

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Shoftim



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Torah Wellsprings - Shoftim

Temimus

There was once a yid, by the name of Yitzchak who learned in Kollel Geletzia in Yerushalayim. There was another member of the kollel, Peretz, who always sought to embarrass Yitzchak and to inconvenience him. Reb Yitzchak would tell Reb Dovid Biderman of Lelov zt'l about his struggles in the kollel, how he suffered from the sharp tongue of the cruel and jealous Peretz. Reb Dovid Biderman advised him to abide by Chazal's counsel (Gittin 36:) הנעלבין ואינן עולבים שומעים חרפתן ואין משיבין ואין משיבין, that one should accept shame and not answer back.

Reb Yitzchak followed Reb Dovid Biderman's advice, though it wasn't easy because the insults came often and were very painful. When he felt that he couldn't bear it any longer, he returned to Reb Dovid Biderman, and Reb Dovid Biderman would once again encourage him to keep silent and not answer back.

Yitzchak's children were getting older; it was time to marry them off. But every shidduch that came up was quickly turned down. Someone was slandering him and his children, and he knew who it was. Peretz was ruining it for his children by badmouthing him to the prospective matches. Reb Yitzchak had a son and a daughter who were both of marriageable age. Peretz worked very hard, making sure to speak lashon hara about the boy and the girl, preventing any shidduch from happening. Reb Yitzchak went to Reb Dovid Biderman, but his response was the same: Yitzchak shouldn't fight back; Hashem will help.

With Hashem's help, both of his children became engaged on the same day, to the same family. (In Yerushalayim, this type of shidduch is called a bayt, an exchange.) Reb Yitzchak's son and daughter became engaged

to the son and daughter of another Yerushalami family. Peretz, you can be sure, tried to ruin those shidduchim too, but this time he wasn't successful.

Now Yitzchak needed money for the two weddings. At that time, it was the norm for people to go to Reb Moshe from Vienna to ask for donations. Yitzchak traveled to Vienna where he found many people waiting to speak to Reb Moshe, Yitzchak's appointment was scheduled for a few days later.

In the meanwhile, Reb Yitzchak rented a hotel room. On the morning of his appointment, Reb Yitzchak packed his belongings. He figured that he would take them with him to Reb Moshe's home, and from there, he would begin his voyage back home, to Yerushalayim.

Before leaving the hotel, he went to the bathroom and found a wallet filled with money on the floor. According to Halachah, he was permitted to keep the wallet filled with money because most people in the hotel weren't Jewish (אבידת עכו"ם מותר, Choshen Mishpat 266:1) but he feared what would happen to him if he was caught with the money. He could be arrested for not giving it over to the police. He acted quickly. He threw the wallet into the toilet, and he mixed the wealth that he found with his own money. Now, even if he would be caught, the wallet wouldn't be on him, and the amount of money that he would be found carrying wouldn't be the exact amount that was in the wallet. Now all he had to do was leave the hotel as quickly as possible. He gathered his bundles and headed to the front door.

But his fears were actualized. Before he was able to escape from the hotel, the hotel was surrounded by police, and no one was

permitted to leave. The wealthy person who lost the wallet called the police and the police were checking each person as they searched for the money.

The yid returned to his room, fearing the worst and hoping for the best.

The police came to his room, and they asked him to show them his money. He gave them his wallet. The amount was almost identical to the amount that the wealthy person lost in the hotel. But it wasn't the same amount, and the wallet wasn't among his possessions.

The police asked him, "Why does a poor person like yourself have so much money?"

Reb Yitzchak replied, "I don't know why you think I'm poor. I am very wealthy. I run the Kollel Galitzia in Yerushalayim, and I am involved with many businesses. A lot of money passes through my hands all the time. This amount of money isn't anything unusual for me."

The police didn't know what a kollel was and what type of businesses he was referring to, so for the meanwhile, they locked him up in prison, and they sent a telegram to the Vienna counsel in Eretz Yisrael instructing them to find out about Reb Yitzchak.

A shliach (messenger) of the counsel came to Kollel Galitzia, and whom did he meet there? Peretz! They asked him, "What's the story with Yitzchak who learns in this kollel? Does he have a lot of money, and does he run businesses, or is he a pauper?"

Peretz figured that Reb Yitzchak was collecting money in Vienna, and the wealthy

people in Vienna wanted to know whether Reb Yitzchak was legitimately poor. Peretz thought, "Now I have another opportunity to harm Reb Yitzchak," and he said, "He isn't poor at all! He has plenty of money. He has businesses..."

When this report reached Vienna, the police let him out free.

Reb Yitzchak returned to Yerushalayim and he made a lechayim in the Kollel Galitzia, to thank Hashem for the miracle that happened to him. He said, "I know that someone from this kollel helped me by giving over the right information. I don't know who it was, but whoever it was, I thank him."

Reb Yitzchak was wealthy for the rest of his life, and until today, his descendants are renowned baalei tzedakah.

This story shows us the reward for those who don't answer back, and it also teaches us that the very thing you think is a problem can become the root of your salvation.

It states in this week's parashah (18:13) תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך, be a *tamim* with Hashem. *Temimus* means to trust and to rely on Hashem. *Temimus* is to believe that we are in Hashem's caring hands, and therefore everything is for our good. In this story, Reb Yitzchak thought Peretz was harming him, and he discovered that Peretz was doing him the greatest favor. Peretz (though unintentionally) saved Reb Yitzchak from imprisonment, and enabled him to keep all the money he found.¹

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

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

There was a person who owned a dog; they were always together. When his master suffered a heart attack, and an ambulance came to bring him to the hospital, the dog came along. Even in the hospital room, the

The Sifsei Tzaddik (Mikeitz 15) writes that a person once said to Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa zt'l, "Every morning I say the brachah *לִי כָל צְרִיכֵי שַׁעֲשֵׂה לִּי*, 'who arranges for me all my needs.' But I don't feel that I can say this brachah, because I don't have all my needs – I am so poor. I think that if I say this brachah, it is a *ברכה לבטלה*."

Rebbe Bunim told him, "You have one need: to accept every situation that Hashem arranges for you with love. Therefore, Hashem is giving you all your needs, for your need is to go through these hardships and to accept them all with love."

The gaon, Reb Naftali Neventzal zt'l survived the holocaust. He was the only survivor of his family. A shidduch was suggested to him, and he thought it was perfect for him. He did his hishtadlus, but the shidduch didn't happen. Reb Naftali told the Chazon Ish about the shidduch, and asked whether he should do more hishtadlus.

The Chazon Ish replied, "You did enough hishtadlus. Now, leave it in Hashem's hands, and whatever will be will be."

Reb Naftali followed this advice, and indeed, the shidduch didn't happen. Eventually, he became engaged to another girl, the girl that was destined from Heaven that he should marry.

He had children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren. Once, he was davening *vesikin*, like every day, and the gabbai gave him an *aliyah*. After the *aliyah*, the gabbai made a *לְיִלּוּדָת*, *מי שברך לילודת*, and everyone shouted *mazal tov* joyously because later that day would be the bris of his great-grandson.

After the tefillah, Reb Naftali told the gabbai that he shouldn't have given him an *aliyah*. Reb Naftali explained that there was another elderly person in the beis medresh who was childless. The *aliyah* and the honor they gave him might arouse the jealousy and distress of that elderly man.

Then, Reb Naftali added the following:

"This elderly man is married to the woman that I wanted to marry, many years ago, until the Chazon Ish advised me to stop trying and to let Hashem decide. Now I understand why the shidduch didn't work for me. If I married her, I would be childless all these years..."

The lesson is: Trust in Hashem and live with *temimus*. When something doesn't go your way, know that this is the best situation for you.

The Chofetz Chaim (*Shem Olam, Shemiras HaShabbos 3, hagahah*) writes, "Man's intelligence is limited and therefore, don't question Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You must have *temimus* and believe that everything Hashem does is for the good, for Hashem never does anything bad. If you will believe, you will certainly merit seeing how everything was for your good."

Some More on *Temimus*

The *ת* of *תמים* (in *אלקד עם ה' אלקדך*) is written large (according to an old custom). The Kotkzer zt'l explains that the large *ת* hints that there is room for everyone to enter. Everyone can have *temimus*.² And the large *ת* hints that one should be whole with *temimus*, with all

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

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

his 248 limbs. No part of his body should be without *temimus*.

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

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

The holy Rizhiner zt'l told his chassidim the following story:

There was once a chassid who had many furs in his store and was having a hard time selling them. One morning, a messenger of a minister came into the store and said that he wants to buy all the furs. But the chassid hadn't yet davened *shacharis*, and he didn't want to sell them before *shacharis*. He didn't want to begin explaining to the messenger that he doesn't do business before *shacharis*, so he quoted an exorbitant price for the furs, assuming the messenger would leave. But when he stated the high price, the messenger was prepared to pay it. So, he raised the price even higher. The messenger said, "I see you don't want to sell them" and left.

Generally, stories like this end with a miracle.

The Rizhiner told his chassidim, "I see you are silent and waiting to hear the end of the story. But that is the end of the story. His *mesirus nefesh* to keep Halachah is the story that I wanted to tell you. He wasn't thinking about what he will gain from this *mesirus nefesh*, and neither should you think about what you gain from your *mesirus nefesh*."

This is Rashi's intention with the words, ולא תחקור אחר העתידות, "don't investigate to know what the future will be," because that isn't important. We do Hashem's will with *temimus*.

Judge Favorably

In this week's parashah it states (16:18) וישפטו את העם משפט צדק, "The judges will judge the nation correctly."

Similarly, each individual must judge his fellow man favorably, as it states (Vayikra 19:15) בצדק תשפוט עמיתך, "Judge your fellow man correctly." This means giving your fellow man the benefit of the doubt. If you aren't sure whether he sinned or not, assume that he didn't.

Reb Yaakov of Pshvorsk zt'l asked why the pasuk doesn't say לבף זכות תשפוט עמיתך "judge your fellow man favorably." Why does it state בצדק תשפוט עמיתך "judge your fellow man correctly"?

Reb Yaakov answered that many times when you give your fellow man the benefit of the doubt, and you judge him favorably, deep in your heart, you think that he really is guilty. You are just following the directives of the Torah, which obligates us to judge him favorably, but you don't believe that this is the reality. The Torah tells us that it isn't so. When you give your fellow man the benefit of the doubt, those are the times when you are judging matters as they indeed are. בצדק תשפוט עמיתך, when you judge favorably, you are judging correctly. Because very often, the truth is that the person isn't guilty, and your favorable judgment is בצדק, the correct judgment.

Sometimes to judge your fellow man favorably, you have to come up with some very innovative logic - sometimes even twisted logic. The Ponovitzer Rav zt'l said, כל פעל ה' למענהו (Mishlei 16:4), 'Everything that Hashem created is for His honor.' Everything created in the world can be used for Hashem's service. So why did Hashem create *krumer svaros* (twisted logic)? It is to explain a Jew who appears *krum*, crooked, and the only way to explain that he might be righteous is to come up with some very innovative ideas and to use some twisted and unusual logic.

Reb Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said that he likes pilpul (an in-depth approach to Torah study) because, with this approach, one can explain how every yid, is righteous and good.

A renowned rosh yeshiva was in chutz le'aretz, collecting money for his yeshiva. At one address, he showed pictures of the yeshiva and the bachurim to a wealthy baal tzedakah. The baal tzedakah replied, "I can tell that this is a very special yeshiva. I am honored that the rosh yeshiva came to my home. Excuse me as I go to another room to get money. I have some money in this room, but I want to give a more generous donation."

The rosh yeshiva asked, "Until you return, can I look at one of your Gemaras?"

The baal tzedakah gave him permission.

When the wealthy man returned, his face was crimson red from anger and he said, "I changed my mind. I will not give you anything. When you showed me the pictures of the yeshiva, I trusted you. I truly believed that you were the rosh yeshiva. But now I see that it is all a lie. You don't even know how to read a Gemara!"

The baal tzedakah was upset because he saw that the rosh yeshiva was reading the Gemara upside down, and he figured that he didn't know how to learn at all.

The rosh yeshiva corrected him. "As a child, I lived in Yemen. As there weren't many sefarim there, I learned Gemara together with three other students. Each student read from another angle. I read from the other side, and I got accustomed to reading upside down. Now it is easier for me to read that way. If you want, you can test me. Take out a sefer, and I will read it upside down, and you will read as you do, and we will see who can read it better."

The wealthy man took him up on the challenge, and he discovered that it was true. The rosh yeshiva could read better than him with the sefer held upside down.

The baal tzedakah excused himself once again, and he went to his other room to get even more money. He gave a very large donation to atone for judging the rosh yeshiva negatively.

We learn from this story to give people the benefit of the doubt, and when we do, those are often the times that we are judging them correctly. Another lesson that we can take from this story is that when we see someone doing something that seems backward or upside down to you, realize that he may be thinking straight. It looks upside down to you, but not to him.

A mashgiach of a yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael told me that he was once delivering a mussar drashah in the yeshiva, and a bachur came in fifteen minutes late holding a cup of tea in his hand, as though he was the owner of the world and could do whatever he wants.

The mashgiach judged him harshly, but he held back from rebuking him on the spot. Then he saw that the bachur took out the tea bag and put it on his eye. The bachur's eye was infected, and he was using the tea bag to cure it.

The mashgiach realized that he had erred when judging the boy negatively. Now he saw that the bachur was righteous. Many other bachurim, in his situation, would have said, "My eyes hurt, so I won't go to the mashgiach's drashah today." But this bachur wanted to hear the mashgiach's shiur, so he took care of his health as he listened to the shiur.

Someone received an invitation to a neighbor's chasunah in the mail, but the invitation wasn't inside the envelope! He understood that the baal simchah was hinting to him that he doesn't want him to come to the chasunah. He repeated this incident to Reb Ben Tzion Feldman shlita, and he said that he was angry at the neighbor for insulting him. He said that from now on, he would act unfriendly to him, too.

Reb Feldman told him that he must give his neighbor the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he forgot to put in the invitation.

"Did you ever receive an envelope for a chasunah, and there was no invitation inside?"

Reb Feldman admitted that it had never happened to him, "Nevertheless, you are obligated to give your neighbor the benefit of the doubt."

Later that day, this man opened up a new batch of mail, and there was an envelope there, inviting him to someone else's chasunah, and they forgot to put the invitation inside! He understood that Hashem was showing him that we must always judge our fellow man favorably.

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

It states (*Avos* 2:5) אל תדין את חברך עד שתגיע למקומו, "Don't judge your fellow man until you reach his place." The Chosid Yaavatz explains that this means you should imagine yourself being in his place. Ask yourself whether you would act any differently than he did if you were in his situation.

We quote:

"If someone embarrassed and disgraced you because of something that you did to him, don't answer back until you ask yourself: 'How would I react to someone who did to me as I did to him?' Judge yourself. Perhaps you would have disgraced and embarrassed that person even more than he shamed you."

Judge Favorably and You will be Judged Favorably from Heaven

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 127:) says, "Whoever judges his fellow man favorably will be judged favorably from Heaven." The Gemara writes examples of Tana'im, who said, "Just as you judged me favorably, may Hashem judge you favorably."

The Magid of Mezritz zt'l explained that this is because Hashem acts towards people the same way they act to other people. Since they are judging others favorably, Hashem will judge them favorably.

It states (*Avos* 2:1) דע מה למעלה ממך עין רואה ואוזן שומעת וכל מעשך בספר נכתב. The Magid of Mezritz zt'l explained, דע, know that מה למעלה מה what happens Above in heaven, ממך, is from you. עין רואה, if you look at the faults of others, Heaven will look at your faults. אוזן שומעת if you listen to gossip, heaven will listen to bad things about you. וכל מעשך בספר נכתב, if everything wrong that people do to you are never erased from your memory...then Heaven will not forget any of your faults. Instead, one should see, hear, and remember only the good in others, because then heaven will have that attitude towards him, too."

The Kedushas Levi writes on the pasuk לך, שופטים ושומרים תתן, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu judges the Jewish nation on the day of judgment with compassion and kindness. But we must arouse Hashem's compassion and kindness. How do we do that? When we do deeds of loving-kindness, and we judge every Yid לכה זכות, favorably, this arouses the same attitude in heaven, and Hashem will judge all Yidden favorably.

"This is the translation of the pasuk, שופטים ושומרים תתן לך. The pasuk is telling us that we should prepare the שופטים, judgment of heaven... ושפטו את העם משפט צדק, by judging our fellow men favorably... Because the way a person acts to others is the way Heaven will act towards him."

The Tzlach writes, "Those who fear Hashem should accept upon themselves the mitzvos of loving their fellow man and judging everyone favorably. When they do so, all their aveiros will be forgiven. They won't need to fast or to afflict themselves, because...this will atone for all their aveiros."

Eglah Arufah: Give Chizuk to Your Fellow Man

At the end of the *parashah*, we study the laws of *eglah arufah*. A man is found murdered in a field, and no one knows who killed him. The scholars of the closest town go to the area and they say, *ידינו לא שפכו את הדם הזה*, "Our hands didn't spill his blood..." (21:7).

Rashi writes, "Does anyone suspect that the scholars... were the murderers? The answer is the scholars were saying that they didn't see him and allow him to travel without food and an escort."³

Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen *zy'a* explains as follows:

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

These ideas apply to many situations in our daily lives. People need *chizuk*, support, encouragement, and it is up to others to help them. Therefore, smile to people, say kind words, as this will give them strength and courage to face their struggles in life.

The city closest to the corpse brings the *eglah arufah*. If the body is found precisely between two cities, and it is hard to determine which city is the closest, the *beis din* of

Yerushalayim measures the distances and determines which city is closer.

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

Reb Tzaddok HaCohen explains that there are three ways to determine who is going through a hard time and needs support and a kind word. Reb Eliezer ben Azarya says we measure from the throat. If they tell you about their hardships, it is a *mitzvah* to try to help them and to encourage them.

Reb Akiva says that you measure from the nose because many people don't want to speak about what they are going through, but if their nose is turned down, you understand that they need *chizuk*, and it is a *mitzvah* to talk to them and to encourage them.

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

Success in Elul

What should a person do to succeed in his *teshuvah* in Elul?

(1) *Bitachon*

3. When a person travels, it is proper to give him some food (*צדקה לדרך*) so he doesn't need to stop traveling to look for food, which sometimes can be dangerous. It is also important to walk him (for at least four cubits) as this creates a spiritual protection for the person when he travels. The elders were saying that they weren't guilty of transgressing these points, and therefore, they aren't responsible for the murder.

We can't do anything on our own. We always need Hashem's help. This also applies to teshuvah. We won't succeed on our own. But when we trust in Hashem, we will succeed.

The Avodas Pnim (Michtav 74) writes, "אלול" is roshei teivos for "ליגמר איניש והדר ליסבר". The Avodas Pnim explains Chazal's words as a lesson in teshuvah:

גומר בדעתו, "ליגמר איניש", you should first decide in your heart that you won't sin again. והדר ליסבר, and then trust in Hashem to help you. ליסבר means to trust in Hashem as it states (Tehillim 146" שברו על ה' אלקיו, His trust is in Hashem, his G-d."

The Avodas Pnim explains that even you have a firm will to improve, chances are that you will revert to being as you were before. However, with Bitachon, you can succeed in your teshuvah.⁵

The Navi (Shmuel 1, 30) tells that Dovid HaMelech went to war against Amalek with six hundred soldiers. Four hundred of his soldiers went to the battlefield, while two hundred warriors remained behind. When they won the battle, the four hundred soldiers claimed that the spoils of war should go only to them because only they went to

war. Dovid told them, *כי בחלק הירד במלחמה ובחלק, הישב על הכלים יחדו יחלקו*, that the spoils should be divided evenly between them. Why?

The Malbim explains, "Dovid told them, 'If we won the war by our strength, I would agree with you. But it wasn't so, my brothers. We didn't do anything. Hashem won this war and gave us all the spoils... And since Hashem won this war, and we didn't win it with our strength, the logic is the opposite. These people who didn't run after the enemy, because they trusted in Hashem that He would save them, their merit is greater than those who went to war and didn't have this level of bitachon."

Similarly, we win the war against the yetzer hara primarily with bitachon.

The importance of having bitachon for success in one's teshuvah is stated in this week's parashah:

The Torah says *כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך וראית סוס ורכב עם רב ממך לא תירא מהם כי ד' אלקיך עמך*, "When you go out to war against your enemy, and you see horses, chariots, a nation that is greater than yours, don't be afraid of them, because Hashem your G-d is with you..." (Devarim 20:1).⁶

4. Literally, these words mean that one first learns Torah superficially, and after he covered a lot of ground, he can go back to attain deeper understanding.

5. It states (Devarim 30:2, 6) *ושבת עד ה' אלקיך... וזמל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך*, "You will return to Hashem...and Hashem will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children." Hashem completes our attempts for teshuvah. We do what we can, and we trust in Hashem to complete the teshuvah for us.

Bederech tzachus:

Someone said to a rav, "I heard that being a sandek is mesugal for wealth. People are honoring you with sandekas all the time. Perhaps one time you can give me the opportunity to do sandekas, so I can also earn wealth."

The rav replied, "You can be a sandek for yourself. Because Hashem is the mohel and He circumcises your heart. You can be the sandek at your own bris!"

6. According to the *passuk's* simple translation, it is a powerful lesson in *bitachon*. As the Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 3:32) writes, "This *passuk* is teaching us that when one sees danger approaching, he should trust in Hashem's salvation. Trust in Hashem, as it says *אך קרוב ליראיו ישעו*, "It is close for Hashem to bring salvation to those who fear Him" (*Tehillim* 85). And it says (in this week's *haftarah*) *מי את ותיראי מאנוש ימות*, 'For the righteous like yourself, why should you be afraid of a human being whose end is death?' (*Yeshayah* 51:12)."

The Or HaChaim explains that the *passuk* is alluding to the greatest war of all, the war against the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hara* is stronger than people for three reasons: (1) He has more experience in this battle than we do, (2) Human nature desires those things that the *yetzer hara* tries to entice us in them, (3) after a person commits many sins, the *yetzer hara* becomes even stronger than before. With these points against us, it seems we will never be able to do *teshuvah*. The *passuk*, however, tells us not to worry.

The Or HaChaim writes, "It is true that if you would be battling with your strength, that you don't have the strength to win this war, but since *ר' אלקיך עמך*, Hashem is with you, His great strength will save you..."¹⁷

Similarly, the Yismach Yisrael (*Vayishlach* 5) writes, "Even when according to man's perception there is no cure to the ills of his soul, he should nonetheless believe and trust in Hashem's divine kindness and the Creator's endless greatness... And with Hashem's compassion, He will also help me, the lowest person of all..."¹⁸

Rebbe Mottele Slonimer *zy'a* (*Maamar Mordechai* p.342) tells the following story: Two *tzaddikim* once made a pact that whoever dies first must come in a dream to his friend to tell him about his judgment.

One of them was *niftar*, and soon afterward, he came to his friend in a dream. He said, "When the heavenly court reviewed my deeds, they saw that everything was perfect. But I had one sin, the sin of *shochad* (taking bribes).⁹ Because once, when I was serving as the head of the *beis din*, one of the parties placed money in my pocket without me knowing. For this sin, I was told that I must go to Gehinom. I told the court that I don't want to go there, so they brought me to a huge building, gave me a small hammer, and said, 'Demolish this building with the hammer. When you finish, you can go to Gan Eden.'

"I was devastated. It seemed that I would be working on knocking down the building for many years. It was a huge building, and I only had a small hammer to work with. But then I thought: 'Why did I study Torah and keep the mitzvos throughout my life? It was because I wanted to do Hashem's will. Well, right now, it is Hashem's will that I break this large building with a hammer. So why should I be upset? This is Hashem's will, and I will do it with joy.' With a joyous heart, I raised the hammer and hit the building with all my might. The entire building collapsed, and I was immediately brought to my place in Gan Eden."

This story reminds us that we just have to start on the path of *teshuvah* and attempt

7. The Or HaChaim explains the *pasuk* like this:

כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך, when you go out to war against the *yetzer hara*, *וראית סוס*, the horse represents the *yetzer hara* who is trained in warfare, *ורכב*, this represents the human body, whose composition (*הרכב*) desires sin and forbidden pleasures, *עם רב ממך*, implies that the strength of the *yetzer hara* became increased since the person listened to him so many times in the past. How can one conquer this great force? How can one change his ways?

The answer is *לא תירא מהם*, don't be afraid *כי ר' אלקיך עמך*, because Hashem is with you.

8. Someone said to Reb Yisrael Salanter *zy'a*, "I don't think I'll ever do *teshuvah*. I'm set in my ways and I can't change."

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

9. The prohibition of taking a bribe is also stated in this week's parashah (17:19) *ולא תקח שחד*.

to do Hashem's will, and then Hashem will help us succeed.

(2) Recognize your Level

Three people came to the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz zt'l, seeking to do teshuvah. One of them said to the Divrei Chaim, "I want to do teshuvah."

The Divrei Chaim replied, "If that's what you want, do so. Why did you come to me?"

The second also expressed that he wanted to do teshuvah. The Divrei Chaim told him, "So do that."

The third person said to the Divrei Chaim, "It is already Elul, and I am not yet inspired to do teshuvah." The Divrei Chaim worked with him and taught him what he should do.

Perhaps the uniqueness of the third person was his honesty. He admitted what level he was on, and the Divrei Chaim worked with him to raise him higher. Because you can't improve and you can't do teshuvah if you imagine yourself at a level that you really aren't there.

So, first recognize who you are: your strengths, your weaknesses, and what you truly want to accomplish with your teshuvah. That will help you make the right kabalos that will lead you to *teshuvah sheleimah*.

(3) Do What You Can

What is the difference between buying boots in the wintertime, when there's a blizzard going on, to buying boots before the winter begins?

The difference is in how picky you will be. If you have time, you will be buying the boots that are most comfortable and suitable for your needs. If it's an emergency, and you need boots right away, you will buy whatever you find.

The nimshal is, throughout the year, Hashem might say to us, "Your teshuvah isn't sincere enough. It isn't perfect enough. We'll wait for a better teshuvah." But now

it's Elul, and there's no time to wait. So Hashem will accept whatever teshuvah we manage to do.

Or, we can tell a different nimshal:

Throughout the year, one might take time choosing where he wants to improve and how he will go about doing teshuvah. But when it's Elul, there's no time for too much contemplation. We have to choose our path in teshuvah quickly, because if not now, when?

This is as it's written *דבר בעתו מה טוב* (*Mishlei* 15:23). The Rebbe of Tosh zt'l explained *דבר בעתו*, when something is in the right time (like now that it's Elul and it is the time for *teshuvah*) *מה טוב*, whatever one does, *טוב*, is good.

(4) Learning from a Ship at Sea

The Arizal said that the *passuk* *הנותן בים דרך*, "Who places a path in the sea" (*Yeshayahu* 43:16) alludes to Elul. We understand from this that a ship sailing at sea is a parable to the teshuvah that we do in Elul.

Reb Akiva Eigar (letter 9) quoted a *מאמר* *ההכנס*, a saying of the wise: Thousands of ships have sailed the sea, but no one has ever paved a path there.

This *passuk*, *הנותן בים דרך*, "Who places a path in the sea" is therefore difficult because there aren't any paths in the sea.

We can answer that when one is at sea, he needs to chart his own route because there is no set route to follow. There are basic rules that he should abide by (such as to learn how to use a compass), but to a large extent, he must navigate the path to his destination on his own. This is the reason this *passuk* alludes to Elul. Everyone has his own mission in life, and everyone must forge their own path of *teshuvah*. The path that works for one might not work for another. Everyone has to find his way (based on his talents, tests, and role that Hashem gave him in life). There are basic tips that everyone uses to help them navigate the sea of repentance – for example, to make times for contemplating

his deeds, to say Tehillim, etc. – but to a large extent, one needs to jump into the *teshuvah* process, and seek his way on his own.

We can offer a second explanation to explain why Elul is compared to a ship at sea. When a ship travels in a sea, the blue water turns foamy white, marking the ship's trail. But moments later, all one sees is the blue sea. The trail is gone. This hints to *teshuvah*, which cleanses us from our past, until no evidence remains.

Now, for a third explanation: When one is on a ship, and discovers that he's going in the wrong direction, he can quite easily turn around in the right direction. However, when one is driving a car in a city or on a highway, and he discovers that he's going the wrong way, he might need to travel several blocks or several miles before he's able to turn around and go in the right direction. Elul and *teshuvah* are compared to a path in the sea because when one discovers that he's headed in the wrong direction, he can easily turn around to the right path. It doesn't take long to improve and to begin going on the right track.

Teshuvah in Elul

The Yeitav Lev zt'l teaches: When you do *teshuvah*, the *roshei teivos* of אלול will be ומל Hashem will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children...' and also אהוב למעלה ונחמד למטה (beloved Above and desired below). But if he doesn't do *teshuvah*, his *roshei teivos* will be הכבדתי את לבו ואת לב (I hardened his heart and the heart...). And for him it will be ואוי לו ואוי לנפשו, woe to him and woe to his soul.

The Baal HaTurim (ibid.) writes that another hint to Elul can be found in the pasuk (Tehillim 27:13) לולא האמנתי, because לולא is אלול written backward.

We can explain that this hints that even if his ways weren't straight and right the entire year, he has the month of Elul to straighten things out.

אלע לידיגייערם ווערן לייט, all empty people become special and good.

But it is crucial to do *teshuvah* with *simchah*. Therefore אלול is *roshei teivos* for לעבעדיג און ווייטער לעבעדיג, "Lively and lively again."

The Baal HaTanya (*Likutei Torah*) discusses how during Elul, Hashem's compassion manifests. He tells the following *mashal*:

A king returned from a trip, and he came out to the country roads that were outside his capital city. Many people – young and old, wealthy and poor – came out to greet the king and to speak to him. The king greeted each person with a radiant countenance, and he listened to their requests. The king traveled on, and the people followed behind him. The king returned to his palace. Now, to see the king one needs permission, and now only high ranking officials will be granted permission to speak with the king.

The Baal HaTanya tells this *mashal* to describe the difference between Elul and Yom Kippur. In Elul, it is like Hashem is traveling in the countryside, outside His capital city. Now, everyone can come to the King and state their requests. But on Yom Kippur Hashem is in His palace, and less approachable.

Obviously, there is a specialness in Yom Kippur that is not present in Elul, but right now, we focus on the uniqueness of Elul. In a way, it is easier to approach the King in Elul than on Yom Kippur.

The Chidushei HaRim zt'l writes, "Brothers of Bnei Yisrael: Be careful to do *teshuvah* during these days that are conducive for repentance. Every day of the year a *bas kol* announces שובו בנים שובבים, 'do *teshuvah*, wild children,' but during Elul, the days themselves roar like a lion, urging people to do *teshuvah*. As it states, אריה שאג מי לא ירא, 'the lion roars, who isn't afraid' (*Amos* 3:8)... Therefore, be strong and do *teshuvah* this month because the punishment for not doing *teshuvah* is greater than the punishment for

the sins. Brothers of Bnei Yisrael, be careful and do *teshuvah* this month. The main thing is that you shouldn't think that you still have time to do *teshuvah* later on."¹⁰

There was once a businessman who often came to the Sfas Emes *zt'l* to ask him for business advice. Once, the Sfas Emes told him, "Right now is Elul, and the best investment that you can make is to invest in Elul."

The Shaar HaMelech (1:1) teaches that Hashem performed a great *chesed* with us, for He told us when the judgment will be. At the beginning of Elul, we know that we have thirty days to prepare for the day of judgment. As it states in Choshen Mishpat (16:1) זמן בית דין ל' יום. This means that when one is being called to court, he has thirty days to prepare himself and to call witnesses to come and testify for him, etc. Similarly, we have the thirty days of Elul to prepare for the judgment. It states (Tehillim 147:19) מגיד דבריו לא עשה, Hashem tells the Jewish nation about the upcoming judgment, לא עשה

כן לכל גוי, Hashem doesn't do so for any other nation. ומשפטים בל ידעום, He doesn't tell them when they will be judged. They don't know to prepare themselves for the judgment, and even on the day of judgment, they are unaware of what is happening to them.

The entire world is judged on Rosh Hashanah, including the goyim. As it states כל באי עולם עוברין לפניו (Rosh Hashanah 16.) בראש השנה, "On Rosh Hashanah, everyone passes before Him..." The goyim are also judged, but they don't know about it. But we know. We have time to do *teshuvah*, say Tehillim and Selichos, and the opportunity to keep Rosh Hashanah properly, too. These give us a much better chance of being successful in the judgment.

The following *meshal* is repeated in the name of the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*: A pauper traveling by foot was offered a ride in a beautiful coach that was pulled by four white horses. The relieved pauper boarded the wagon, but when the generous man riding in the wagon tried to make small talk

10. In the introduction to his *sefer* אריה ישאג, the Rebbe of Zimegrad *zt'l* tells the following story: It was wartime, and people hiding in the forest heard a lion's roar. They were frightened and ran as far as they could. As they were running, they saw a group of people sitting in the forest, not at all afraid. They couldn't understand why they weren't afraid of the lion's roar. When they returned to their place in the forest, they approached those calm people and asked, "Why didn't you run away when you heard the lion roaring? Weren't you afraid?"

They pointed to their ears. They couldn't hear. They were deaf.

This is a lesson for the month of Elul. It is written אריה שאג מי לא ירא, "When the lion roars, who isn't afraid?" But some people aren't afraid. Those who are deaf, spiritually, aren't afraid.

People were waiting in line to speak with a great tzaddik, to receive his brachos and counsel. Each person just had a couple of moments, and then the gabbai would send him out, to let the next person in line a turn.

One of the people in line had a stutter. His problem was that it took him a couple of minutes just to get the first word out. But once he managed to say the first word, he was able to speak fluently. He was worried that the time would be up before he could say a word.

He expressed his fears to the person standing next to him in line. His neighbor in line replied, "Begin speaking now, while you are still waiting on line. That way, by the time you reach the tzaddik, you will be able to state your request."

One of the tzaddikim of Ger *zt'l* said that this parable to express the essence of Elul. We begin speaking to Hashem now, and then there is a better chance that we will succeed in receiving a positive judgment on the Days of Awe.

with him, the pauper didn't reply. They rode the rest of the way in silence.

People saw the pauper alight the expensive coach, and they ran over to him and asked, "Did you get to speak to the rich man?"

"Not really," he replied.

"Didn't you recognize him? He's the Kaiser! If you would have spoken to him, perhaps you would build a relationship. The friendship could have helped you in the future. You lost the opportunity..."

The pauper cried out in anguish. The Kaiser wanted to speak to him, and he ruined his chances.

The *nimshal* is that Hashem gave us Elul, a time when we can become close to Hashem. As it says אני לדודי ודודי לי, "I am to my friend, and my friend is to me." We can develop a relationship with Hashem that will last throughout the year. It's a terrible loss to lose out on this opportunity.

There was a person who would build homes and sell them for a profit. His son was in charge of buying the material: Wood, metal, pipes, electric wires, etc.

He told his son, "Buy cheap materials so that we can earn a greater profit. By the time the pipes begin leaking and the house has other problems, we will have already acquired all the money from the purchase."

His son became engaged to be married, and his father told his son to buy the construction materials, because he wanted to build him a home.

The son was accustomed to buying inexpensively, and this time, too, the son bought the cheapest materials. The father said, "When I build a home for others, I want to use cheap material. But when I build a home for you, I want to use the best materials so that the house will stand for many years."

The moral of the story is that now it's Elul, and we should seek the very best. Even

if throughout the year, we are satisfied with mediocre deeds, during this month we shouldn't be satisfied with poor *tefillos* and weak learning sessions. Now we want the very best because what we invest in now will become the structure for our life in the upcoming year.

The *Haga'os Ashri* (*Bava Metzia* 2:9) tells the following true story:

Reuvan bought lead from a non-Jewish carpenter because he wanted to make shingles for his roof. Afterward, Reuvan changed his mind, and he sold the lead to Shimon. Shimon began using the material and discovered that it was silver and not lead. It was only coated with lead.

Reuvan heard about this, and he told Shimon that he wants the silver back. He explained, "It was a *מקח טעות*, a sale made in error because I didn't realize I was selling silver. Therefore the sale isn't valid."

The *din Torah* was presented to Reb Eliezer of Mitz zt'l. Reb Eliezer of Mitz zt'l ruled in Shimon's favor. This is his innovative explanation: "Reuvan never acquired the silver from the non-Jewish carpenter, because he thought he was buying lead. One can't buy something when he doesn't know that he is buying it..."

There is more to discuss here, to understand this Halachah clearly. However, for our purposes at the present, the lesson is: If you don't know what you are acquiring, you don't acquire it.

The *Ishbitze* zt'l said that this applies to *avodas Hashem*, too. We can acquire so much from the *mitzvos*, but the acquisition will only happen when one knows what he is earning with his good deeds. However, if he doesn't recognize the value, he doesn't acquire it.

This lesson is applicable for Elul. Elul is an extremely precious time, but only those who value it will earn its benefits.

The mazal of Elul is *besulah*, a virgin. What is the comparison between Elul and a *besulah*? The Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 32.) calls a field that was never tilled a *קרקע בתולה*, a virgin field. *Besulah* represents newness. Indeed, this is the month for new beginnings.

Furthermore, a *besulah* (and actually, every woman) has *בינה יתירה* (*Nidah* 45:), which means intelligence to understand one thing from another. Indeed, one needs intelligence (*בינה יתירה*) to take advantage of Elul. One should use his *בינה יתירה* to understand that it will soon be Rosh Hashanah and to a large extent, everything that will happen next year is dependent on this month.¹¹

The Nesivos Shalom *zt'l* had the following dream: He saw the month of Elul passing, and then Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur up to Hoshanah Rabba, but he saw himself remaining the same, without any inspiration to improve. Then he woke up from his dream, and it was still erev Rosh Chodesh Elul. Relieved, he saw that it wasn't too late. He can still utilize the Elul, and to turn these days into a success story for teshuvah.

It states (*Devarim* 11:12) *עניי ה' אלקד בה מראשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה*. The Sfas Emes explains, *עניי ה'*, Hashem seeks *מראשית השנה*, from the very beginning of the year, *ועד אחרית שנה*, when will it finally be the end of the year, the month of Elul, when Yidden will return to Me with teshuvah?

11. The mazalos are star constellations. The Rosh (*al hatorah Bereishis* 6:2) teaches how the mazal *בתולה* was created. The Rosh writes, "When the angels came to this world (see *Bereishis* 6:2, that *malachim* came to the world, and they were sinning with women), a virgin would say that she will only listen to the angel's request if the angel will give her his wings. The angel gave his wings and she instantly flew to heaven, thus saving herself from sin. She grabbed onto the *Kisei HaKavod* and Hakadosh Baruch Hu put His cloud over her to accept her, and Hashem placed her in the *mazalos*. This became the mazal of Elul, which is *besulah*, virgin. As for the angels (who lost their wings) they remained on earth and couldn't return to heaven until they found Yaakov Avinu's ladder. As it states *והנה מלאכי אלקים עולים ויורדים בו*." We learn from this that the essence of Elul is to flee sin.