

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Beha'aloscha



©

copyright 2020

For subscription & comments
Email: **Mail@torahwellsprings.com**
TEL: **718-484-8136**

Table of Contents

Torah Wellsprings - Beha'aloscha

Hashem Hears Us.....	4
Don't Complain.....	4
In Hashem's Embrace.....	5
Speech.....	6
The Power of Desire.....	7
Toil in <i>Avodas Hashem</i>	8
The Toil Makes our <i>Avodas Hashem</i> Special.....	10
Learning Torah is the Greatest Mitzvah.....	11
Torah Study.....	13
Material Gains.....	13

Torah Wellsprings - Beha'aloscha

Hashem Hears Us

It states (11:1), 'ויהי העם כמתאוננים רע באוני ה', "And the nation complained in Hashem's ears. וישמע ה' ויחר אפו ותבער בם אש ה' ותאכל בקצה המחנה, Hashem heard and became angry. A fire burned them and consumed the [people at the] parameters of the camp..." The *rishonim* give various explanations to explain exactly which sin was committed here.

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* says their sin was *באוני ה'*, that the nation didn't believe that Hashem hears them, and that He listens to their prayers.

People believe that Hashem sees everything, knows everything, and runs the world with *hashgachah pratis*. But it is hard for them to believe that Hashem turns His ears to listen to us when we speak to Him. The nation, at this time, was lacking *emunah* in this area.

The Chasam Sofer writes, "There is an attribute of *עניי ה'*, which is Hashem's surveillance over all His creations... However, regarding the concept of *אוני ה'*, that Hashem listens to our prayers, and [that our *tefillos* can] change Hashem's decrees... of this they were doubtful. They said, 'Although Hashem's eyes are upon us to bestow goodness, nevertheless, He doesn't hear our *tefillos*, to change His decree and to grant us our desires.' This is the definition of *ויהי העם כמתאוננים רע באוני ה'*. The words *אוני ה'* means that they didn't believe that Hashem hears them.

וישמע ה', And Hashem showed them that He listens. He listens and hears their complaints, and He certainly hears and accepts our prayers, and He will fulfill all of our desires."

Towards the end of the *parashah* it states, וינעק משה אל ה' לאמר אל-ל נא רפא נא לה, "And Moshe shouted to Hashem saying, 'Please G-d, heal her now.'" The Chida writes that when Moshe

was in heaven, he was told that when one says *נא* twice in his prayers his *tefillah* will be answered. Therefore, Moshe said twice *נא* when he prayed for Miriam's recovery from *tzaraas*.

נא means please. Saying it twice indicates that one should plead, again and again, and his *tefillos* will be answered.

Don't Complain

The Ramban has another approach to explain the sin of the *מתאוננים*. He says their sin was that they complained.

The Ramban writes, "Har Sinai was located near cities that had human settlements. [This comforted them, because they knew that if they needed something, civilization was nearby.] But now they left Har Sinai and for the first time they traveled into the great, awesome, deserted desert. Anxiously they cried, 'How can we possibly survive in this desert? What will we eat? What will we drink? ... When will we leave this desert?' The translation of *מתאוננים* is complainers (see *Eichah* 3:39, and *Bereishis* 35:18)... The nation spoke bitterly, like hurt, downtrodden people. This was bad in Hashem's eyes. They should have followed Hashem joyfully after all the kindness that Hashem showed them. Instead, they traveled as though they were being forced to go, complaining as they went."

This is a very important lesson, which we should always remember: It is wrong to complain! Complaining is considered *רע בעיני ה'*, bad in Hashem's eyes. Hashem's praise must always be on our lips.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* adds that complaining will lead us to many other sins. We see that immediately after the story of the *מתאוננים* (the sin of complaining) the Torah states, התאוה תאוה... "The nation had a temptation... and they said, 'Who will give us meat.'" This is the way things transpire: First one is

unsatisfied and complains, and then he eventually falls into bad temptations.

A generous man found a young child crying at the bus station.

"Why are you crying?"

"I don't have money to buy a bus ticket."

"Here's some money. Go buy yourself a ticket."

The child went to the clerk, paid the money, returned with the bus ticket, but was still crying.

"Why are you crying now?" the man asked.

"When other people come to the clerk, he gives them a ticket and he gives them change as well. But he only gave me a ticket" (because he paid the exact rate).

From this story we learn that when people cry and complain they lose sight of all the good that they do have. Focus on all the good that Hashem gives you, be happy with your portion, and steer away from complaining.

In Hashem's Embrace

The Be'er Maim Chaim explains the *pasuk* (10:32) *as* -The ultimate good is that Hashem is with us.

One Friday, on *erev Shabbos Bahaloscha*, Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz *zy'a* said, "We should really be dancing with music today, because in this week's *parashah* it says (10:29) *כי ד' דיבר טוב על ישראל* "Hashem promised that He will do good for the Jewish people."

About Moshe Rabbeinu it states, *תמונת ה'* (יב"ט 12:8). The Beis Yisrael *zt'l* explains, *יב"ט* -wherever Moshe looked, *ה'* -he saw Hashem. He understood that everything is Hashem's *hashgachah*.

The Shlah Hakadosh (*Behaloscha, mussar* 12) writes, *אם ירצה* "With everything you do, say *אם ירצה* or *בעזרת ה'* or *ה'* *be'ezras Hashem*, and I will arrive at such-and-such place *im yirtzeh Hashem...*" ... If you will do so, Hashem's name will always be

on your lips, whether you are planning or doing. This is how you should do all your deeds."

This is hinted to in *pesukim* (9:18-20), *על פי ה'*, "By Hashem's word they traveled and by Hashem's word they camped..." We can't do anything without Hashem's aid; therefore, Hashem's name should always be on our lips.

One of the *melachos* of Shabbos is *סותר* (which is the opposite of *בונה*). *בונה* is to build, *סותר* is to dismantle, to demolish.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 31:) says, (according to one opinion) that the prohibition of *סותר* is *סותר* -when one's plan is to dismantle and then to rebuild it *on the very same place*. If one demolishes a structure with the intention to rebuild it elsewhere, he hasn't transgressed the (Shabbos) prohibition of *סותר*.

We know that the 39 *malachos* of Shabbos are derived from the 39 tasks that were performed when constructing the Mishkan.

The Gemara asks a question. In the desert they dismantled the Mishkan with the intention to rebuild it only at their next camping location. Why doesn't the prohibition of *סותר* include dismantling with the intention to rebuild elsewhere, as was done with the Mishkan? Why does the Gemara say one must intend to rebuild it in the very same spot?

The Gemara replies that it states (in this week's *parashah* 9:20), *על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו*, "By Hashem's decree they camped and by Hashem's decree they traveled." Consequently, it is as though they dismantled the Mishkan with the intention of rebuilding it in the very same place.

What is the Gemara answering?

(Rabbeinu Chananel explains that if Hashem would tell them to rebuild the Mishkan in the exact place that they took it down, they would do so. Therefore, it is as though they dismantled the Mishkan with the intention of putting it up again in the same location.)

Reb Chaim Shmulevitz *zt'l* (*Sichos Mussar* 5733, 22) further explains the Gemara's answer as follows:

We can compare it to a mother who carries her child when she travels. From the mother's perspective, she is traveling from one place to another. But from the child's perspective, he hasn't gone anywhere. He began his journey in his mother's embrace and he arrives at his destination still enveloped in his mother's embrace.

This is how the Yidden felt as they traveled through the desert. Even if they took down the Mishkan in order to rebuild it elsewhere, they felt they were rebuilding it in the same place – under Hashem's protection and guidance. From their perspective, they didn't go anywhere.

If we remember that we are always in Hashem's hands, led by His compassion, we will never complain about our fate.

Speech

In addition to guarding one's mouth from complaining, one must guard his mouth from forbidden speech.

It states (9:20), על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו. This can be translated, על פי, if a person is cautious with his words, ה' יחנו, Hashem will dwell with him. ועל פי, but if one isn't cautious with his speech, ה' יסעו, this causes Hashem to depart from him, *chas veshalom*.

The Trisker Magid *zt'l* (*Magen Avraham*, beginning of *Lech Lecha*) writes, "Diseases come to the world because of bad speech. Forbidden speech pollutes the air and ruins the nature of the world [which results in diseases]. Therefore, be cautious and don't speak forbidden words. Sanctify your mouth with Torah and *tefillah* from the depths of your heart..."

As it is known, creation is comprised of four categories: דומם צומח חי מדבר, inanimate matter, plant-life, animal-life, and human beings. When these are dead, the word נבל is added. For example, a dead animal is called

נבילה, a dead plant is called עציץ נבל, a broken inanimate object is called נבלי הרם.

And then there is נביל פה, profane speech. When one speaks in that way, the speaker receives the title נבל, which means a carcass.

Forbidden speech also de-values our Torah and *tefillah*. Imagine you are bringing a beautiful cake to a king in honor of the king's birthday. You didn't find a dish to put the cake on, but you had a pot, which you realized would fit the cake perfectly. The pot was still dirty from last night's supper, but you figure that a little bit of grease and oil won't ruin the cake.

You carry the pot to the king, and you sing, "Happy Birthday!"

The holy *sefarim* say that this is what happens when one talks forbidden speech and then he speaks Torah and *tefillah* with that same mouth. He is using a sullied vessel to bring gifts to Hashem.

As the *Kitzur Shlah* writes, "If you want your *tefillos* to be accepted by Hakadosh Baruch Hu be cautious with your mouth, because that is your utensil for prayer. Be cautious and don't speak profanely, curses, swears, *lashon hara*, and the like, because prayer is a gift to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the mouth is the vessel that holds your gift. The vessel can't be dirty... If it is, it is a disgrace for the King, and it is a disgrace for the gift... You should speak Torah, *tefillah*, permitted speech, and nothing else."

The Ben Ish Chai (*Niflaim Maaseicha* 124) told the following story:

Tuvyah the Judge was revered and honored by most of the populace. All judicial matters were settled according to his judgment. But he also had his share of enemies, and they always tried to harm him.

Eventually they succeeded. The king believed their slander and decided to fire Tuvyah and to punish him for his alleged crimes.

Tuvyah caught on to what was about to happen, so he put on civilian clothing and escaped. People saw Tuvyah passing through

the dark streets that night, but didn't realize that he was the celebrated Tuvyah, who just a few hours ago was the second most powerful person in the country.

Tuvyah exited the city, traversed a desert, and reached a river. The other side of the river meant freedom for Tuvya. But how can he cross the river without a boat or raft? He didn't know how to swim.

Soon the king will discover that Tuvyah escaped, and will pursue him. Tuvyah stood on the riverside, perplexed and worried.

A peasant recognized Tuvyah the Judge. Tuvyah told him that he needs to cross the river. The villager was short and scrawny, and under normal circumstances wouldn't consider swimming across the river while carrying a tall, heavy man like Tuvyah. But the villager realized that this was his opportunity to find favor with this great judge. He said, "Honored judge, hang on to my back. I will deliver you across the river."

Thinking about the reward and wealth he will get for doing this, he almost didn't feel Tuvyah's weight.

When they were three quarters across the river, Tuvyah said, "If Hashem will be kind to me, and I become a judge again, I will reward you immensely..."

"You mean you're not the grand judge anymore?"

"That's right" Tuvyah replied. "Corrupt people slandered me to the king.

I'm escaping judgment..."

The peasant dropped Tuvyah in the water and said, "When you become judge again, I will pick you up and take you out of the water," and the peasant swam back to shore, alone.

People rebuked the peasant. "If you were able to bring Tuvyah three quarters across

the river, you should have brought him all the way."

The peasant replied, "I'm weak and feeble. I can't carry a heavy person like Tuvyah. As long as I was imagining the great honor and wealth I would earn for helping Tuvyah, I had strength. I almost didn't feel his weight. But when Tuvyah told me that he was escaping and couldn't award me, I suddenly felt his full weight and didn't have strength to bring him to shore..."

The Ben Ish Chai told this story to teach that we must be cautious with our speech, because so many troubles come from unwarranted speech. If only Tuvyah had remained silent, his life would be saved. Similarly, all forbidden speech, and even unnecessary talk, result in heartache – to oneself and to others.¹

The Power of Desire

There's another lesson that we can take from the Ben Ish Chai's story: When one wills something very much, he finds within himself the energy to acquire it. The peasant was weak, he couldn't swim across the river while carrying the big, heavy, Tuvyah. But when he wanted to very much – because he was imagining the reward he would receive from it – he had strength to carry Tuvyah across the river.

The lesson is: If you will desire Torah and mitzvos with all your heart, you will have strength and you will succeed to acquire them.

The Chofetz Chaim tells the following *mashal*:

A simple, poor person hoped his daughter will get married to the rav's son. The rav's son was very learned and had all the qualities he was looking for. Furthermore, it would be a great honor for this pauper to become a *mechutan* with the rav. So, he sent several

1. A wise person said, "Before I speak, I rule over my words. After I speak, my words rule over me."

shadchanim to speak with the rav, to suggest his daughter as a *shidduch* for his son.

The rav didn't take these offers seriously. He wanted his son to either marry the daughter of a *talmid chacham*, or the daughter of a wealthy person. This pauper was lacking in both.

The simple pauper didn't give up. He kept on trying, and he sent more *shadchanim* to speak with the rav. Eventually, the matter was settled when the rav's son became engaged to someone else.

At the *chasunah*, the simple pauper sat himself down at the head table. When people came by to give *mazal tov* to the rav and to the *mechutanim*, this pauper put out his hand, to make sure everyone says *mazal tov* to him too.

His friends asked him why he was sitting at the head table, accepting *mazal tov*-wishes from all the guests. He was acting as though it was his *chasunah*.

The pauper replied, "I tried to be the *mechutan* at this wedding. So, I'm sitting here. I am almost a *mechutan* here." His friends laughed saying that when it comes to most matters of this world, trying doesn't carry any significance, only results do.

If you hire someone to do some work for you, and he tried but failed, will you pay him? Probably not, because trying doesn't deserve payment.

However, *avodas Hashem* is an exception. In *avodas Hashem*, the primary and most important part is the trying. For the trying itself one will earn immense reward. As it states (*Tehillim* 105:3), 'ישמח לב מבקשי ה', "May the

hearts of those who seek Hashem rejoice." The goal is to be a מבקשי ה', to seek Hashem, to strive to do His service.²

But there's a condition. The condition is that he must translate his desire into action. He must do what he can. It isn't enough to just say "I want" and not act upon it. This would connote that there was no real desire.

A soldier, wounded in battle, will be aided and supported by the country he fought for. They will pay his medical bills and send him a pension until he is well. But that is solely if he was wounded while fighting for his country. If he wasn't doing anything at all, he doesn't deserve compensation.

The same is applicable for one who fails in *avodas Hashem*. He will be immensely rewarded for fighting the *yetzer hara* and for trying to achieve his goal. But if he doesn't even try, he doesn't deserve reward.

And, if one desires enough, he will generally find a way. As was apparent in the story that the Ben Ish Chai told. When the peasant imagined the great rewards he would receive for saving Tuvyah, he mustered the strength to do what he otherwise wouldn't be able to.

Toil in Avodas Hashem

Based on our discussion, if a person truly desires to learn Torah and to become a *talmid chacham*, he will succeed. If he translates his desire into deeds, and if he continues to want enough, he will attain very high levels.

It won't be easy. The path of growth has many ups and downs – and the greater the

2. Rashi at the beginning of the *parashah* writes, "Why does the menorah follow the [sacrifices of] the *nesi'im*? Aharon saw the *chanukas hanesi'im* (that the *nesi'im* donated *korbanos* to dedicate the Mishkan) and he was disappointed that he and his *shevet* didn't participate in this inauguration. Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him, חייך שלך גדולה משלהם שאתה מרליק ומיטיב את הנרות, "I swear, your portion is greater than theirs, because you light and you prepare the lamps [of the menorah]."

Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorke *zt'l* explains that HaKadosh Baruch Hu was saying, חייך, the fact that מיניין דיר אין לעבן, that it means so much to you, as if your life is dependent on it, that you should have a share in the inauguration of the *mizbeiach*, שלך גדולה משלהם, that desire is even greater than their sacrifices."

goal, the harder it will be – but if he perseveres, he will succeed.

There was a lively child who didn't have patience to study Torah. The *melamed* brought the child to the rav of the city. Perhaps the rav could influence the boy to study Torah.

The rav told the child, "I had an interesting *din Torah* and I want to hear your opinion. The *din Torah* was between a *sefer Torah* and a pair of shoes. The shoes said, 'We both were once cowhide. We grew up in the same barn, ate the same fodder, and drank water from the same trough. But a *sofer* bought you, turned your skins into parchment and made you into a *sefer Torah*. Whereas a shoemaker bought me and turned me into a pair of shoes. Why do we have such different fates, we used to be so similar? When the *sofer* finished writing you, they placed a silver crown on your head and carried you to a beis medresh dancing with joy. When you are taken out of the *aron kodesh* people stand up for you and they hug and kiss you. When you will get worn out, you will have a *levayah* and you will be buried with honor. But I'm just a pair of shoes. People don't respect me. They wear me in muddy areas. When I'll get worn out, I will be unceremoniously tossed into the trash. Is it fair that we should have such opposite fates?'"

The rav asked the boy for his opinion. The boy sided with the shoes. It didn't seem fair.

Then the rav explained that creating a *sefer Torah* requires many hours of hard labor. The *sofer* has to write letter after letter until the entire *sefer Torah* is finished. Making shoes, *lehavdil*, doesn't take long and no great toil is involved.

Upon hearing that side of the story, the boy agreed that the *sefer Torah* deserves more respect, because so much toil was put into making it.

The rav concluded, "My son, if you desire to attain the crown of Torah, and if you want people to honor you and admire your Torah

knowledge, then you must toil diligently. You must put in a lot of effort. Otherwise, you will be like a pair of shoes that has minimal value."

One of the *gedolim* of today told this story at a family *simchah* and said that he was that child in the story. The rav told him about the "*din Torah*" in order to teach him that the crown of Torah is acquired only through hard work. The *gadol* added that after this discussion, he began putting his efforts into Torah study.

The winner of a lottery had to pick up his prize in person. He hired a coach to take him to the lottery office where he picked up many bags filled with gold coins. He loaded the bags onto the wagon and began his way back home.

Somewhere along the way, they stopped to rest. The coachman pulled over to the side of the road, and soon, both of them were sound asleep. When they awoke and continued on their way, the wagon driver said, "We were robbed. The money isn't on the wagon anymore."

"How do you know?!"

The wagon driver explained, "The horses are running quickly. If the wagon would be carrying all those gold coins, the horses wouldn't be able to run like this. That's how I know we were robbed."

This parable reminds us that when things go smoothly, the wealth isn't there. When things are difficult, when we have to struggle in our *avodas Hashem*, that's when we are carrying and earning immense spiritual wealth.

We wrote above the Ramban's and the Chasam Sofer's explanation for the sin of the *מתאוונים*. Ramban says that their sin was that they were complaining. The Chasam Sofer says their sin was that they didn't believe Hashem hears their *tefillos* (רע באוני ה'). Rashi has yet another explanation.

Rashi (11:1) explains that the Jewish nation said, "Woe to us! We are on this long journey for three days and we haven't yet rested

from the tiresome travels.' Hashem became angry and said, 'I intended for their good, so the nation should come to Eretz Yisrael immediately...' Their sin was that they were complaining that they were traveling so quickly to Eretz Yisrael. They traveled for three days, without stop!

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* asks: If Hashem wanted, Hashem could have brought them to Eretz Yisrael without any hardship at all! (For example, He could have flown them to Eretz Yisrael on eagle's wings.) Why was this long and difficult journey necessary?

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* answers that some amount of hardship was required. As Chazal (*Brachos* 5) tell us, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave three gifts to the Jewish nation, and each gift is acquired solely through *yesurim*. They are: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and Olam HaBa." It is impossible to acquire Eretz Yisrael without some amount of hardships. The three difficult days of traveling was for their benefit, because precisely this discomfort would grant them the gift of Eretz Yisrael. But the nation thought it to be a bad thing.

The lesson is that in order to acquire these three special gifts of Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and Olam HaBa, one must endure some measure of suffering. It is never an easy path. Don't be afraid when things get hard. Keep trying, and you will succeed.

The Toil Makes our Avodas Hashem Special

Before *mattan Torah*, Hashem asked the nations of the world whether they want the Torah. They asked, "What is written in the Torah?" and Hashem told each nation the mitzvah that was hardest for them to keep.

Why did Hashem show them the hardest mitzvah?

It is because this is the way of the Torah: It is hard to keep. And that is what makes our *avodah* precious.

The Yidden standing at Har Sinai experienced immense fear. They said (*Devarim* 5:22-23), ועתה למה נמות כי האכלנו האש הגדולה הזאת. אם

"Why should we die...? If we continue hearing Hashem's voice, we will die."

The Rebbe of Kobrin *zy'a* discussed these *pesukim* at his *tisch* on Shavuos night. With tremendous *hislahavus* he asked, "What were they afraid of? Isn't a close attachment to Hashem with immense fear of Heaven the greatest pleasure? Why should it bother them if they will die from their fear of Heaven?"

Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin carried on with this question, asking it very passionately, with a lot of *hislahavus* until he fainted and his chassidim had to carry him back to his room.

The next day, at the *yom tov tisch*, the Rebbe of Kobrin answered his question:

It wouldn't bother the Yidden to die due to their *yiras Shamayim* and close attachment to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That would be their greatest pleasure. But they wanted to *live*, for Hashem's sake. Because Hashem wants us to live in this 'world of tests,' and to fight the *yetzer hara*.

Hashem replied (*Devarim* 5:25), היטיבו כל אשר דברו, "Everything they said is good." The *Chumash* doesn't tell us (explicitly) that Hashem praised the nation when they said נעשה ונשמע, or at any other time. Only this time, when they said that they were afraid that they might die, Hashem replied, היטיבו כל אשר דברו, that they spoke well. Because the nation perceived that their mission in life is to overcome a *yetzer hara* that will pose great challenges and ultimately to serve their Creator in this situation. The purpose of life is to battle the *yetzer hara*, and struggle to do Hashem's will.

Reb Yitzchak of Volozhin *zt'l* (son of Reb Chaim of Volozhin *zt'l*) explains that each location in the desert where the Jewish nation camped represents a different *yetzer hara*. One locale represented the *yetzer hara* for temptation; another place represented the *yetzer hara* for anger; from a third site emanated the *yetzer hara* for heresy, and so on. When the nation came to these places,

they were tormented by those *yetzer haras*. When they came to the location of anger, they had to struggle to control their anger. When they came to the location of temptation, the *yetzer hara* enticed them to temptations.

When they overcame the *yetzer hara* associated with each place, the locale was purified.

The Leshem *zt'l* (*Leshem Shvo Va'achlamah* vol.2, *drush* 4:20:4) adds, "It was extremely hard for the Jewish nation when they came to these places in the desert, because they immediately felt the *yetzer hara's* cloak of darkness, and they fell drastically from their *madreigos*. They wanted to flee, like from fire. After they were in a place for some time and they purified the region, they wanted to remain there [because now the *yetzer hara* wasn't disturbing them anymore]. The Torah writes, 'על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו', 'They camped, and they traveled by Hashem's decree.' They didn't do what they wanted to, they did Hashem's will... The Torah says, 'ובהאריך הענן, 'when the Cloud was in one location for a long time,' the reason for the prolonged stay was because of the great *tumah* that presided over there. They were very challenged at those places; it was very hard for them to overcome the *yetzer hara*. They wanted to run away. Nevertheless, 'ושמרו בני ישראל משמרת ה' ולא יסעו', 'Bnei Yisrael kept Hashem's decree and they didn't travel.' There were places that the cloud only stayed 'מערב עד בקר', 'from nighttime until morning' because that place wasn't very impure. They wanted to stay there longer, nevertheless, in the morning, when the Cloud moved on, they traveled on. The *pasuk* praises the Jewish nation that they undertook the task of overcoming the *yetzer hara*. Although it was very hard, 'משמרת ה' שמרו', 'they obeyed Hashem's decree.'"

Learning Torah is the Greatest Mitzvah

It states (*Mishlei* 8:11), 'כי טובה חכמה מפנינים וכל הפצים לא ישוו בה', "The wisdom of Torah is more precious than diamonds. Nothing compares to it." The Gemara (*Moed Katan* 8:) adds, 'אפילו המצוות לא ישוו בה', "Even mitzvos don't compare to Torah." Because the greatest mitzvah a person can perform is to study Torah.

This is not the way people generally see things. If you ask unlearned people, "What is the greatest deed a person can do?" Many will respond, "Saving a life." Indeed, saving a life is a great mitzvah. But learning Torah is greater. As Chazal (*Megillah* 16:) say, 'גדול תלמוד תורה יותר מהצלת נפשות', "Studying Torah is greater than saving lives."³

Consider this story. (Although the story is fiction it will help illustrate our point):

During the Holocaust there was a Jewish *kapo* who used his position to save many Yidden. He pretended he was working for the Germans, while he used his political influence and knowledge to save many Yidden from transports and from torture.

When he was *niftar*, many families whom he saved were present at the *levayah*. One person stood up and told everyone how this "kapo" learned Gemara every day. "Even during the war, he had a Gemara with him, and he studied it at every opportunity."

The Holocaust survivors were upset. Why doesn't the speaker say anything about the many lives he saved with *mesirus nefesh*? Why is he talking only about a small accomplishment, when there is so much more to say about him?

But, actually, this speaker emphasized the greatest merit. As the Gemara tells us, "learning Torah is greater than saving lives."

3. The Gemara adds, "Studying Torah is greater than building the Beis HaMikdash... Studying Torah is greater than *kibud av ve'eim*."

Pirkei Avos (6:5) states, "Torah is greater than *kehunah* and *meluchah* (kingship)."

The Midrash (הנעלים פ' וירא) writes, "The *korbanos* ceased, but Torah didn't cease. Whoever can't bring the *korbanos* should study Torah, and that is even greater."

The Taz (*Yorah Deiah* 251:6) writes, "Saving a life always comes first. Nothing stands in the way of *pikuach nefesh*. The Gemara [that says studying Torah is greater than saving lives] is saying that the *merit* of learning Torah...is greater than the merit of saving lives."

Hashem gave us the Torah to keep. Whenever a mitzvah comes your way - a mitzvah that no one but you can perform - you must perform that mitzvah. Of course, you must stop learning to save a life. Nevertheless, Chazal tell us, if you measure the merits, the merit of learning Torah is greater than saving a life.

The Chofetz Chaim (*Toras HaBayis* ch.5) writes, "My friend, think about the precious value of each moment of Torah so you won't waste your time. Imagine that you once had the merit to save someone's life. Someone was drowning in the river and you went out and saved him. How proud you would be! You will never forget this moment. For the rest of your life you will be talking about it. And, indeed, it is an incredibly great mitzvah to save a life. As Chazal say, 'Whoever saves a Yid's life it is like he saved the entire world.'

"If you saved many people's lives, your joy will be boundless. Now, *chas veshalom*, think about the opposite: Someone drowned in a lake or was consumed in a fire because the person who knew about it, and who had the potential to save his life, was lazy, and didn't respond immediately. How will he feel?

"He will feel terrible. He will always remember this error..."

The Chofetz Chaim continues: "One person saved lives; another person learned Torah. Each acted correctly, according to the situation they were in. If the question is raised, 'Who performed a greater mitzvah?' Everyone will say the person who saved lives performed a greater mitzvah! However, Chazal reveal...studying Torah is greater than saving lives. Now understand, my brother, that according to this, for every

moment you had the opportunity to study Torah and you didn't, it is like you had the opportunity to save someone's life and you didn't take advantage of it. Although our eyes are covered and we don't recognize things this way, Chazal revealed this secret to us. The merit of studying Torah is extremely great. Nothing in the world compares to it. This is the reason Dovid HaMelech prayed so much for success in Torah (in *Tehillim* 119)..."

So, we must change our perspective, and acquire the Torah's view: There is no greater mitzvah than studying Torah. Fortunate are those who pursue it.

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 5) says, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu cries for three kinds of people each day." One of them is "Someone who has time to study Torah and he doesn't study."

Why does Hashem cry for him?

The Chofetz Chaim (*ibid.*) explains that it is because Hashem is like our father. He loves us as a father loves his children. Wouldn't a father cry when he sees his son throwing away opportunities in attaining extreme wealth? Hashem also cries when He sees us wasting precious time that could have been used for collecting something that is more precious than gold and diamonds.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 34:) says, כל הנביאים כולן לא נתנבאו אלא למשיא בתו לתלמיד חכם ולעשות פרקמטיא לת"ח ולמהנה מונכסיו אבל תלמידי חכמים עצמן עין לא ראתה אלקים וזולתך, "All prophecies of the prophets [which tell the great rewards that are reserved for the righteous] were only discussing [the rewards] of someone whose daughter marries a *talmid chacham*, or someone who does business with a *talmid chacham*, or someone who gives money for a *talmid chacham*. But [the reward of] the *talmidei chachamim*, themselves, (*Yeshayah* 64:3) 'no eye ever saw it, other than Hashem, alone.'" How can a person throw this opportunity away?

The Chofetz Chaim writes, "A wise person should keep in mind that every time he joins a group of idle-talkers, and every time he wastes time reading the newspaper

about issues that aren't related to Him, Hakadosh Baruch Hu...cries over this loss of time. He could have used this time to study Torah, to acquire diamonds and pearls, which would illuminate his lot, eternally, and grant him honor and greatness. And he exchanges them for matters that have no benefit... When a person thinks about this... he will study Torah whenever he has a free moment, for this is his good fortune and his eternal life."

Torah Study

Hashem told Moshe that if the Yidden accept the Torah they will become עם מגולה, ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש, "a chosen nation, a kingdom of kohanim, a holy nation..." (Shemos 19:5-6). And Hashem concluded, אלה הדברים אשר תדבר אל בני ישראל, "These are the words you shall tell Bnei Yisrael." Rashi writes, לא פחות ולא יותר, "Not more and not less."

The Sar Shalom of Belz ז"ל taught לא פחות ולא יותר, "not more and not less" hints that Hashem was telling Bnei Yisrael, "No one is greater than one who accepts the yoke of Torah and no one is smaller than one who throws off the yoke of Torah."

The Gemara (Yoma 72:) says, זכה נעשית לו אם, היים לא זכה נעשית לו אם המוות. This means that Torah is like medicine, which either gives life or death. Rashi writes that if one learns *leshem shamayim* and he desires to keep what he learns then the Torah becomes an elixir of life for him. However, if one doesn't study Torah *lishmah*, and he isn't interested in keeping what's written in the Torah, the Torah becomes an elixir of death.

When one reads this, he might become afraid and he will say, "Perhaps I'm not learning *lishmah* and the Torah is an elixir of death, אם המוות. Who can risk learning Torah?"

Therefore, it is important to repeat how the Sfas Emes ז"ל understands this Gemara. The Sfas Emes teaches: When one studies *leshem shamayim* the Torah becomes an elixir of life - granting him spiritual life. When he doesn't study *leshem shamayim*, the Torah

becomes an elixir that protects him from death - from spiritual death. This means, his Torah doesn't have the strength to sanctify him and to elevate him to high levels (because he isn't studying *lishmah*), but it will help him overcome the *yetzer hara*. It will protect him from falling into sins, which is represented by death - a spiritual death. This is the intention of the Gemara, that his Torah becomes אם המוות, an elixir which protects him from spiritual deaths.

Material Gains

One only gains from learning Torah. There are people who think the Torah limits them and prevents them from enjoying life, but it isn't so. For this world and for the next world, for *parnassah* and for fulfillment in life, the path of the Torah (*lehavdil*) is always the superior path to follow.

Chazal obligate people to enjoy good meals on Shavuos. As Chazal (Pesachim 68:) say, הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם, "All opinions agree that on Shavuos, one must enjoy it [with good foods]." One may not spend the entire day in beis medresh, davening and learning.

This may seem surprising because it is the day the Torah was given. Isn't it appropriate to devote ourselves fully to Hashem's service on this day? But the answer is: It is to tell us that the purpose of Shavuos isn't solely for the *neshamah* and for Olam Haba. The Torah is also beneficial for the body and for all aspects of life in this world.

This is implied in Chazal's words (ibid.) בעינן נמי לכם, you need to know that Torah is לכם, for your benefit. Because there is no better way of living than by following the dictates of the Torah.

Reb Akiva told his students (Pesachim 49.) "When I was an *am ha'aretz*, I used to say, 'Who will bring me a *talmid chacham* so I can bite him like a donkey.'"

His students asked him, "Rebbe, why don't you say that you would bite him like a dog?"

Reb Akiva replied: When a dog bites, it doesn't break the person's bones.

Reb Akiva wanted to bite a Torah scholar and break his bones.

Why did Reb Akiva tell this to his students?

We can explain that he was telling his students that they shouldn't be jealous of those people who don't follow the Torah. "Don't think they live a more enjoyable life than we do. Just think about how it was for me when I was in their shoes. I remember how bitter and how jealous I used to be. My anger was so intense that I wanted to bite a *talmid chacham* with all my might. I wasn't leading a happy life, at all. Remember this, and recognize that your fate is way better than theirs."

Ohev Yisrael (*Vayikra, Likutim Chadashim*) writes:

"We see many *chassidim* who become *meshugah*, *chas veshalom*, or they become depressed. How does this happen? If you will say that it is from the Torah, we know that it is just the opposite, because Torah makes people happy. (It is therefore forbidden to learn Torah on Tisha b'Av and also those who are mourning can't learn Torah, because Torah makes people joyous.) If you will say they became insane or depressed because of their caution

to do the mitzvos, once again we know that this isn't correct. Because (*Tehillim* 19:9), 'פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב', 'Hashem's mitzvos...make the heart happy.' ..."

The Ohev Yisrael answers that depression and insanity comes from trying to seek high levels that are beyond their abilities.⁴

We repeat this source to remind us that Torah and mitzvos are never the cause for people's feelings of distress, anxiety, and the like. It could be that they are distressed because they are trying to reach higher levels too quickly; levels that are beyond them. There could be other reasons, too. But it is never Torah and mitzvos, because Torah and mitzvos bring joy.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu warned Yehoshua, רק חזק... לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפך והגית בו יומם ולילה כי אז תצליח את דרכך, "Be strong... Torah should never leave your lips. Study it by day and by night, and then you will succeed..." Because to win the wars in Eretz Yisrael, Yehoshua and the nation had to study Torah.

During the very first battle to conquer Eretz Yisrael, the nation didn't study Torah for one night. A *malach* appeared before Yehoshua with a drawn sword. The *malach* told him, עתה באתי, "I came for now"⁵ and Chazal explain that he came because they didn't study Torah on that night.

4. We'll quote the Ohev Yisrael's words here:

"The explanation is: These people want to serve Hashem, but the ladder to ascend was concealed from them. They grab onto levels that are beyond them, levels that aren't their calling, and they don't have permission to go up on that path...

"As it states (*Shemos* 20:23), לא תעלו במעלות על מזבחי, don't seek to be a *baal madreigah*, עלי, because it will lead you to depression, *chas veshalom*... One should be very cautious with this. ולא יהרסו אל ה', 'They shouldn't destroy [by going beyond one's level]' (*Shemos* 19:21)

"Rashi (beginning of *Vayikra*) writes, 'For every command that Hashem told Moshe, Hashem called him first.' Rashi wants to teach us a great rule in Torah: Just as Moshe didn't speak with the *Shechinah* before he was summoned, similarly, whoever who wants to go up to Hashem, he has to be called first... Because the true service is someone...doesn't want any level, other than what they force onto him from heaven, for the benefit of the community."

5. Tosfos explains that עתה means Torah, as it states (*Devarim* 31:19), עתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת, "and now write this song" referring to the Torah.

This taught Yehoshua that conquering Eretz Yisrael is achieved solely through *hasmadah* in Torah.

The next war, Yehoshua was cautious to study Torah. As it states (*Yehoshua* 8:9), וילן יהושע, בלילה ההוא בתוך העמק "...that night Yehoshua was immersed in the depths," and the

Gemara explains, מלמד שלן בעומקה של הלכה, he was immersed in the depths of Torah.

The Chofetz Chaim (*Toras HaBayis* 5) discusses these matters and concludes: "This tells us that not only for Olam HaBa, but also for life in this world, to be protected from danger one needs Torah.