custom to bring *besamim* to the *taharah* room. He replied that there was no such *minhag* and that there were no *besamim* in the room. Yet, everyone smelled the *besamim* – a sign that hints to the holiness of this great tzaddik.

When the Nazis were planning on coming to Eretz Yisrael, Rebbe Shlomke and other tzaddikim went to the *kever* of the Or HaChayim HaKadosh on Har HaZeisim and they davened for *klal Yisrael*. Their *tefillos* were answered, and the Nazis were defeated in Egypt. This was the first time, since the war began, that the Nazis were defeated.

Rebbe Shlomke was *niftar* on the 26th of Iyar (יסוד שביסוד) the day World War II ended. Tzaddikim said that his *petirah* on the day

the war ended demonstrates that he was a warrior against the Germans. (Throughout the war years, Rebbe Shlomke was active in saving the Yidden in Europe.) So therefore, when the war was over, he was also able to leave the world.

Stories of Tzaddikim

Tzaddikim foresaw that in the generation before Moshiach comes, it will be very difficult to have *emunah*. They said that the solution is to tell stories of tzaddikim.

Stories of tzaddikim also serve as a guide, because we can learn from their ways.

Another benefit in telling stories of tzaddikim is hinted to in the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 60:6), *נתת ליראיך גם להתנוסס*, which can be translated, "You gave miracles for those who fear You

so more miracles can sprout from it." By speaking about the wonders and miracles that happened in the past we draw the miracles down so they will happen again for us.

The Rebbe of Ruzhin *zt'l* said that this is alluded to in the *pasuk*, *מגדיל ישועות מלכו ועושה חסד למשיחו* (*Tehillim* 18:51), which can be translated, *מגדיל ישועות Hashem performs great salvations, מלך through the tzaddikim (who are called מלך, kings). ועושה חסד Hashem does kindness, again, למשיחו, for those who speak about those miracles. (למשיחו spelled with the letter sin means to speak).*

For these reasons, we tell stories of tzaddikim, and this week, in honor of the *yahrtzeit*, we elaborated on the wondrous ways of Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiller. May his merit protect us, ⁹ *זכותו יגן עלינו אמן.*

9. When people would come to Rebbe Shlomke with their troubles and worries, he would often go to the *mikvah*. If it was about an ill person, it was there, in the *mikvah*, that he perceived whether the person would survive or not. By the way he responded after immersing in the *mikvah*, one could discern what the outcome would be. Each time, Rebbe Shlomke predicted correctly.

Reb Elyah Roth *zt'l* (the *gabbai*) asked him, "How do you know what the future will be, and who will get well and who won't? Are you the *urim vetumim*?"

Rebbe Shlomke replied, "We are living in a generation of *hester panim*, when Hashem's *hashgachah pratis* is concealed. This leads people to have questions in *emunah*. Therefore, in every generation, Hashem chooses a tzaddik that for him the concept of *hester panim* doesn't apply. Through him, awareness of Hashem is revealed to the world."