

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Chukas - Balak



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Torah Wellsprings - Chukas - Balak

Accepting Hashem's Decree; It is all for our Good

Rashi (19:2) writes, "The Satan and the nations of the world make fun of the Jewish nation and they say, 'What is this mitzvah [of *parah adumah*]? What logic does it have?' Therefore, it states *הקה*. This is My decree. You don't have permission to question it."

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabba* 19:8) discusses this lesson in greater detail:

A gentile once asked Raban Yochanan ben Zakai: "Your mitzvos look like witchcraft! You bring a cow; you burn it and grind it; you take the ashes; and then, if one of your people becomes *tamei* from a human corpse, you sprinkle two or three drops on him, and you say 'you are pure.'"

Raban Yochanan ben Zakai replied, "Did you ever suffer from a bad spirit?"

"No," he answered

"Did you ever see someone afflicted with a bad spirit?"

"Yes."

"What do you do for such people?"

"We bring incenses, place them on a fire, and the smoke surrounds him. Then we throw water on him, and the bad spirit leaves."

Raban Yochanan ben Zakai said, "Listen to what you're saying! The bad spirit that you are referring to is the spirit of the *tumah*... We, therefore, sprinkle on the person the purifying waters and the bad spirit leaves."

After the gentile left, Raban Yochanan ben Zakai's students said, "You got him out of your way with a stick [with a fabricated, untrue explanation]. What do you tell *us*?"

[What is the true logic and reason behind the *parah adumah*?]"

Raban Yochanan ben Zakai replied, "I swear, the corpse doesn't cause *tumah*, and the water doesn't cause purity. But this is what Hakadosh Baruch Hu decreed. 'It is His decree, and you may not transgress it.' As it states *זאת הקת התורה*, this is the Torah's decree."

So, we therefore keep the laws of *parah adumah*, not because we understand the logic behind it, but because this is Hashem's law. We can now explain that this attitude - of accepting Hashem's decrees because Hashem said so, without needing explanations - is the root of the purity that we receive from the *parah adumah*.

Don't question Hashem's mitzvos, and don't question Hashem's *hashgachah*. Trust that Hashem is leading you in the very best way. This *emunah* will purify you.

We must praise Hashem even for what seems to be bad because we believe that these situations are the best for us. As the Gemara (*Brachos* 48:) obligates us: *כשם שמברך על הטובה כך מברך על הרעה*, "Just as you bless Hashem for the good so shall you bless Hashem for the bad."

We are constant recipients of Hashem's kindness. If a person praised Hashem for all the kindness he receives - with all his strength, at every moment of his life - it still wouldn't be sufficient. Nevertheless, it stands to reason that someone who received extra-special favors from Heaven should praise Hashem more than others.

For example, let's say one person won twenty dollars in a lottery, and another person won two million dollars. They should both praise Hashem, but it is reasonable that the one who won two million dollars should

praise Hashem more than the other person, who won twenty dollars.

The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* (*Divrei Eliyahu*) says that this is also true regarding praising Hashem for the bad. When something bad happens, *chalilah*, one should praise Hashem because he believes that it too is for the good. And if something very bad happens, *chalilah*, he should praise Hashem even more, because the great suffering is a sign that an even greater *chesed* is concealed there.

In the Vilna Gaon's words: והטובה היא לפי ערך הרעה, "The good [that he is receiving] is in accordance to the extent of the bad." The Vilna Gaon explains, "If he loses a silver coin, he should praise Hashem as if he found a silver coin. If he loses two silver coins, he should think [and praise Hashem] as though he found two silver coins. The same is for every bad thing that happens to him; he should consider the bad to be good."

The Meor Einayim (*Lech Lecha*) also teaches this lesson. He explains that before Hashem bestows His kindness, a hard and difficult moment will come. He explains this concept based on the teachings of chassidus, and then he writes, "According to the extent of the kindness that Hashem plans to give someone, so will be the extent of the [hardships] that will precede it. If the kindness [that Hashem is planning to give him] is great, the difficulties that precede it will also be great and severe. When one believes this, he will surely praise Hashem for the bad with joy just as he blesses Hashem for the good [because they are a prelude of immense *chesed*]... If a person is wise and he keeps his eyes open, he will see the good that follows the hardships. And if he doesn't find the kindness that was supposed to follow the suffering, the *dinim* (hardships) were certainly to release him from his sins so that he can merit Olam HaBa...and there is no greater favor than that! Because one moment of pleasure in the next world is better than the entire Olam HaZeh, with all its pleasures. In addition, there is no greater favor than if through the *dinim* (hardships) the

person becomes closer to Hashem, and he is more afraid of Him. A wise person should think about these matters..."

So, one should keep his eyes open and he will often find the kindnesses that follow life's hardships and afflictions. And after a more painful experience, he can expect an even greater good, because והטובה היא לפי ערך הרעה, "The good [that he will receive] is in accordance to the extent of the bad."

A relative of Reb Eizik Shor of Slabodka *zt'l* broke her foot in a very severe way, and she had to stay home for a long time until her foot healed. She was very upset about it. Reb Eizik visited her and tried to give her some *chizuk*. He asked her, "Do you remember the pain of pregnancy and childbirth?"

"I remember," she replied.

"Are those bitter memories or happy memories? I'm certain they are happy memories for you because they brought you a child who gives you so much *nachas*. Similarly, all suffering in life is like childbirth because something very good will come from it... We must believe that it is so."

There was once a person who suffered from antagonists. Rav Shach *zt'l* spoke to him to support and encourage him. He told him, "ישועה ה' כהרף עין", in a moment all your *tzaros* can go away. And in the meanwhile, follow Chazal's counsel of not answering back (see *Gitin* 36:)."

In the middle of the conversation, Rav Shach brought him a cup of tea with a teaspoon of honey. Rav Shach said, "Bees frighten people, and sometimes they sting, but they give us sweet honey. Similarly, regarding those who are troubling you, believe that something very sweet will come from it."

A *yungerman* was once looking to buy a house in Monsey for his growing family. He studied the market well and saw that there were many homes in the area. When he found his dream house, he knew he was getting a very good deal. The location, the

price, and the layout of the house were all perfect. He speeded up the process and finalized the purchase in record time, because he didn't want to lose out on this special deal.

On the same day that he bought the house, his parents, in-laws, and siblings came over for the *chanukas habayis*. It was obvious that he and his wife were elated with their new home.

The next morning, he saw in the local paper that another home was put up for sale, just around the corner from the one he bought – and it was being sold for a much better price!

Now he regretted having rushed the purchase. He kept telling himself, "If only I would have waited and bought that other house, I would have saved myself so much money."

He knew that if anyone could give him *chizuk* it was his rebbe, Reb Mordechai Shwab *zt'l* (brother of the renowned Reb Shimon Shwab *zt'l*).

Reb Shwab spoke with him for some time, explaining to him that everything is *bashert*. He told him the following story, "Reb Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* once told me about a *shidduch* he made (apparently for one of his children), and how he regretted making that *shidduch*. He told me all the details and then he concluded, 'But what happened was *bashert*. It was destined that I should make this mistake!' Because even when we act in a way that ends up having a negative impact on ourselves, it was also planned and pre-arranged in heaven. It had to be this way. It is Hashem's plan, and it is for our good.

Reb Mordechai added, "I'm certain you bought the house that was *bashert* for you. My proof is that you only learned about the other house a day after you bought yours. Why didn't you hear about it earlier? It is because you were destined to buy your house! There's no room for regrets."

The letters of Hashem's name הו"י can be written twelve ways, and each month has another combination. Hashem's name that is associated with Tamuz is ה-ו-ה-י, which is Hashem's name written backwards. When Hashem's name is read in order (as it is printed in the *Chumash* and *siddur*) it represents *chesed*. When the name is written backwards (like in Tamuz) it represents *din*. How does one turn this name (for Tamuz) into *chesed*? It can be done by moving just one letter. Place the ו"י that's at the end and place it at the beginning and it becomes Hashem's name – the name for *chesed*.

The letter ו"י represents a Yid with his *emunah* in Hashem. Place your *emunah* at the top of all your thoughts, believe everything is for the good, and then everything will become good.

The Or Hachayim writes, "All the descriptions of the *parah adumah* represent *dinim* (hardships). It's red, the color of harsh *din*. In fact, it must be completely red (אדומה תמימה). It can't even have two black hairs. Even the horns and the hooves have to be red. It may not be black. It certainly can't be white (because white represents *chesed*). Another feature of the *parah adumah* is אשר לא עלה עליה עול that it never carried a yoke on its neck. This is because the yoke removes *din*. As Chazal (*Brachos* 5.) say, יסורין ממרקין כל עוונותיו של אדם, the hardships cleanses from all sins, and sins are *din*. [Likewise, the *parah adumah* must be an animal that never had any hardships at all, so all the *dinim* are in it, and they were never sweetened through the hardships and toil.] The cow is burned in fire, and fire is *din*. All these aspects of *din* become concentrated in the ashes of the *parah adumah*, and this removes the *tumah* from the man who was in contact with a human corpse..." In short, the *parah adumah's* ashes represent a strong force of *din* – like a gravitational force – and it therefore attracts all *dinim* to it. When the ashes are sprinkled on the person who became *tamei*, the *tumah* flees from him. This is because *tumah* is *din*,

and the *tumah* is attracted to the gravitational force of *din* of the ashes.

We quote this Or HaChaim here to remind us that when one endures hardships, it mitigates and removes *dinnim*. Because sometimes a person deserves very great *dinnim* (punishment) *chas veshalom*, but when he endures a lighter dose of *din* (such as the minor hardships of day-to-day life) this can save him from much greater suffering, *chalilah*.

Therefore, trust in Hashem and believe that everything is for the good, for it is indeed so.¹

"The Place Where *Baalei Teshuvah* Stand..."

Why did Moshe Rabbeinu hit the stone, instead of speaking to it? The Divrei Shmuel *zt'l* explains that Moshe thought back forty years to when they first came to the desert. At that time, Hashem told Moshe to hit the stone, to draw water for the nation. To draw water by *speaking* to the stone would be an even greater miracle, and Moshe understood that the Jewish nation wasn't worthy for such a miracle to happen. Now, forty years later, Moshe figured the nation was at an even lower level, because they had committed

1. There was a child who choked on a coin and his face was turning blue. The Chazon Ish *zt'l* said, "The only solution is to bring the child to the Ponovizher Rav, because the Ponovizher Rav is an expert in getting coins out of people, even out of the tightest places..."

Everyone laughed, including the child. This dislodged the coin and it found its way out. The Chazon Ish said about this incident, "Happiness saves people from all *tzaros*."

We'll add that the boy wasn't really happy. He was laughing because he saw that everyone else was laughing. But that was also enough to save him. Because when one can't be truly happy, he should pretend that he's happy, because that will also bring *yeshuos*.

The Yismach Yisrael *zt'l* said that a hint to this is from the words (*Devarim* 16:16) והיית אך שמח. The first letters spell שוא, falsehood, and hints that a person can have a false joy too, because a false joy will eventually become a true joy.

Chazal (*Avos* 4:30) say על כרחך אתה חי... ועל כרחך אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון, "You are alive against your will... and you will be brought to court in heaven against your will." I heard that this is referring to when someone isn't happy with his life. He feels על כרחך אתה חי, "I am alive because I was forced to be alive. But really I don't want to be alive." If one has that attitude, על כרחך אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון, you will be brought to court in heaven and will be judged for that. Because a person should be happy with his life – the life that Hashem gave him.

There was a Slonimer Chasid who lived in Teveria named Reb Mordechai (Motke) Lider *zt'l*. From time to time, Reb Motke took the very long trip to travel to Slonim, Lithuania, to be by his Rebbe, the Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l*. (In those days, this was an extremely long trip.)

Reb Shmuel Salant *zt'l*, the Rav of Yerushalayim, asked him why he takes such long trips, and what is lacking in his *avodas Hashem* if he would remain in Teveria. This is what Reb Motke replied:

The Mishnah (end of *Sotah*) states, משמת ר' מאיר במלו משלים, "When Reb Meir was *niftar*, it became *batel*, annulled, the people who knew how to tell parables. משמת בן עזאי במלו שקדנים, when ben Azay was *niftar*, it became *batel* truly diligent Torah scholars, who study with *hasmadah*..." The Mishnah lists other things that became *בטל* over time. Then the Mishnah writes, משמת רבן גמליאל הזקן במל כבוד התורה ומתה טהרה ופרישות, when Raban Gamliel the elder was *niftar*...purity and *prishus* died." Notice that these final words, don't say that it became *batel*, rather that it died.

Reb Motke explained, "This is because there are people who practice purity and *prishus* (which means separating themselves from unneeded pleasures) but they do so with a heavy, sad heart. They don't really want to separate from any pleasures at all. I travel to Slonim because there I learn how to have *taharah* and *prishus* with *simchah*. *Prishus* should be alive (kept with joy); it shouldn't be dead.

the *aveiros* of the *egel*, *meraglim*, and others. Moshe said to himself, "If I had to hit the stone forty years ago, before they sinned, *kal vechomer* now, I will surely have to hit the stone. They aren't worthy to have a great miracle done for them, such as water gushing from a stone by merely speaking to it.

Moshe's error was his assumption that the Jewish nation was on a lower level after forty years in the dessert when in actuality they were now at a higher level. Because Chazal say, "The place where *baalei teshuvah* stand, the greatest *tzaddikim* can't stand." At this time, Moshe could have just spoken to the stone and it would have miraculously brought forth water.²

In *Oz Yashir*, Moshe's name is mentioned together with Bnei Yisrael's, as we say, או ישיר, משה ובני ישראל, "Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael sang..." But in this week's *parashah*, when the nation sang *shirah*, thanking Hashem for the *be'er* (well), only the Jewish nation is mentioned. As it states (19:17), או ישיר ישראל. Why isn't Moshe's name stated herewith Bnei Yisrael as they sang praises for the well?

The Sfas Emes (*Chukas*) explains that when they sang *Oz Yashir* after *krias yam suf*, it was before they committed the severe sins

of the *egel* and *meraglim*. Whereas, they sang and praised Hashem for the *be'er* after their sins and after they did *teshuvah*. Chazal say, "The place where *baalei teshuvah* stand, the greatest *tzaddikim* can't stand," therefore the nation was on a higher level than Moshe, and he couldn't be mentioned together with them.³

Before hitting the stone, Moshe said, שמעו נא המורים, "Listen rebellious people..." The Rambam says that Moshe was punished for this, because he should have spoken to the holy, Jewish nation with the proper respect.

Rashi says his *aveirah* was that he hit the stone instead of speaking to it.

The Bas Ayin explains that both ideas are related. At first, Moshe spoke disrespectfully to the Jewish nation and called them *מורים*, rebels, fools. After this, Moshe thought that his mouth wasn't pure enough to perform a miracle with it. How could he bring water out of a stone with a mouth that just sinned? He therefore hit the stone to bring forth water. Moshe's error was that he didn't recognize the power of *teshuvah*. With *teshuvah*, he was able to perform miracles, even with a mouth that moments before spoke improperly.⁴

2. When we discuss in this section Moshe Rabbeinu's errors, it is solely so we can learn lessons that are applicable for us. We aren't, *Chas veshalom*, trying to measure Moshe Rabbeinu's unfathomable greatness.

3. Rashi (19:20) also asks why Moshe's name isn't mentioned by the song for the *be'er*, and Rashi replies, "Moshe's [name isn't mentionied, because he] was punished for hitting the *be'er*. And since Moshe's name isn't mentioned, Hakadosh Baruch Hu's name is also not mentioned. It can be compared to a king who was invited to a meal. He replied, 'If my beloved friend is there, I will go. But if my friend isn't there, I won't go there.'"

4. Reb Shlomo Kluger *zt'l* (*Chachmas HaTorah*) gives a similar explanation. Until this point, Moshe performed all the miracles with his staff - such as the ten *makos* and *kriyas Yam Suf*. The war against Amalek was also with Moshe's staff, as it states (*Shemos* 17:9), ויאמר משה אל יהושע בחר לנו אנשים וצא הלחם בעמלק מחר אנכי נצב על ראש הגבעה והמטה, האלקים בידי, "Moshe said to Yehoshua, 'Choose warriors and go fight a war against Amalek. Tomorrow, I will stand on the top of the mountain with Hashem's staff in my hand..." And, obviously, the first time Moshe brought water from the well, Moshe hit the rock with his staff. But this was all before *mattan Torah*. Now Moshe was on a higher level, and he was able to perform miracles with his speech, alone. Therefore, Hashem told him to bring forth water by speaking to it. But after Moshe said שמעו נא המורים, which the Rambam says was a sin, he felt that he went back to his levels of before *mattan Torah*, and that he can't perform miracles with his speech anymore. This is the reason he hit the stone. But he was mistaken,

Rashi writes that the Satan and the nations of the world poke fun at the Jewish nation and they ask for an explanation for the mitzvah of *parah adumah*, for it seems like an unusual mitzvah. Our response is that this is Hashem's will, and we don't know why, and we don't ask questions. As Hashem says, חקקוהוּ הַיָּהּ מִלְפָנַי וְאֵין לְךָ רִשּׁוֹת לְהַרְהֵר אַחֲרָיוּ, "It's My decree and you don't have permission to question it." Later in the *parashah*, Rashi writes a reason for the *parah adumah*. He writes that the *parah adumah* atones for the *egel*. This seems to be a contradiction, because after Rashi says that we don't know the reason for *parah adumah*, Rashi gives us the reason.

We can explain that we do know the reason for the *parah adumah*. It is to atone for the *egel*. But we don't want to think about that. We don't want to remember the devastating sin of the *egel* (nor any of our past sins).

The Satan and the nations of the world are also aware that the *parah adumah* is to atone for the *egel*. They ask us (as if they don't know) "Why do you make a *parah adumah*?" because they want to remind us of our past sins, hoping we will fall into *yeush*,

depression, and then into sin. Hashem tells us to answer them, "this is Hashem's command. There is no reason." And to ourselves we say, אֵין לְךָ רִשּׁוֹת לְהַרְהֵר אַחֲרָיוּ, that we mustn't think about the errors of the past.⁵

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (*Drashos* vol.1, p.33:) teaches that the *parah adumah* with its purity continues in our times. The *parah adumah* was a red heifer, burned to ashes, and then mixed with spring water that was collected in an earthenware vessel. All these factors are present when a person does *teshuvah*. The Chasam Sofer explains: "A person who committed *aveiros* is like the *parah adumah*. He humbles himself with regret and with fasting, and thereby, he becomes like the ashes of the *parah adumah*. His tears are the מֵיִם חַיִּים, fresh spring water, that was placed in the earthenware vessel, which is his body, for his body is like a broken, clay vessel. But the waters of the *parah adumah* aren't sufficient to purify him. He is still *tamei* until he goes to *mikvah*... And since Hakadosh Baruch Hu helps the *baal teshuvah* do *teshuvah*, Hashem is his *mikvah*. The moment he gets sprinkled with the water of the *parah adumah*, which are his tears, Hakaodsh Baruch Hu purifies him in His *mikvah*."⁶

because with *teshuvah* he could immediately return to his high levels of after *mattan Torah*, and he could have drawn water with his speech.

5. A human corpse is אָבִי אֲבוֹת הַטּוֹמְאוֹת, the highest kind of *tumah*. The Radziner *zt'l* explains that this is because a corpse is *yeush*. As long as a person is alive, there is hope. After one dies there is nothing to hope for. And losing hope is the greatest *tumah*.

6. Rebbe Boruch of Mezhibuzh *zt'l* saw that his chassidim felt down and broken, because they felt they can't win the *yetzer hara*. He told them, "It states (*Tehillim* 104:3) הַשֵּׁם עֹבֵים רְכוּבוֹ. This means Hashem resides even on people who are עֹבֵם, on a low level. The only condition is, מִהַלֵּךְ עַל כַּנְפֵי רוּחַ, that they should strive to fly up to higher levels - as though they have wings."

Someone told his rebbe that he suffers from thoughts of *kefirah* (heresy).

His rebbe replied, "Why should that bother you?"

The man replied, "What are you saying? Of course, it bothers me. Should I be a *kofer*, *chas veshalom*!"

The rebbe replied, "From your response, I see that you do believe in Hashem..."

Someone said to Rebbe Shlomo Karliner *zt'l*, "Please! Open my heart."

The Rebbe replied, "I don't have the key that can open your heart."

Turn to Hashem

Hashem wants us to always be turning to Him for our needs. The Gemara (*Yoma* 76.) states:

Students once asked Reb Shimon ben Yochai: "Why didn't the manna fall once a year? Why did it fall each day, just enough for the day?"

Reb Shimon replied with a *mashal*:

A king had a son, whom he loved dearly. Once a year, the son came to the king, and the king gave him enough money to last until the next year. But the king wanted to see his son more often. With this arrangement, he only saw his son once a year. The king decided that from now on, he would give his son *parnassah* for one day at a time. That way, the son will come to his father every day.

Similarly, if Hashem would send them a lot of manna, enough to last a year, they wouldn't think about Hashem throughout the year. Therefore, Hashem gave them manna each day, so they were forced to turn to Hashem every day.

As Reb Shimon bar Yochai explained, "Someone who had four or five children, was afraid: 'Perhaps tomorrow the manna won't fall, and they will all die from hunger.' This way, they were constantly turning their hearts to their Father in heaven."

In the desert, Hashem led the nation in a way which forced them to constantly turn to Hashem, and this was very hard for them. They wanted to be like the nations of the world, who have food in abundance. It states (21:5-6) וידבר העם באלקים ובמשה... כי אין לחם ואין מים ונפשנו, קצה בלחם הקלוקל "The nation spoke against Hashem and Moshe... [They said] 'There is no bread, no water, and we are disgusted from the manna...'" The Rabbeinu b'Chaya

explains that they were saying: "Behold, the nations of the world have all their needs. They have enough food for a long time. They don't have to worry about what they will eat the next day. Certainly, they have plenty of water. Whether they deserve it or not, their needs will be met. Why must we be different than all the nations? Why do we get the manna every day, and not once to last for a long time? Even water, which is free for the entire world, was also once taken away from us (when Miriam was *niftarah*). We must always be cautious with our ways or our *parnassah* may cease!"

But it was for their benefit, because this system forced them to always turn to Hashem and to be cautious with their deeds. They are different than the rest of the world because Hashem wants them to be constantly attached to Him. As the Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "It was to train them in the middah of *bitachon*."

As we know, it is the same for us. We never have everything we need. Every day something is lacking. This is planned by Hashem, so that we will always turn our eyes to Heaven.

Chazal (*Pesachim* 118.) say, "A person's *shidduch* is as difficult as splitting the sea. And a person's *parnassah* is as difficult as splitting the sea."

We can explain this as follows:

People pray with all their heart and soul for their *parnassah* and for *shidduchim*, and Hashem loves those *tefillos*. He loves the connection it creates between us and Hashem. Hashem knows that when He fulfills our will and He gives us *parnassah* and/or a *shidduch*, we will stop praying; therefore, it is קשה, *keviyachol*, hard for Hashem to give these to us. It is similar to the phrase, קשה עלי פרידתכם, "[Hashem says] it

The man said, "So take an ax and break open my heart."

The Rebbe replied, "If you say that, apparently, your heart is already open."

is hard for me when you leave me." As well as with *parnassah* and *shidduchim*, it is קשה, hard for Hashem to give it to us, because He knows that once He does, we will stop praying.

The counsel is to continue praying, even after the salvation comes, so the connection will always remain.⁷

The Snakes

As we explained, the Jewish nation complained, because they didn't want to live with the special *hashgachah pratis* that Hashem led them with in the desert. They wanted to live by the rules of nature, similar to how the nations of the world seem to live.

What was their punishment for this complaint? It states, וישלח ה' בעם את הנחשים השרפים, "Hashem sent to the nation the poisonous snakes." The Rabbeinu b'Chaya explains that these weren't new snakes. They were the snakes which were always found in the desert. (And therefore, it says הנחשים, with a ה"א, because it was the snakes that they knew about.) Until now, Hashem protected them with special *hashgachah pratis*, and the ענני כבוד, clouds of glory, went before them to protect them from the snakes and scorpions of the desert. But since they wanted to live by the rules of nature, the clouds of glory didn't protect them.

Their cure came into effect when they looked at the copper snake that Moshe built. Chazal tell us that it wasn't looking at the copper snake per se that helped them, but when they looked up at the snake, they saw

the sky in the background. They turned their hearts to their Father in heaven, and that's what saved them. Because the Jewish nation doesn't live according to the rules of nature, but by Hashem's *hashgachah pratis*. They get their needs when they turn their hearts and their eyes to Hashem.

The Sfas Emes writes, "The copper snake had the *segulah* of *refuah*; Hashem made it with the ability to cure the people who got bitten by snakes... However, Hashem's will is that when one takes a *refuah* from this world, his eyes and heart should be to heaven, and recognize that it isn't the snake that heals, rather everything is from Hashem."

Toiling in Torah

It states (19:14), וזאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל, "These are the laws of the Torah of someone who dies in a tent..." The Gemara (*Brachos* 63:) says: "How do we know that Torah is only found by those who kill themselves over Torah. It is because it states, וזאת התורה, where is the Torah? אדם כי ימות באהל, by those who kill themselves over Torah in the tents of the beis medresh."

One doesn't acquire Torah by learning it nonchalantly. One acquires Torah with immense toil.

What is the definition of toil? What does it mean to "kill oneself over Torah"?

One definition is to study even when one doesn't want to. Rebbe Aharon Roth zt'l (*Shomer Emunim*) writes in a letter that there was a time when he tasted death in every

7. The Midrash *Shemos Rabba* (21:5) says that by *kriyas Yam Suf*, the Mitzrim pursued the Yidden from behind and the sea was in front of them, because Hashem wanted to hear their prayers. This is the reason *kriyas Yam Suf* was also difficult for Hashem, because that would mean they would stop praying.

Reb Yitzchak Dovid Gutfarb (a tzaddik from Yerushalayim) davened for something at the Kosel for forty days. When he got what he wanted, he continued going to the Kosel for yet another set of forty days.

Dovid HaMelech says (*Tehillim* 86:3), תגני ה' כי אליך אקרא כל היום, "Have mercy on me Hashem, because I will call to you all day long." The Arvei Nachal explained that Dovid was saying that he will continue to pray even after he gets his *yeshuah*, therefore there is no reason Hashem shouldn't answer his tefillos.

word of Torah and every word of *tefillah*. One day he went to a grave of a tzaddik, and he prayed there with tears that he should pass this test. He took out a Gemara and opened it randomly. It opened to the Rosh in *hilchos mikvaos*. He decided, "I'm not getting up until I understand this." It was bitter, but he kept on studying. And then he tasted the sweetness of studying Torah, and that was when this hard test left him.

This is part of the obligation to "kill oneself over Torah." You feel that you are dying over each word – it is so bitter for you. But you don't stop. And then you will taste the sweetness of Torah.

Another aspect of toil in Torah (killing oneself over the Torah) is to study even when you have many things to take care of.

Many people have to work many hours, each day, and they also have other obligations. They too must find time for Torah study.

At a *simchas chasan* and *kallah*, when the *chasan* stands up to say a *doar Torah*, many have the custom to sing and to interrupt the *drashah*. What is the purpose for this custom? The Pnei Menachem *zt'l* said that this is to hint to the *chasan* that there will be many times in life when he will be interrupted from learning Torah. Not long ago, he was a *bachur*, and there weren't many things that he had to take care of. He could devote himself entirely to Torah study. But now that he is married, he has a wife and family to support, and it will be harder for him to find time for Torah. He will be interrupted many times– like his friends who sang in when he was trying to say *divrei Torah* – but he shouldn't be affected by these interruptions and interferences. He should continue studying and speaking *divrei Torah*. He should study as much as he can.

And, he should study even more than he can. As the Kotzker said: One should "steal" from his busy time to find time for Torah. Because Chazal (*Shabbos* 31) say that when one's soul goes up to heaven, the heavenly

court asks him, קבעת עיתים לתורה, "Did you have set times for Torah?" This can also be translated, "Did you steal time for Torah?" (Because the translation of קבעת is to steal. As it states [*Mishlei* 22:23, and see *Rosh Hashanah* 26:], קבע קבעיהם, נפש, which means to steal.)

There are people who are sharper, more intelligent, and have a stronger background in Torah study. Each hour that they study, they acquire much more knowledge than those who aren't so wise, and who lack a Torah background.

Nevertheless, when they both toil in Torah – each one according to his abilities – they are equal, because the primary aspect of Torah study is to toil in Torah.

In *Akdamos* (on Shavuos), we say: צבי וחמיד, ורגני דילאון בלעותא, "Hashem desires that we toil in Torah." We don't say צבי... דידעון אורייתא, "Hashem desires that we know Torah." Rather, Hashem desires דילאון that we toil in Torah. Because toiling in Torah is the main objective.

The Sefer Chasidim (945) also teaches us that the primary aspect of Torah study is its toil. He writes, "For Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the unwise hearts of the later generations are the same as the wise scholars of the earlier generations. Otherwise, each generation can say: Why didn't you create me in the earlier generations, when there were great scholars, and then I would have known so much Torah?' The answer is, what difference does it make for you? You can learn a lot and you can learn a little, the main thing is that your heart and your intention should be for Heaven. And don't waste your time; study as much as you can, even if you aren't so wise."

It is known that around eighty years ago, in Yerushalayim, there was a *kameia* (קמיע) that the Turei Zahav *zt'l*, himself, wrote. When someone was ill, or when someone didn't have children, he wore the *kameia*, and his situation improved and changed.

One person wanted to copy the *nusach* of the *kameia* so he opened up the *kameia* to see

what was written there. (He didn't know that by opening it, the *kameia* would lose its *segulah* and strength). He found the following words written on the *kameia*: אני דוד בן שמואל עמלתי על התוספות בחולין דף צ"ו (ע"א). בזכות זה יעזור ה' שכל העקרות יושעו וכל החולים יתרפאו. This means, "I am Dovid ben Shmuel HaLevi. I toiled over Tosfos on *Chulin*, page 96. In this merit may Hashem help all barren women that they should have a salvation and all ill people that they should have a *refuah sheleimah*."

The Taz didn't write that in the merit that he understood the *Tosfos* Hashem should help the ill and barren. He also didn't write that in the merit that he wrote a commentary on *Shulchan Aruch*, the ill and the barren should get their *yeshuah*. Rather, he emphasized, עמלתי על התוספות, "I toiled on a Tosfos." Because the primary aspect of learning Torah, which is incumbent on us, is to toil in Torah - and that is something everyone can do.

There was once a *bachur* who needed an operation. He went to the Chazon Ish to ask his opinion. The Chazon Ish heard the details and agreed that an operation was necessary. Then the Chazon Ish began speaking to the *bachur* in learning. (The topic was in *kodshim*.) The Chazon Ish saw that the *bachur* was a *talmid chacham*. The Chazon Ish told him, "About the operation. I changed my mind. You don't need it."

The *bachur* was confused. Why did the Chazon Ish change his mind? Just before he agreed that he needs an operation. The Chazon Ish explained, "At first, when you asked me about the surgery, I didn't know that you are a Torah scholar, so I told you that by the standard rules of nature, it is correct and recommended that you should undergo the operation. But now that I see that you toil in Torah, my opinion changed. You don't need to go through this, because Hakadosh Baruch Hu leads those who toil in Torah in an entirely different way (*Maaseh Ish* vol.1, p.77).

About a year ago, the Rosh Yeshiva of Lakewood, Reb Malkiel Kotler Shlita, related

this story. An elderly person stood up and said, "The story happened to me!"

When the Torah describes Eisav, the Torah writes what he *knew*. As it states (*Bereishis* 25:27), איש יודע ציד, "A person who *knows* how to hunt." But when the Torah discusses Yaakov, it states what he did. As it states, יעקב איש תם יושב אהלים, "Yaakov was a wholesome man who sits in the tents of Torah." Why doesn't it state יודע תורה, that Yaakov knew Torah? Why do we only emphasize that he studied Torah?

The Shevet HaLevi *zt'l* explains that the quality of Torah does not necessarily mean to know Torah, but to learn Torah, and to try the best he can.

The Shevet HaLevi adds that this is an example of how success in spiritual pursuits is different than success in worldly pursuits. For worldly pursuits, trying isn't sufficient. Therefore, it states about Eisav יודע ציד, that he knows how to hunt. This implies that he succeeded in the path he chose. But for spiritual pursuits - such as studying Torah - the primary accomplishment is the attempts, the יושב אהלים, sitting and striving to know Torah. The attempts count, more than the results.

Dovid HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 119:54), זמירות, "Your Torah is like songs for me." The Gemara (*Sotah* 35.) states that Dovid was punished for comparing Torah to singing songs. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "You call the Torah songs? I will cause you to err with a matter that even young children know."

The *aron* must be carried by people, and not put in a wagon. As it states (*Bamidbar* 7:9), ולבני קהת לא נתן כי עבודת הקדש עליהם בכתיף ישאו, "[Moshe] didn't give [wagons] for the children of Kehos, because...they carry [the aron and other holy utensils] on their shoulders."

Dovid forgot this *halachah*, and the *aron* was brought on a wagon (see *Shmuel* 1, 6:19).

Why was Dovid punished specifically in this manner, for calling the Torah songs (*zemiros*)? The Brisker Rav *zt'l* explained that

not everyone can sing. It is a talent that some have, while others don't. The problem with referring the Torah to *zemiro*s is that it implies that it is solely for the experts. But it isn't so, because Torah is available for anyone who is ready to accept the yoke of Torah on his shoulders. This is because (a) the main part of Torah study is toil, and everyone can toil in Torah. (b) When one toils in Torah, he will eventually succeed. The condition is only to put the yoke of Torah on one's shoulders.

Therefore, Dovid forgot the halachah that the *aron* (where the Torah lay) was carried on Kehos's shoulders. Taking the yoke of Torah on one's shoulders is all one needs to do, and then he will succeed in Torah.

Chazal (*Avos* 5:5) say that in the Beis HaMikdash *רווחים ומשתחווים צפופים*, "People stood close to one another, and they bowed down with plenty of room." The Chasam Sofer (*Teshuvos Yorah Deiah* ר"ל ד"ה ופר"מ) asks, why didn't Hashem perform a miracle and have them stand *רווחים* with plenty of room. Why did they have to stand *צפופים*, close to one another? This is so they can get their reward for the hardships. As Chazal (*Brachos* 6:) say, *אגרא דכלה דחוקא*, the reward...is the pushing [when there are a lot of people, it is uncomfortable, and yet they go there to perform the mitzvah]. Similarly, the reward for the Torah is when it comes along with hardships.

There are people who have a bad *mazal*, whatever they do they fail. They don't have money, or they don't have children, *r'l*, etc. All of this can change by toiling in Torah. As the *Zohar* (vol.3, 116:) states, "Whoever toils in Torah, his bad *mazal* is taken away."

When one toils in Torah, the Torah will purify him. The Meor Einayim (*Pesachim*) says that this is hinted to in the words *עמילין של טבחים*. The word *עמילין* sounds like *עמל*, toil. Literally, *עמילין של טבחים* is a bread, made from the flour of wheat kernels that didn't grow a third of its height. This bread is placed over a pot that is cooking meat, and it draws out the *זורה*, dirt. The Meor Einayim says

that similarly, the *עמל*, toil in Torah will cleanse us from all *זורה*, impurities.

A chassid told the Chidushei HaRim that he finds *avodas Hashem* very hard. The Chidushei HaRim replied, "It would be a disgrace to us if serving such a great King came easy for us."

To another group of people who asked that the Chidushei HaRim remove the *yetzer hara* from them, the Chidushei HaRim replied, "If you won't have a *yetzer hara*, what purpose will there be in your *avodas Hashem*?"

The Chofetz Chaim (*Toras HaBayis*, and the origin is a Midrash) tells about someone who was hired by a king to fill barrels with water. The king told him, "For each barrel that you fill with water, you will get a coin." After working at this for a day or two, he stopped. Someone asked him, "Why don't you continue? The king asked you to do this, and the pay is very good."

The man replied, "All these barrels have holes in them. As soon as I fill them, the water leaks out. So, what's the purpose?"

The man replied, "This shouldn't deter you. The king gave you a job, and you must do it. You will be rewarded, as the king promised. If the water goes out, that's not your problem."

The *nimshal* is a lesson for someone who learns Torah and then forgets it. We tell him, "Don't stop learning Torah because of that. The King told you to study Torah. For this you will earn a great reward. If you lose everything you learn because you have a weak memory, that shouldn't stop you from accomplishing the mission that Hashem gave you, and it won't detract from the reward you will eventually get.

We conclude this section with a halachic idea that the Magan Avraham (end of 580) discusses: "The Tanya writes that on Friday of *parashas Chukas* some people fast, because on this day, twenty wagons filled with *sefarim* were burned in France. The date

wasn't established on the date of the month (rather the fast is on the Friday prior to *Shabbos Chukas*) because in a *shaalas chalom* (a prophetic dream) it was revealed that the tragedy (burning of the Talmud and other holy sefarim) was associated with the *parashah*. On the words *וזאת חקת התורה*, Onkelus writes, *דא גזירת אורייתא*, this is the decree on the Torah [hinting that the Torah will be burned on the week that this *parashah* is read]. Another reason for this fast is because on this day, two large communities were decimated during the massacres of the years ת"ה ת"ט, as written in the *selichos* authored by the Shach..."

Today, most people don't fast. Nevertheless, we understand that if this is a day that the Torah was burned, *r'l*, it is also a day for us to take on our shoulders the yoke of Torah, to love Torah, and to make its study our life's mission. Whether we succeed or not isn't as relevant as our attempt to learn and to toil as much as we can.

Don't Give the *Yetzer Hara* a Foothold

The Midrash (*Tanchumah* 1) writes, "The Torah has 613 mitzvos, some are *חמורות*, severe, and some are *קלות* light, and people aren't cautious with the "light ones." They tread on them with their heels. Therefore, Dovid was afraid of the judgment. He said, 'Ribono Shel Olam, I am not afraid of the *חמורות*, severe transgressions of the Torah, because they are severe [and I will be cautious]. What am I afraid of? I am afraid of the *מצות הקלות*, the light mitzvos and light transgressions. I fear that perhaps I transgressed one of them, because they are light [in people's eyes]. And you say, *הוי זהיר*, that we should be cautious with the light sins like the severe ones."

Reb Yohonoson Eibshitz (*Yaaros Dvash* 1, *drush* 5) explains that Dovid was afraid because the small transgressions become stepping stones for the *yetzer hara* to lead us to greater sins.

The Ahavas Yisrael of Viznitz *zt'l* compared it to building a fence in order keep wild animals out from a field but

leaving one breach next to one of the gates. All the animals will walk around the gates and climb in from there. Similarly, there are precautions we must keep. If we are lax with even one of them, everything can be lost.

Another example is given by the Toldos Yaakov Yosef. He tells a story of a pauper who begs a wealthy person to allow him to buy a small room in his mansion. The wealthy person refuses. But the pauper continues to nudge until the wealthy person figured that he might be better off just selling him that small room. Perhaps then he will stop harassing him. They write up a deed, the money was paid, and he bought that small room.

The pauper used to come into that room just hang up his clothes. The wealthy person couldn't stop him, because that was their agreement.

One day, instead of hanging up clothes, he hung up a carcass. The stench was very strong, the wealthy person left the house, and that's how the pauper attained the entire mansion.

The *nimshal* is that the *yetzer hara* asks for only one thing, and people think that it is worthwhile to give in to that one thing, so the *yetzer hara* will stop bothering him. But that one matter can lead to many others, until the *yetzer hara* totally takes over his entire body.

In this week's *parashah* it states (21:26), *כי השבון עיר סיחון והוא נלחם במלך מואב הראשון ויקח את כל ארצו מידו*. This *pasuk* tells that Cheshbon used to be a Moabite city, but Sichon (the king of Emori) conquered it. Reb Yohonoson Eibshitz *zt'l* (*Yaaras Dvash* vol.1 *Drush* 5) explains that Cheshbon was a relatively small city, and the Moabites didn't consider it necessary to protect it - which made it easy for Sichon to conquer it. After Cheshbon was conquered, and Sichon was already inside Moav's territory, Sichon was able to conquer the entire country.

The next *pasuk* (21:27) states, *על בן יאמרו המושלים*, *באו השבון*, and the Gemara (*Bava Basra* 78:) says

that this *pasuk* implies the importance of making a *cheshbon hanefesh* (to check one's deeds, to see what is good and what needs repairs).

What is the connection between the war against Cheshbon and making a *cheshbon hanefesh*? Reb Yohonoson Eibshitz explains that the war against Cheshbon teaches us that we shouldn't give in to the *yetzer hara's* requests, not even the relatively small ones, because they become stepping stones to greater conquests of the *yetzer hara*.

The Chovas HaLevavos (*Yichud HaMaaseh* ch.5) writes, "You must know that your greatest enemy in the world is the *yetzer hara*, who is mixed within the strengths of your soul and who participates in all your feelings. He knows all your thoughts and all your secrets, and he is your advisor... You are sleeping and he is awake, plotting against you. You forget him, but he doesn't forget you. He dresses up like he's your friend who loves you, and tells you that you can rely on his counsel... but he is shooting his deadly arrows at you to uproot you from Olam HaBa... If you will rely on him and follow his will, he...will cause you to lose both worlds... Therefore, don't let any war occupy you other than this war... Think about this, my brothers: When you win your enemy once and a second time, he will stop waging war against you, because he knows you are stronger than him. But the *yetzer hara* doesn't give up, regardless if you won him one time or a hundred times... Therefore, Chazal say: 'Don't believe in yourself until the day you die.'"

(The next words of the Chovas HaLevavos are on the topic we are addressing):

"The *yetzer hara* is happy to catch you in even the smallest transgression, because he knows that this becomes a stepping stone to have you transgress greater sins. Therefore, it is proper that you should be cautious from him, and don't fill any of his requests.

The smallest of his conquests should be in your eyes like a great conquest..."

Our discussion also applies to the precautions and guidelines that the *chachamim* of our present generation set for us. Consider the following *mashal*, told by Maharam Tzvi *zt'l* (Reb Moshe Zvi Weingarten, Rav of Shedlitz, from the *gedolei hador* 150 years ago):

Someone owned a large business. The factory took up an entire city block. Once, he had to travel with his family to another country for a month. He was worried that in his absence, the business will fall apart. For three nights before his trip he couldn't sleep, because he knew that if the person he appoints to take over the business doesn't do a good job, the entire business can collapse. On the day of the trip, he gave the keys over to this person and warned him to take good care of the business.

A month later, he returned to his factory. From a distance he saw that the lights were turned off, which wasn't a good sign. He found the person he appointed sleeping in a small room, outside the factory.

"What happened!? I gave you the keys so you can take care of the business!"

"Why are you so upset?" this man replied. "I lost the keys, but so what? How much do the keys cost? It's just a few pennies. What's the big deal?"

The big deal aren't the keys, but the business that collapsed because of it.

The *nimshal* is we must be cautious with the guidelines that the *chachamim* of our generation give us. Sometimes it might be something small, but negligence in these areas can result in great catastrophes.

Balak

Living without Complaints

The Mishnah (*Avos* 5:5) lists the ten miracles that took place in the Beis HaMikdash. The tenth miracle listed is: ולא אמר אדם לחברו צר לי המקום, שאלין בירושלים, "No one ever said to his friend: 'There's no place for me to sleep in Yerushalayim.'" Millions of people arrived at Yerushalayim for the *yomim tovim* Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos, yet there was room for everyone.⁸

In an innovative approach, the Chasam Sofer (vol.2 234) writes that it actually was crowded in Yerushalayim during the holidays. So, what was the miracle, and what is the intention of the Mishnah? The Chasam Sofer explains, "The miracle was that no one ever *complained* about the cramped quarters. They loved Hashem immensely, and Hashem planted a lot of joy in their hearts when they were in Yerushalayim, therefore, no one ever said that it was crowded. As the Gemara says, 'When our love was strong, we were able to sleep on a knife's blade...'"

The Kotzker *zt'l* also says that the miracle that occurred was that no one complained about the cramped quarters. The Kotzker's explanation comes along with the following discussion:

When Hashem opened the donkey's mouth, the donkey relayed Hashem's messages. The donkey wasn't only revealing its thoughts, concealed in the donkey's words, it was also telling Bilaam messages from Above. The donkey said to Bilaam (22:28), מה עשיתי לך כי הכתני זה שלש רגלים, "What did I do to you that you hit me שלש רגלים, three times?" The question is, why did the donkey

say שלש רגלים, and not the more common term שלש פעמים?

Rashi was bothered by that question, and he answers that the donkey was relaying the following message: "You are trying to uproot a nation that celebrates the three *regalim* (Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos)!" In other words, the donkey was saying, "How can you even consider uprooting the Jewish nation? Don't you know how special they are, for they go to the Beis HaMikdash three times a year!"

Why was this specific mitzvah singled out? The Jewish nation perform many mitzvos. The donkey could have said something like, "How dare you uproot a nation who wears tefillin" and the like.

The Kotzker *zt'l* answers that it states (22:26), ויוסף המלאך ה' עבדו ועמד מבקום צר אשר אין דרך לנטות, "The *malach* Hashem went to a narrow place, where one can't turn right or left... and Bilaam hit his donkey..." Bilaam was in a צר, a narrow place, and he immediately lost his patience and began hitting his donkey. The donkey told Bilaam the following message: "The Jewish nation is so much better than you! When you are in a cramped, narrow place for a moment, you lose your sanity and you begin hitting me. But about the Jewish nation it is said that none of them will complain when they go three times a year to the Beis HaMikdash. Millions of people will be in a small city, but no one will complain; not the residents, neither the visitors. How dare you try to uproot this special nation that is so much better than you?"

Indeed, how did the Jewish nation refrain from complaining, under those difficult circumstances? The answer is: When one knows that everything is from Hashem, it isn't hard for him to endure overcrowding

8. The Rashbatz writes that he saw this miracle occur in a beis medresh in Yerushalayim. Shavuos, people from all around would come to that beis medresh, yet there was plenty of room for everyone. The Chasam Sofer (vol.2 234) adds, "I also saw this wonder in a beis medresh in *chutz le'arets*, only I can't express the details because of the פריצי עמנו (the mockers in our nation)..."

or any other discomfort. He is being led by Hashem, so everything is good. These thoughts were on everyone's mind.

Yishuv HaDaas

Reb Moshe Kobriner zt'l wrote in a letter, "All the wealth of the world doesn't equal one moment of *yishuv hadaas* (tranquility and peace of mind) that the Jewish people have." It is so important to maintain one's peace of mind, and to avoid panic and fright. As we discussed above, we are being led by Hashem, and therefore there is nothing to fear.

Moav was very afraid of the Jewish nation, and in their panic, they sought solutions of how to be protect themselves? However, they didn't have anything to fear. Hashem commands us **אל תצור את מואב**, "don't cause distress for Moav." It is forbidden for the Jewish nation to wage war against Moav, so why were they afraid? But that is the nature of people, they create false premises, construe ideas that aren't true, and this causes them to panic and to be frightened. It happens to us, too. Fortunate are those who can maintain their tranquil peace of mind, always.⁹

Haman's plan was (*Esther* 9:24), **להמם ולאבדם**, "To confuse the Jewish nation and to annihilate them." The Nesivos Shalom zt'l (of Slonim) explains that Haman understood that he can only harm the Jewish nation after they lose their *yishuv hadaas*. Therefore, he sought to confuse them and to put them into a mode of panic.

This was also **בלעם** and **בלק**'s plan, as the *Zohar* (vol.3 199:) states that the first letters of their names spell **בלבל**, confusion. The last letters spell **עמלק**, because when one is confused, he can be influenced and harmed by Amalek, who weakens his *emunah*.

About Bilaam, it states (22:21), **ויקם בלעם בבקר**, "Bilaam got up in the morning." In contrast, about Avraham it states (*Bereishis* 22:3), **וישכם אברהם בבקר**, "Avraham woke up early in the morning." What is the difference between **ויקם** and **וישכם**, (waking up or getting up)?

The Lev Simchah zt'l (of Gur) explains that **ויקם** means he stood up from his bed, but it doesn't imply that he slept at night. **וישכם** implies that he had a night's sleep, and he awoke early to perform the *Akeidah*.

The difference between them is significant:

If Hashem tells someone to go sacrifice his child, that person won't be able to sleep at night. His emotions will be churning all night. He will be full of questions and uncertainties. But the Torah tells us that Avraham **וישכם**, awoke the next morning. This means he was able to sleep as usual. He was able to keep his daily schedule. This is because he had the attribute of **השתוות**, which means he accepted everything that Hashem does and decrees. Therefore, the information that he must slaughter his son didn't disrupt his life. *L'havdil*, when Bilaam conspired to curse the Jewish nation, he was so excited about the *aveirah* he was about to do, he couldn't sleep that night. Therefore, it states **ויקם בלעם**, that he got out of his bed, but it doesn't state **וישכם**, that he woke up.¹⁰

9. Why didn't Bilaam tell Balak, "You have nothing to fear. The Jewish nation may not make a war with Moav"? Perhaps it's because Bilaam wanted money – he wanted the job – so he didn't reveal the truth.

10. The Reishis Chachmah (*Shaar Ahavah*) tells a *mashal* of someone who was speaking with a king and someone comes in and smacks his face. He won't respond; he will remain silent. Because if the king sent him to hit him, what should he do? And if the king didn't send him, the king and his men will certainly punish this person for his imprudent deed, to hit someone who is speaking with the king.

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef zt'l (*Tzafnas Paaneiach, Mishpatim* ר"ה ע"ד י"ל) explains that this *mashal* is hinted to in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 16:8) **שוייתי ה' לנגדי תמיד**, I always see myself as though I am standing before the King. And therefore, **לכן שמחה ליבי ויגל כבודי**, I accept everything that happens to me with joy. When someone harms me, it

Above Witchcraft

Bilaam praised the Jewish nation in the following way (23:23): **כִּי לֹא נַחֵשׁ בִּיעֲקֵב וְלֹא קִסָּם**, בישראל, "There is no witchcraft or magic among the Jewish nation."

The Yeitav Lev *zt'l* explains that this means that magic and witchcraft doesn't affect us. And the reason is, **כַּעַת יֹאמֵר לִיעֲקֵב מִה**, **פַּעַל א"ל**, which means that whatever happens to us, we say that it was from Heaven. And when one believes that everything is from heaven, no forces can harm him. Because Hashem created forces in the world - such as the rules of nature and the power of sorcery - but above them all, is Hashem himself. When one recognizes that, nothing can harm him.

In our generation, witchcraft hardly exists. Tzaddikim say that its strength was abolished in the Baal Shem Tov's times. Nevertheless, there are other forces in the world that exists until today, such as the rules of nature (which indicate health, wealth, and other matters), and there's also the power that people can use to harm their fellow man. In this discussion we will discover how to abolish witchcraft, and most importantly for us, how to overcome all forces, so none of them can harm us.

The Sfas Emes (*Balak* תרל"ב) explains the *pasuk*, **הִנֵּה עַם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה כִסְּהוּ אֶת עֵין הָאָרֶץ**, "Behold a nation left Mitzrayim; they are covering the eyes of the earth..." The **עֵין הָאָרֶץ** can mean the earthly way of looking at things. We think that everything happens according to the rules of nature, but this nation says that everything is from Heaven. **וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב מִמּוֹלֵי**, Rashi explains that **מּוֹלֵי** comes from the word **בִּי אֲמִילֵם**, to destroy. Balak was saying, with their faith they will destroy us.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 67:) tells the following story:

A witch was once trying to take earth from under Reb Chaninah's feet to do *kishuf* with it. Reb Chanina told her, "If you succeed, go ahead and make your witchcraft [because I am not afraid of it]. Behold it says, **אֵין עוֹד**, מלברו, "There is no One other than Hashem." And therefore, witchcraft, and no other force, can harm him, if it wasn't Hashem's decree.

The Gemara asks, "But didn't Reb Yochanan say that witchcraft is called **כַּשְׁפִּים** because it stands for **כַּחַשׁ פְּמִלְיָא שֶׁל מַעְלָה**, that it denies the kingship of Heaven?" This seems to imply that witchcraft can work contrary to Hashem's will, *chas veshalom*.

The Gemara replies, "Reb Chanina is different, because he had many merits."

Rashi explains, "Heaven will be *moser nefesh* to save him."

When reading this Gemara, please don't get the wrong impression that witchcraft can even oppose Hashem's will, *chalilah*. The Nefesh HaChaim (3:12) writes that this is impossible. Nothing can go against Hashem's will.

The Nefesh HaChaim explains the Gemara as follows:

"Witchcraft is performed with impure forces...using *tamei* names... and through them, the witches can do things. They swear to the *tamei* forces...to do wonders that are contrary to the rules of nature... This is because the Creator, the Master of all, established that sorcery should be above and stronger than the rules of nature... Therefore, they have the ability to do things that oppose the nature that Hashem established from the beginning of Creation... When Chazal say, **שְׂמִכְחִישֵׁן פְּמִלְיָא שֶׁל מַעְלָה**, that they counter the rules of the heaven, this only means that they can override nature, which is drawn from the stars and

constellations of the heaven... But this doesn't mean, *chas veshalom*, that sorcery can do something that isn't [Hashem's will]. When one swears with holy names all their forces become completely annulled in a moment... Because it isn't their strength, *chas veshalom*, rather, אין עור מלברו , Hashem is the source of all forces. Furthermore, there is really nothing in the world other than Hashem's oneness. אין עור מלברו. Aside from Hashem there are no strengths - not *tumah* or any other power, or world, or creation, at all..."

In review, Hashem created a world that functions under the rules of nature. Hashem also established that witchcraft (the force of *tumah*) can override and act contrary to the rules of nature. But witchcraft was also created by Hashem. Ultimately, Hashem is in charge of everything, and nothing holds power against His will. When Chazal say that sorcery is כחש פמליא של מעלה, denies the kingship of heaven, it only means that sorcery is above the rules of nature, which the rules of nature are מעלה, based on the formations of the stars and constellations in heaven.

The Nefesh HaChaim continues:

"Chazal tell the story about the woman who was trying to take earth from under Reb Chanina's feet. He told her "Take it if you want because you won't succeed. There is nothing but Hashem, אין עור מלברו. The Gemara asks, but didn't Reb Yochanan say that witchcraft denies the chariot of Heaven? Reb Chanina is different, because he has many merits.

"It's certain that Reb Chanina didn't consider himself worthy due to his Torah studies and many good deeds. [He was humble, and he didn't rely on his good deeds to protect him from sorcery.] Rather, as we explained, the chariot of *tumah* doesn't have its own strength, *chalilah*. It is only that Hashem established that their strengths should be above the rules of nature (of the stars and constellations), and therefore, with sorcery, people are able to change the rules

of nature. But without Hashem, they too are nothing at all. Reb Chanina didn't trust his holy merits (Torah and good deeds) but he checked himself and he saw that his faith is complete and pure, and he knew אין עור מלברו, that nothing at all has a power in the world without Hashem... Therefore, he was certain that the witchcraft, drawn from the chariot of *tumah*, couldn't harm him. And he told her, 'You won't succeed. Behold it states, אין עור מלברו, there is no other but Hashem.'" Because when one knows that everything is from Hashem, nothing can harm him. Reb Chanina's emunah was perfect, he knew that אין עור מלברו, everything is from Hashem. Therefore, he knew that the sorcery couldn't harm him.

The following lines of the Nefesh HaChaim are renowned, for it is the *segulah* that he taught, which can save a person from all troubles and no one and no force can harm him:

"The truth is, it is a great concept and a wonderful *segulah* to remove all *tzaros*, so that the plans of others shouldn't have the power to harm him, and they won't even make an impression. When a person implants in his heart that 'Behold Hashem is the true God. There is no power in the world other than His. All worlds are filled with His simple Oneness.' He annuls and ignores all strengths or plotting. He subjugates and attaches his pure thoughts solely to the one Creator. Hashem will help him that, indeed, all other strengths and desires of the world won't be able to harm him at all.

"This is also the intention of the *Zohar* (*hakdamah* p.12.) 'To know Hashem... When one knows that everything is Hashem, and he won't think that there is any other power, then even the Sitra Achara will leave the world.' Understand this. Also, he can decree something, and it will happen - wondrous miracles beyond nature - because he has subjugated his heart to Hashem, and for Hashem it is just as easy to act according to nature that He established or to act the opposite of nature. This is how Reb Chanina

[ben Dosa] would decree and act according to his desire, all the time – [even when it was] the opposite of nature. As he once said, "The One who said oil should burn should say vinegar will burn." He meant that for Hashem, both are possible. And Hashem did that for him. There are many other

examples too, of the miracles that Reb Chanina ben Dosa performed."

Similarly, in the above mentioned Gemara, Reb Chanina [ben Dosa] wasn't afraid of witchcraft, because his recognition that everything is from Hashem subjugated all forces, and only Hashem's will prevails.¹¹

11. The Nefesh HaChaim's descendants practiced this wonderful *segulah*, and they told the miracles that happened to them. The Nefesh HaChaim's (Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l*) great-grandson was the Beis HaLevi of Brisk *zt'l*. His son was Reb Chaim Brisker *zt'l*, and his son was Reb Velvel, the Brisker Rav *zt'l*. In times of distress they focused on *emunah* that everything is from Hashem, and nothing has any power above His will. These are the miracles that happened to them:

The Jewish section of Brisk had gates at both ends. One day, the police closed both gates so no one could leave, and they began checking each store, one by one, to see who was selling products without reporting it to the tax collectors.

One shop owner ran to the Beis HaLevi and told him that he's afraid the police might catch him. The Beis HaLevi told him to stay with him, and together they studied that section of Nefesh HaChaim, where, because the Nefesh HaChaim assures that the awareness that everything is from Hashem is a *segulah* for protection. They kept reviewing this piece, over and over again, until people came to them to tell them that the police had left. Miraculously they forgot to check his store.

The miracle was clothed within the rules of nature: The police were checking store after store. When they reached this man's store, they decided to stop for a break. They made a little mark on his shop to remember where they were up to. When they returned, they thought the sign implied that they had already checked that store, so they moved on to the next store. This is how he was saved. It was in the merit of the recognition that everything is from Hashem, and no one can harm him if it isn't Hashem's will.

The second story happened with the Beis HaLevi and his son, Reb Chaim of Brisk *zt'l*. The Russians conscripted Reb Chaim Brisker *zt'l* to the czar's army. The Beis HaLevi traveled with his son to the army headquarters, and throughout this trip they studied the *segulah* of the Nefesh HaChaim. An army doctor gave Reb Chaim a medical checkup and said that he was exempt from the army, without offering an explanation.

The third story happened with Reb Velvel *zt'l*, the Brisker Rav. When the Nazis invaded Poland, the Brisker Rav acquired false passports, and traveled with his family from Warsaw to Russia. As they neared the Russian border, a Nazi ran towards them shouting wildly. Just then a Russian soldier appeared, and the Nazi fled.

The Brisker Rav told his family, "The entire time that we traveled, I focused on the Nefesh HaChaim's *segulah*. This is how we were able to travel the long distance from Warsaw to the Russian border without any disturbance. However, when we reached the border, I felt confident that we were safe and I forgot to focus on the Nefesh HaChaim's counsel. That is when the Nazi appeared. I quickly refocused on the *segulah*, I began thinking about how everything is from Hashem, and no one can harm us if it isn't Hashem's decree, and the Nazi ran away."