

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
from  
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*Vayigash*



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# Torah Wellsprings - Vayigash

## If there is a Will, there is a Way

It is a well-known and documented fact that in emergency situations, people can accomplish outstanding feats. For example, I once read about a child that was caught under a car. The mother lifted the car with her bare hands to save her child. Strong men cannot lift a car by themselves. How did a frail woman do it by herself? The answer is that when faced with danger, the body produces powers that were not there beforehand. People can lift cars, jump tremendous heights, and run far distances when in danger. In last week's *parashah*, Yehudah said to his father, Yaakov (43:9) אנכי אערבנו מידי תבקשנו אם לא הביאתיו אליך והצגתיו לפניך והטאתי "I will be Binyamin's guarantor.... If I don't bring him back to you, I will be in sin before you forever." Yaakov was very apprehensive about sending Binyamin to Mitzrayim. Still, when he heard that Yehudah accepted upon himself גידוי, a ban if he doesn't bring Binyamin home, Yaakov agreed to send him.

What caused Yaakov to change his mind?

The Avnei Nezer explains that a *niduy* is a very serious matter. It meant that Yehudah would be banned from the *yeshivah shel maalah* (the heavenly academy, see *Sotah* 7). Since Yehudah's future was at stake, Yaakov knew that he would use all his revealed and latent powers to achieve his goal. Because we all have amazing strength hidden within ourselves, and they come to the fore at times of need.

In this week's *parashah*, Yehudah told Yosef, הנער, "Because your servant guaranteed the lad..." (44:32). Rashi explains that Yehudah was telling Yosef, "If you will ask, why am I advocating on Binyamin's

behalf more than my other brothers? Because, they aren't so connected, but I am bound, with a strong knot, to be banned from both worlds [if I don't return with Binyamin]." When one feels bound and obligated, he will find a way to succeed.

It states (*Tehillim* 119:106), נשבעתי ואקיימה לשמר, משפטי צדקך "I swore... to keep Your mitzvos..." *Halachah* advises us that although we generally shouldn't take *shavuos*, oaths, there are times when a *shvua* is recommended, as it helps a person keep the mitzvos.

How does the *shvua* help a person keep the mitzvos?

The answer is that the stringent obligation to do as he swore increases one's resolve and ensures that he will perform the mitzvos. Because success depends on one's willpower, and on one's understanding that he must accomplish this deed.

## Judge Favorably

People's personalities are intricate and complex. We think we understand others, but we very often do not. Therefore, we should never jump to conclusions. It is possible that we aren't reading the story accurately.

Yosef's brothers thought Yosef was a *rodef*, someone who wanted to harm them. Why else was he telling them that they will one day bow down to him? They, therefore, felt they were correct in selling Yosef as a slave. But then the day came when Yosef told them (45:3), אני יוסף... ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו, "I am Yosef... The brothers weren't able to reply because they were frightened of him." The Maharal translates the words, כי נבהלו מפניו, literally: "They were frightened by his *face*."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Because if the *pasuk* means that they were afraid of *him*, it would say, כי נבהלו ממנו.

They saw a new face, a new Yosef. They saw him now, for the first time, as he indeed was—a brother who loved them, who did not seek their harm.

Yosef told his brothers (45:4) **אני יוסף אחיכם**, "I am Yosef your brother who you sold to Mitzrayim." The Or HaChaim explains that Yosef told his brothers that they don't need to be afraid of him because **אני יוסף אחיכם**, "I am your brother, and I love you as a brother. **וכאלו לא היה הדבר**, and in my book, it is like that story [of you selling me] never occurred."

The Or HaChaim adds that Yosef told them, "Even when you sold me, **לא כהתה האהוה**, ממני, the brotherhood wasn't affected. I continued to love you as before." As Yosef told them, **אני... אחיכם אשר מכרתם**, "I am...your brother whom you sold..." Even when you sold me, I was your brother, and my love to you wasn't affected. This is a profound level of brotherly love. His brothers completely misjudged him.<sup>2</sup>

We often misjudge people. Unless we are 100% certain, we should give people the benefit of the doubt. We think they are cruel, unkind, uncaring, and often it isn't so at all.

### Teshuvah – Focus on the Present

People think that teshuvah is about mourning past evil deeds. Chazal tell us

teshuvah is about focusing on the present. As Chazal say **ועתה**, "now," refers to *teshuvah*. This is because teshuvah means to improve one's ways, so the primary focus is the present and the future, and not the past.

Does bemoaning the past help you refrain from repeating bad deeds? Generally, focusing on errors of the past will throw you into depression, and then you will probably commit those bad deeds again. Therefore, an ideal approach to teshuvah is to focus on what you can do to improve the present and the future.

Chazal say, **הרהורי עבירה קשין מעבירה**. The Chazon Ish explained, "Focusing on the aveiros of your past is worse than the actual aveiros that you committed." Similarly, tzaddikim taught: More than the *aveirah*, itself, the yetzer hara wants the sadness that comes after the *aveirah*.

Yosef told his brothers (45:5), **ועתה אל תעצבו**, **ואל יחר בעיניכם כי מכרתם אתי הנה**, "and now, don't be sad, and don't let this anger you, that you sold me here..."

The Shinover Rav *zt'l* explains that Yosef told them, "Don't dwell on your sin – that you sold me. Rather, **ועתה** – think about the present, **ואל תעצבו**, and then you won't be sad."<sup>3</sup>

2. Tzaddikim taught that since the Or HaChaim wrote this explanation, this means the Or HaChaim was also on this high level.

3. Rebbe Shalom of Koidenov *zt'l* said that *teshuvah* must be with a broken heart (**לב נשבר**) but not with depression (**עצבות**). The difference between a broken heart and depression is that when one has a broken heart, he feels that he is worse than everyone in the world. When one is depressed, he is angry at the entire world.

The hint is in this week's *parashah*. Yosef told his brothers, **ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם**, if you won't have *atzvov*, then you won't be angry with others.

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* once rebuked his son, and told him to be happy. The son asked, "Why do you rebuke me specifically about being happy? There are so many other things that I do wrong?"

The Beis Aharon replied, "All other *aveiros* and bad *middos*, you know that they are bad and you will eventually do teshuvah on them. I don't have to tell you about those *aveiros*. But people don't recognize how severe *atzvov* is. Therefore, I must rebuke you for feeling sad."

The Beis Aharon said, "*Atzvov* isn't an *aveirah*, but it pulls people down more than the greatest *aveirah*."

A *bachur* was once very upset because of the *aveiros* he committed, and he spoke with the Lev Simchah (of Gur) *zt'l* about it. The Lev Simchah told him that according to the Ramban's commentary, Yaakov never asked Yosef how he got to Mitzrayim, and Yosef never told him about it. This means Yaakov Avinu never found out that it was his children who sold Yosef to Mitzrayim. This is because it isn't important to think about the past. What was, was. The focus should be on improving the future. The Lev Simchah advised the *bachur* to ignore the past, because the path of *teshuvah* is ועתה, to make the present and the future better.

The Yerushalmi (*Pe'ah* 8:8) tells that Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish were traveling to Teveria to bathe in the hot springs. On the road, they met with a beggar who asked for a donation. Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish replied, "When we return from the baths, we will give you some money." When they returned, the pauper was already dead. He died from hunger. Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish said, "We didn't merit taking care of you when you were alive; we will take care of you now, after your death."

When they were preparing him for burial, they found a wallet filled with money on his body. They realized that he wasn't poor. He was tricking people into thinking he was poor to get their money.

The Lev Simchah of Gur *zt'l* said that this story demonstrates how the holy Amoraim would focus on the present rather than to mope over the past. If they would mourn and be distressed over the past, they would be devastated that they didn't give money to the pauper immediately and that they caused his death. They would probably be so broken they wouldn't have the willpower or energy to bury him. And then, throughout their lives, they would live with a guilty conscience that they caused someone's death. But because they focused on the present, they

discovered that he had plenty of money, and it wasn't their fault that he died. This pauper preferred to die than to spend his money.

The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz *zt'l* taught, "It states (*Vayikra* 6:6), אש תמיד תוקד על המזובה לא תכבה. This means fire to serve Hashem should always be burning על המזובה, in one's heart. לא תכבה, even if he committed sins, those sins shouldn't discourage him and cool off his fire and inspiration.

We shouldn't think about the past troubles and hardships, and then we can live with happiness. It states (47:8-9), ויאמר פרעה, אל יעקב כמה ימי שני הייך ויאמר ימי שני... מעט ורעים היו... "Pharaoh asked Yaakov, How old are you?"

Yaakov replied, "...They were few and bad years..."

There are thirty-three words in these two *pesukim*. Chazal tell us that since Yaakov Avinu complained before Pharaoh about his hard life with thirty-three words, therefore Yaakov was niftar 33 years younger than his father, Yitzchak. (Yitzchak lived till 180 and Yaakov till 147.)

The commentaries ask: Not all of the 33 words stated in the *pesukim* were Yaakov's. Part of the 33 words is Pharaoh's question, "How old are you?"

Why was Yaakov punished for Pharaoh's words too? Why did Yaakov lose years of his life due to Pharaoh's question?

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* answers that Pharaoh was shocked by Yaakov's elderly appearance, which prompted Pharaoh to ask him his age. Yaakov explained that he isn't that old, only the *tzaros* he endured caused him to age early. Yaakov was punished for Pharaoh's question because his appearance prompted it.

What lesson can we learn from this? If we train ourselves to focus on the present and to forget about the past, it will be easier for us to live without complaining and to

live happily without appearing old and worn out.

It takes training because people's minds go back to what was, but it is often unhealthy. There needs to be set times for introspection, and there are times for saying viduy over the sins of the past. But our primary focus should be on improving the future.

### ***Kibud Av ve'Em***

The *Targum Yonoson* (46:29) writes that when Yaakov met Yosef, he didn't realize that it was Yosef. He thought it was a king or a high-ranking officer, so he bowed down before him. Because he bowed to Yosef, Yosef lost years of his life.

Yosef was supposed to live until 120, but since his father bowed to him, Yosef was niftar at 110.

In contrast, someone who honors his parents will merit *arichus yamim*, a long and prosperous life. As the Torah says (Shmos 20:12) "כבד את אביך ואת אמך למען יאריך ימך", "Honor your father and your mother so that you will live long."

The *pasuk* (46:29) states, "ויפל על צוואריו ויבך על, צוואריו עוד", "Yosef fell on his father's neck, and he cried on his neck, copiously." According to the *Targum Yonoson*, Yosef was crying because he lost years of his life.

Rashi writes, "Yaakov didn't fall on Yosef's neck, and he didn't kiss him. Chazal say that he was saying Shema."

The question is, if it was time to say the Shema, then why wasn't Yosef saying Shema, as well?

The Steipler *zt'l* (*Birchas Peretz, Vayigash*) answers that Yosef was doing the mitzvah of *kibud av v'em*, and העוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה, when one is involved in doing a mitzvah, he is exempt from doing other mitzvos.

In תש"א a *bachur* came to Eretz Yisrael by himself. His parents arrived two years later, in תש"ג. The parents needed help getting settled. They didn't yet have a place to live or a source of parnassah. The *bachur* wanted

to help his parents. He knew the language better than his parents did, and he was more familiar with how things worked in Eretz Yisrael. He asked his rebbe, Reb Eizik Sher *zt'l*, whether he should leave the yeshiva for a couple of weeks until his parents were settled.

Reb Eizik Sher replied that he didn't know how to answer because the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* says that someone who has the potential to succeed in Torah shouldn't stop studying Torah, not even to perform a mitzvah that no one else can do other than him. And this *bachur* had the potential to become great in Torah. (Indeed, today, he is one of the *gedolim*.)

Reb Eizik advised him to ask the Chazon Ish *zt'l*. The Chazon Ish replied, "It is natural that a child should give to his parents" (מעשה איש p.184).

Reb Yaakov Halprin *zt'l* once noticed that a great *talmid chacham* in Eretz Yisrael was sad, and he asked him why he wasn't happy. The *talmid chacham* replied that his parents had just come from Lodz, and it was his responsibility to support them. But he hardly has money for himself, and he doesn't have money for his parents.

Reb Yaakov Halprin replied, "I will support your parents, but on condition that I will earn the reward for the mitzvah."

The *talmid chacham* didn't know how to respond. He didn't want to lose the reward for the mitzvah. "I need to think it over," he replied.

He asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l*. The Chazon Ish told him, "What's the question? Of course you should accept Reb Yaakov Halprin's offer. And if you lose the reward for the mitzvah, so you lose it. You should know that one must be ready to even jump into Gehinom to honor one's parents."

Then the Chazon Ish added, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu has enough reward for you and to Reb Yaakov..." (מעשי איש p.181).

A father once wrote a letter to his son who learned in Reb Chaim Brisker's yeshiva

telling him to return home. The student asked Reb Chaim Brisker what he should do because his father hadn't attached money for the trip. Reb Chaim told him, "You aren't obligated to pay for the trip home (because one isn't obligated to spend his own money for *kibud av v'em*), but that doesn't exempt you from your obligation to walk home, because walking doesn't cost money..."

Reb Shlomo Kluger *zt'l* wrote in a letter to his son, Reb Avraham Shmuel Binyamin *z'l*, "My dear son, why don't you have *yiras shamayim*? When you write a letter to me (with *chidushei Torah*), send greetings to your mother, and do the mitzvah of *kibud em*. From now on, send a greeting to your mother..."

### The Holy Beis Medresh

The memory of Chanukah is still fresh on our minds, and therefore, this is an ideal time to take with us an important lesson from Chanukah:

The Yevanim strived to banish the Shechinah from the Beis HaMikdash, so that we wouldn't be able to have a connection with Hashem. Chazal (*Middos* 2:3) teach us that the Yevanim breached the walls of the Beis HaMikdash in thirteen different places,<sup>4</sup> and they erected an idol in the Beis

HaMikdash, and they defiled the Beis HaMikdash in other ways, too. The Yevanim did this because Hashem resided in the Beis HaMikdash and the Yevanim tried to banish the Shechinah, to separate us from Hashem.

The Yevanim had a particular dislike for the menorah (and they made its oils tamei), because the menorah is called *עדות*, testimony, as its miracles were testimony that Hashem resides in the Beis HaMikdash together with the Jewish nation (see *Shabbos* 22).<sup>5</sup>

Today, due to our sins, we don't have the Beis HaMikdash, but we have the batei midrashim and the batei knesiyos. They are all like a miniature Beis Hamikdash, and Hashem's presence resides in them. As it states (*Yechezkel* 11:16), *כה אמר ה'... כי הרחקתם בגוים, וכי הפיצותם בארצות ואהי להם למקדש מעט בארצות אשר באו שם*, "So says Hashem, 'Although I have distanced them...and I have scattered them among the nations, I remain for them a מקדש מעט, miniature Beis HaMikdash in the lands where they go.'"<sup>6</sup>

The Tzlach (דרוש ל"ג) explains that we shouldn't speak in the beis medresh during the tefillah, because Hakadosh Baruch Hu resides there, and speaking during the *tefillah* banishes the *Shechinah* from our midst. The Tzlach adds, *אין לך מורד במלכו של עולם בהיכלו ולפניו*, "There is no greater rebellion against the

4. We sing in Maoz Tzur, *פרצו חומות מגדלי*, "They broke the walls of the Beis HaMikdash." When the Chashmonaim won the miraculous war against the great Greek army, these thirteen breaches were fixed. Chazal instituted that when one passes one of the repaired walls, he should bow down and praise Hashem.

5. The menorah is called *עדות*, testimony (*Vayikra* 24:3, *Rashi*). This refers to the *נר מערבי*, western lamp of the menorah, which miraculously burned all night and all day, and then this lamp was used to light the other wicks, each evening. This miracle revealed to the Jewish nation that Hashem dwells with them.

6. The halachos of a beis medresh are based on the halachos of the Beis HaMikdash. The two topics are related, because the beis medresh is our Beis HaMikdash. As Hashem resided in the Beis HaMikdash then, today Hashem resides in the beis medresh, and we must comport ourselves in the beis medresh with respect. The Torah obligates us (*Vayikra* 19:30), *ומקדשי תיראו*, to be afraid of the Beis HaMikdash. Chazal (*Yevamos* 6.) explain that we aren't afraid of the Beis HaMikdash, but of Hashem's *Shechinah* that resides in it. Today, this halachah applies to the beis medresh. Hashem resides in them, and we must comport ourselves in the beis medresh with fear of Hashem.

As it states in the *Mishnah Berurah* (151:1), "We mustn't act silly (*קלות ראש*) in the beis medresh because they are *מקדש מעט*, a miniature Beis HaMikdash, and...it states, *ומקדשי תיראו*, that we must fear the One who dwells there..."



king of the world, for it is in His sanctuary, right before Him."

Furthermore, the Tzlach adds, "He is contaminating the holy air of the beis medresh, similar to the Yevanim who defiled the *mizbeiach*." "כי בזה הוא כמעמיד צלם בהיכל", "It is like he is placing an idol in the *heichal* (sanctuary)" *r'l*.

The Tzlach adds, "During these days [of Chanukah], we should rectify the sins that caused the *Shechinah* to leave Yisrael – for that was the Yevanim's goal..."

Recently, many of us were banished from the beis medresh (due to the Corova virus), and when we returned, we renewed our awareness of the importance and holiness of the beis medresh. We keep it holy by not speaking during davening.

Chazal tell us that "if someone has a beis medresh in his city and doesn't daven there, he is a bad neighbor." The Tzlach (דריש כ"ג) explains, even if he davens at home with a minyan, he is a bad neighbor because he isn't davening in the beis medresh. Because a person's home doesn't have the *kedushah* of a beis medresh. The beis medresh is a Beis HaMikdash, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu dwells there. When a person enters a beis medresh, the *yetzer hara* leaves his heart. It is like he is in Eretz Yisrael. His *tefillos* go straight up to heaven, because the *sar* (*malach* of *chutz l'aretz*) doesn't have any control over the air of a beis knesses. When one davens at home, he misses out on all these benefits."

The Vavei Ha'Amudim (ch.10) writes, "When you sit in the beis knesses, whether you are a man or a lady, you must be cautious not to engage in idle talk. Certainly, you

mustn't discuss mundane matters during the *tefillah* and *kriyas haTorah*...We aren't able to rebuke people, to tell them to stop speaking. As a result, talking during the *tefillah* has become something that is seemingly permissible. Woe to them. Woe to their *neshamos*. How will their *tefillos* go up when they are sullied with this idle talk? ויין קטיגור נעשה סניגור, a *tefillah* that shows our sins (for it is mixed with people speaking) can't be our advocate, to bestow goodness upon us. Therefore, it is proper that in every shul... there should be people appointed to tell people, harshly, to stop speaking. They should embarrass them in public. And then Hashem's honor will be revealed in the world. Everyone will see, and they will learn to be careful. They will muzzle their mouths to ensure that they don't speak idle talk in the beis knesses."

The father of the Shlah Hakadosh, in his *sefer* (פרק אזהרת התפילה אות י"ב), writes (יש נוחלין): "I swear, that from all *aveiros*, I don't know of any *aveirah* so severe. Because what does the speaker gain? All other *aveiros*, like theft, forbidden foods, and the like, have gains. The *yetzer hara* causes him to sin because the person desires pleasures. But the *yetzer hara* doesn't overwhelm him when it comes to [speaking during the *tefillah*]. Another problem with this *aveirah* is that one can't transgress it by himself. He commits the *aveirah* with another person, so he is חוטא ומחטיא, a sinner who causes others to sin. Thus, the *aveiros* of others are on his hands. The worst part, in my opinion, is that with this sin, he is publicly disgracing Hashem's honor in public, in front of the congregation. At a time when he should be praising Hashem, he is speaking..."<sup>7</sup>

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7. The Chida (quoted in *Kaf HaChaim*, 151:8) states that if one can't control himself from speaking during the *tefillah* it is better that he daven at home, by himself, so he won't desecrate the holiness of the beis medresh.

This tells us the severity of speaking during the *tefillah*.

The *Zohar* (ויקרא ר"ה) writes that it is even a greater sin to speak in the beis medresh on Shabbos. The *Kaf HaChaim* (151:8) explains that this is because Hashem's presence in the beis medresh is greater on Shabbos than on the weekdays, and therefore the sin of speaking and banishing the *Shechinah* is a much more severe sin.

Unfortunately, there are some people who talk in the beis medresh during the *tefillah*. We should consider it similar to the thirteen breaches the Yevanim made in the Beis HaMikdash. This is true in its literal sense because many batei midrash have burned down because of talking during the *tefillah*. It is also true in a spiritual sense because speaking during the *tefillah* takes away from its holiness, as we will explain:<sup>8</sup>

### A Literal Breach in the Walls of the Beis Medresh

ב' ניסן תשכ"ו, there was a fire in the beis medresh of Reb Yaakov Yosef of Skvere *zt'l*. (He was *niftar* on the same date, two years later, ב' ניסן תשכ"ח). The Skvere Rebbe would daven in his private room that was connected to the beis medresh. The only room that wasn't ruined in the fire was the Rebbe's room. The door to this room was burned on the side facing the beis medresh, but the interior of the door, facing the Rebbe's room, wasn't affected by the fire.

Rebbe Mordechai Shlomo of Boyan *zt'l* spoke to the Rebbe that very day to console him for this terrible loss. In the conversation, the Boyaner Rebbe asked whether the Rebbe's room had also burned down. The Skvere Rebbe said that his room had been spared, and he explained, "No one ever spoke there during the *tefillah*."

As the Eliyahu Rabba (124:12) writes, אוי להם שמשוחזין בעת התפילה כי ראינו כמה בתי כנסיות נחרבו בשביל עוון זה, "Woe to those who speak during the *tefillah*. We saw many batei kneses destroyed because of this sin."

### A Spiritual Breach

Even if the beis medresh doesn't burn down, *r'l*, this doesn't mean that the beis medresh is standing. Sometimes the beis medresh is ruined in a spiritual sense.

The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos* vol.2 p.309:) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu compassionately left us with a מקדש מעט, miniature Beis HaMikdash. They are the batei medresh and batei kneses. If we treat them with respect and recognize their holiness, in the future, they will be transplanted to Eretz Yisrael (see *Megillah* 29.). Even now, they have the *kedushah* of Eretz Yisrael, and the *tefillos* we say in them go up to the gates of heaven. However, *chas v'shalom*, if we act disrespectfully in the batei medrashim, and we speak idle chatter there, the air of this speech is *tamei*, and the *sar* (*malach*) of *chutz l'aretz* dresses himself in this impure air. This *sar* becomes the head of the beis medresh. He captures the *tefillos* that are said there, and he sends them to the היצוים, *tumah*. It is like worshiping *avodah zarah*..."

### Punishment

The Gemara (*Bava Kama* 60:) states, דבר בעיר, אל יכנס יחיד לבית הכנסת שמלאך המות מפקיד שם כליו, "If there's a plague in the city, don't go to a beis kneses by yourself, because the angel of death stores his weapons there." Why does the *malach hamaves* store his weapons specifically in a beis medresh? It seems to be the last place we would think is appropriate for storing weapons!

The Derech Moshe answers, דבר, plagues, come from דיבור, speech, from people speaking in the beis medresh. Therefore, the *malach*

8. The Beis Yisrael of Gur *zt'l* was very strict that there should be no speaking in the *tefillah* in his beis medresh. Once, two *bachurim* were speaking, and he immediately sent them out of the beis medresh. He told them that they can't return for two weeks. One of the *bachurim* said, "I know I was wrong for speaking." The Beis Yisrael told him that he can return to the beis medresh immediately. The other one said, "I wasn't speaking. It is just that he asked me something, and I answered..." The Gerer Rebbe told him that now he can't return to the beis medresh for six weeks. This is because when one knows he did something wrong, he can correct his ways. But as long as one rationalizes, and he excuses his speaking, he won't stop speaking.

hamaves gets his weapons from the beis medresh, r'l.

*Shulchan Aruch* (124:7) calls the sin of speaking in davening, גדול עונו מנשוא, "His sin is too heavy to carry." This same expression (גדול עונו מנשוא) is written when Kayin killed Hevel. There seems to be an association between murder and speaking during the *tefillah*. This is because speaking in the beis medresh enables the *malach hamaves* to do his work and bring on a plague. Therefore, we should consider speaking during davening like murder.

*The Shulchan Aruch* (ibid.) states, לא ישיח שיחת חלין בשעה ששליח צבור חוזר התפילה ואם שח הוא חוטא וגדול עונו מנשוא וגוערים בו, "Don't speak idle talk when the *shaliach tzibur* is saying *chazaras hashatz*. If someone speaks, his sin is great, and people should shout at him." People asked Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt'l whether we should keep this halachah and shout at those who speak during the *tefillah*, even if they are elderly.

Reb Shlomo Zalman replied, "If you see an elderly person stand up to murder someone, will you also question whether you should shout and stop him or let him commit murder?" Speaking during *tefillah* causes deaths, r'l.<sup>9</sup>

There was once a terrible epidemic in the city of Ostroh r'l. The rav of Ostroh set aside

a day for fasting, introspection, and *tefillah*. The community gathered in the city's large beis medresh to say *Tehillim* and pray for salvation. The rav stood in front of the community and said, "This epidemic didn't happen on its own. It came to us because of our sins – but we don't know which sin. If someone knows of a sin happening in this city, either by an individual or by the community, please come forward to tell me and the *beis din*, because we have to figure out which *aveirah* is causing the plague, so we can correct it and end the epidemic."

Two people from the community thought they might know what *aveirah* was causing the plague. There was a person who hadn't come to the beis medresh to daven for a long time. There was something suspicious about him. They decided that they would follow him and see where he goes and what he does.

They took turns stalking him during the day and the night, but they didn't see anything unusual. But at midnight, they saw him leaving his home with a lantern in his hand. They followed him. The man walked out of the city's limits and entered a thick forest. They didn't follow him further. The following day, they told the rav what they saw.

The rav said, "Tonight, call me when you see him leaving for the forest. All three of us

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9. Some say that keeping silent in the *tefillah* is a גזירה שאין רוב הציבור יכולין לעמוד בה, a decree that most people can not adhere to. It is almost impossible to remain silent. When I hear people say this, I respond, "Aren't the troubles, hardships, and illnesses that come from this *aveirah* a גזירה שאין רוב הציבור יכולין לעמוד בה, decrees that most people cannot endure? So, although it is hard to refrain from speaking in the *tefillah*, we must be strong to keep this halachah.

The Gemara (*Succah* 51:) describes the enormous beis medresh in Alexandria. The Gemara says, ולא היו יושבין מעורבין אלא זהבין בפני עצמן וכספין בפני עצמן ונפחין בפני עצמן וטרסיים בפני עצמן וגרדיים בפני עצמן וכשעני נכנס שם היה מכיר בעלי אומנותו ונפנה לשם ומשם פרנסתו ופרנסתו אנשי ביתו, "They didn't sit wherever they wanted, rather the goldsmiths sat in their own section, the silversmiths in their own sections, the ironsmiths were in their section, the coppermiths were in their sections, the weavers were in their section. When a pauper arrived, he went to the section of his expertise (the work that he knew how to do) and he and his family had *parnassah*."

The Pardas Yosef (מלואים והערות לפרשת וירא) states another reason each profession had their specific section. Chazal (*Tanchuma Bereishis* 8) tell us that כל אומן שונא בני אומנותו, "Every professional hates the people of his profession" because they compete with one another. People who hate each other won't speak during the *tefillah*. People of the same profession davened together, so they won't be any speaking by the *tefillah*.

will follow him, and we will try to figure out why he is going into the forest."

As they followed him into the forest, the rav encouraged the two men who were with him: "We are doing this for the entire city. We must find out who is committing serious *aveiros*, which are the cause of the epidemic. Now isn't the time to be afraid."

They could see the man they were following because he had a lantern, but he couldn't see them. They saw him sit down on the floor of the forest, and they heard him saying *Tikun Chatzos*, with tears and bitter anguish. They heard another voice, crying and wailing together with him, but they didn't see anyone.

Upon completing the *Tikun Chatzos*, the man headed out of the forest. When he was at the edge of the forest, the rav revealed himself to him and told him that they had been watching him. The rav said, "We followed you in an attempt to figure out who is sinning in our city and causing the epidemic, but now we know that you are a true tzaddik. Please forgive us for suspecting you. But please tell us, who is the second voice that we heard, crying together with you in the forest?"

The man replied, "Every night at midnight, I cry over the churban Beis HaMikdash, as is recommended in halachah. Heaven gave me a gift: Yirmiyahu HaNavi comes to say Tikkun Chatzos and to cry together with me."

The rav told him, "When Yirmiyahu comes to you, ask him why we are suffering from this terrible epidemic, which has taken the lives of so many, young and old."

The man replied, "I will ask Yirmiyahu HaNavi. Tomorrow morning, I will come to the beis medresh for Shacharis, and I will relate to you what Yirmiyahu HaNavi told me."

The rav returned to the city and announced that everyone should come for Shacharis the next morning because then

they will be hearing the cause of the epidemic.

A large crowd came for Shacharis. It was time to daven, but the hidden tzaddik wasn't there yet. The rav instructed them to begin davening. Soon afterward, the tzaddik arrived, dressed in his tallis and tefillin, his face shining with a very saintly glow. Everyone became afraid; some fainted.

After Shacharis, in front of the community, the rav asked the hidden tzaddik why everyone got so afraid, and some even fainted, when he came to the beis medresh. The tzaddik replied that, "Chazal (Brachos 6.) tell us that when one wears *של ראש* it casts fear on people. As it states (Devarim 28:10) *וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך*, 'Everyone will see that Hashem's name is on you and they will be afraid of you.'"

The rav asked, "We all wear tefillin, but we don't see that anyone is afraid of us."

The tzaddik replied, "I don't speak idle talk when I wear tefillin; I am aware of its holiness; therefore my tefillin have this *segulah* that they cast a holy fear on all."

The tzaddik added, "Idle talk is also the root of the epidemic. Yirmiyahu HaNavi told me that people speak during the tefillah, which brought on Hashem's wrath and the epidemic. I stopped davening in this beis medresh, long ago, because of all the talking."

The community did teshuvah. They accepted upon themselves that they would not speak in the beis medresh, during tefillah. The plague stopped immediately.

They wrote this story on a plaque on one of the walls of the beis medresh, so that it should never be forgotten, and that people will always be cautious not to speak in the beis medresh. When visitors came to the beis medresh and they weren't aware of how strict they were about not speaking during the tefillah, they would bring them over to the plaque and have them read it on their own. They would do this without saying a word. The visitors would read that the epidemic came because of speaking in the

beis medresh, and it left them the moment they accepted on themselves that they wouldn't talk in the beis medresh anymore.

The Debrinitziner Rav zt'l (באר משה ה"ז סימן ק"ה) writes, "I will tell an amazing story that I, myself, witnessed. My knees shiver from fear when I remind myself of this story. Once, my father (Reb Avraham, hy'd zt'l) gave a drashah on Shabbos on the topic of answering amen and *amen yehei shmei raba*. He mentioned the vort of the Remak, that שיבה, is roshei teivos for שתיקה יפה בשעת התפילה. He explains that when someone is silent by the tefillah, and he answers amen and *amen yehei shmei raba*, he will merit living a long life. My father added מכלל הן אתה שומע לאו, that we understand that if one isn't cautious about answering amen and *yehei shmei raba*, and he speaks by the davening, then, *chalilah*, it will be the opposite... the opposite of long life, r'l. This is what my father implied, but he didn't want to express it in words.

"The next morning, there was a tumult in the beis medresh. People were gathering around a person who had heard my father's drashah on the previous day, and he was repeating a dream he had at night. In his dream, he saw himself standing before the court in heaven, and the court ruled that he was guilty. (He knew that he was sleeping and that it was a dream, but nevertheless, he understood that the beis din was saying that his neshamah would remain above, and he won't wake up in the morning, *chas v'shalom*.) He pleaded before the court saying, 'I am young. Why should I be punished this way?' The court explained that he spoke *devarim beteilim*, idle talk, in the beis medresh and he didn't answer *amen yehei shmei raba*. He told the court, 'I shouldn't be punished for this because I didn't know how severe the *aveirah* is.'

"One of the malachim of the beis din replied angrily, 'How can you claim that you didn't know the severity? You were by the rav's drashah yesterday, and you heard, in the name of the Remak that שיבה (old age) stands for שתיקה יפה בשעת התפילה, being silent by the tefillah, which results in old age... The rav hinted that if one speaks by the davening,

it will be the opposite. So how can you claim that you didn't know the severity of this sin?'

"The man pleaded with the court, 'Permit me to live, and I will tell everyone from the kehillah what happened to me. I will warn them that they should be very careful with these matters from now on.' The court accepted his petition, and they permitted him to live.

"Everyone present in the beis medresh was overtaken with fear of Hashem."

The Gemara (Shabbos 119:) states, "When someone answers *amen yehei shmei raba* with all his strength this has the power to rip up his *gzar din*." This means that if the court in heaven ruled that he must go through some form of hardship, r'l, the decree is annulled and ripped up in the merit of the *amen yehei shmei raba* that he said. The Gemara adds, "Even if he has the *aveirah* of *avodah zarah*, saying *amen yehei shmei raba* will atone."

The following *mashal* will help us understand the specialness of answering *amen yehei shmei raba*: A king sent a message to a certain city to announce that he would be coming to visit, and he specified the date when he would arrive.

The people of the city prepared for this royal visit. As the day came nearer, the excitement and the preparations increased.

The date arrived; the king was riding in his chariot through the city streets. The residents of the city lined the streets on both sides, and as the king drove passed them they shouted with enthusiasm, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" But at one street, something terrible happened. After the shouts, "Long live the king!" dirt and stones were hurled towards the king.

The police found the culprits immediately. They were two youths.

In court, the persecuting lawyer elaborated on the terrible deed these youths had committed, how they disgraced the king on the day when they should have been honoring him.



shul that will have no speaking during the tefillah. One of the members of this community became very ill, r'l, so his friends, from this minyan, made a kabbalah that they won't speak by the davening for forty days – regardless of whether they daven in their own beis medresh or elsewhere. They attributed the merit of this kabbalah to their friend's refuah sheleimah.

One person told of the hardships he had keeping this kabbalah. On Rosh Hashanah (year תש"פ) he was davening in another beis medresh, and a friend came over to him and asked him a question. He signaled with his eyes and hands that he couldn't reply because he doesn't speak by davening. The man replied, degradingly, "Oh, you are from those people..." This was very humiliating for this youngster.

The kabbalah brought results. After the forty days passed, the ill friend recovered from his serious illness.

And there was an added benefit. The youngster who was humiliated and shamed on Rosh Hashanah because he didn't want to speak by davening had his own, personal yeshuah. During the forty days they were refraining from speaking by davening, his wife was diagnosed with "the illness." After taking a M.R.I. test, the diagnosis was confirmed. Their rebbe advised them to get a second opinion by a doctor that the rebbe recommended. They did so, and that doctor's diagnosis was the same. All experts agreed that she needed an operation, and the sooner, the better. A couple of days afterward, she was brought to the operating room.

As the operation was underway, the husband went to a room where he would be

able to daven in private. He said, "Ribono Shel Olam, You know how hard it was for me to be silent for forty days. You know of the great humiliation I suffered on Rosh Hashanah when my friend humiliated me for being silent. Please give my wife a refuah sheleimah, and I undertake to be silent in beis medresh for a half year."

The operation was supposed to take an hour-and-a-half, but it took forty-five minutes longer. The head doctor explained to the husband that when they looked for the growth that they saw on the M.R.I. they couldn't find it. The operation took longer than expected because they were looking for something that wasn't there! (There was something minor there, which wasn't dangerous and life-threatening, which they removed.)

Her life was saved in the merit of not speaking during the tefillah. Because just as speaking during the tefillah causes the worst troubles, refraining from speaking brings the greatest blessings and yeshuos. As tzaddikim said, שתוקה יפה בשעת התפילה, "it is good to be silent during the tefillah" is roshei teivos for שיבה, old age. Refraining from speaking brings life, old age, health, and many blessings.<sup>10</sup>

### The Specialness of Tefillah when you don't Speak

The Mishnah (Avos 5:5) teaches, עשרה ניסים נעשו לאבותינו בבית המקדש... מעולם... לא נצחו הרוח את עמו, "Ten miracles happened to our forefathers in the Beis HaMikdash... [One of the miracles is]: The wind never unsettled the pillar of smoke [that rose from the korbanos]." The smoke rose straight upwards and didn't get moved around by the wind. The Avodas Yisrael writes, "The meaning of

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10. It states (Shmos 14:14) ה' ילחם לכם, Hashem will fight your wars for you. Your part is ואתם תחרישון, that you should be silent and you shouldn't speak by the davening. In this merit, Hashem will fight your wars.

Rebbe Meir of Permishlan said ה' ילחם לכם, Hashem will give you parnassah, ואתם תחרישון, and you should plow. The pasuk is hinting, you make hishtadlus, and Hashem will give parnassah. Perhaps we can add ה' ילחם לכם, Hashem will give you parnassah, ואתם תחרישון, and your part is that you should be silent during the tefillos. Because then the tefillos will go up to Hashem and your requests for parnassah will be answered.

this is the following: The Beis HaMikdash in heaven is directly above the Beis HaMikdash that's below, in this world. When the smoke of the korbanos below goes up and reaches the Beis HaMikdash above, it creates a nachas ruach before Hashem, which draws down bounty to all worlds. If a wind disturbed the smoke, the smoke would be dispersed, and it wouldn't go up to the Beis HaMikdash above. Behold it states (Yechezkel 11:16) וַאֲדָרִי לָהֶם לְמִקְדָּשׁ מֵעַט, that in galus, the beis medresh is a miniature Beis HaMikdash, as the Gemara (Megilah 29.) tells us. Therefore, it is certain that each beis medresh has its counterpart beis medresh in heaven. The tefillos uttered in the beis medresh below go up to the beis medresh in heaven. Therefore, we must be cautious not to speak even just a few words during the tefillah, in the beis knesses. We should only say words of tefillah. [Because when one speaks idle talk, it creates a ruach ra'ah which disturbs the pillar of tefillah not allowing it to reach up to the beis medresh in heaven.] When one speaks idle talk during the tefillah, it can be compared to speaking with the king and turning away to speak with someone else. He says, 'My master, the king, I can't speak to you. I have something more important to take care of.' This banishes the Shechinah, r'l from the beis medresh. Additionally, other people are davening in the beis medresh together with him. It is possible that their tefillos won't be answered, all because of his chatter, chas veshalom."

The Baal HaTanya (Igeres Hakodesh ch.24) writes, "My friends, my brothers, don't do bad, o friends, who are beloved to their Creator and who are hated by the yetzer hara. [Chazal say] אל יעשה אדם עצמו רשע שעה אחת לפני המקום, don't be a rasha, not even for a שעה אחת before Hashem. שעה אחת alludes to the hour when we gather in beis medresh to pray before Hashem. That is the שעה אחת, the time that Hashem desires and chooses, more than any other hour of the day. This time is an eis ratzon, auspicious time, before Hashem. At this time, Hashem reveals His presence in the beis medresh, the miniature Beis HaMikdash. We can meet with the

Shechinah... [His presence and glory] is en clothed in the words of tefillah of the siddur. His Shechinah becomes revealed to each individual according to his intelligence and *shoresh neshamah* [when he davens with kavanah]... Those who search and yearn for Hashem will find Him. But if at this time you will speak [to your fellow man about] your personal needs, you are expressing that you aren't interested in seeing Hashem's presence that is being revealed at this time... You are showing that you don't want to think about the beauty and greatness of the king of kings, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who is revealed above at this time, and also He is revealed below for those who desire to look at His honor and greatness". The Tanya is explaining the great opportunity we have, three times a day when we are in tefillah before Hashem in the beis kneses. Hashem resides in the beis medresh, and we can find Him, primarily during the tefillah. But this is only when we daven with kavanah because Hashem's presence is concealed within the words of the tefillah. If one speaks at this time, he is acting like a rasha before Hashem, for he shows that he isn't interested in seeing Hashem's presence.

The Tanya describes b'derech mashal the disgrace he is causing by speaking during the tefillah:

"The kingship of heaven resembles the kingship of the kings below (מלכותא דרקיע בעין). It is the way of kings to conceal themselves in their innermost room, with guards at the doors. People wait their turn to speak with the king for days and years. They wait for the opportunity to behold the beauty of his glorious kingship. However, there are rare times when the king reveals himself to his people, so everyone can experience his glory. An announcement is made in his entire kingdom, announcing to the people that they can come, gather, and stand before the king, to behold the honor of his kingship and the glory of his greatness. But imagine how disgusting and foolish it is if someone stands before the king, and instead of looking at him, he chooses to look



elsewhere, and he is occupied with his own needs. How disgusting and how foolish he is! Everyone will look down at him... Additionally, he is disgracing the king, because he is expressing that the king isn't important to him and he doesn't care to look at Hashem's honor and glory. He is more interested in his own needs. For this, he deserves the death penalty, because he is showing disrespect to the king in front of everyone. Therefore, it states (Mishlei 3:35) *בסילים מרים קלון*, 'the fools show disgrace.' The pasuk is telling us that even if someone is a *בסיל*, fool, [and he doesn't want to look at the king] he shouldn't *מרים קלון*, show this disgrace to everyone. [He should pretend that he is davening properly.] Chazal say that when one davens, it should be *באילו עומד לפני המלך*, as if he is standing before the king. This means he should at least show, outwardly, *באילו*, as if he is standing before the King. This is how it should appear to others who look at him and see his mannerisms and words [and they don't know his thoughts]... The purpose of tefillah, the reason they were established, was so that one can concentrate on the words [and thereby recognize Hashem's presence]. Someone who doesn't even pretend that he is davening with kavanah, he is chayav misah. The Zohar writes about him that he is acting disgracefully...and that he doesn't have a portion with the G-d of Yisrael r'l. Therefore, as a shaliach of Chazal, I make a gezeirah...that no one should speak *דברים בטלים* from the moment the chazan begins the tefillah until after the final kadish. This is for Shacharis, Minchah and Maariv. Someone who transgress this, on purpose, he should sit on the ground and ask three people to be *מתיר נידוי*, to free him from the heavenly ban that he was placed into, and this will cure him..."

### Be Silent, and Others will Learn from You

The Rambam (Deios 6:1) states, "It is the way of man to think and act as his friends do... Therefore, one must be close to tzaddikim, and to always be among the wise scholars, so he can learn from and adapt their ways... As Shlomo HaMelech says (Mishlei 13:20) *הולך את חכמים יחכם ורעה בסילים ירוע*, 'Go with the wise and you will be wise. Follow the fools, and you will do bad.' ... Therefore, if he lives in a country with evil customs, and people aren't going in the right way, he should go to a country where there are tzaddikim who act correctly. And if all countries that he knows about are acting wrongly, as this is how it is in our times... he should remain by himself, alone..."

People learn from others. If you are among people who fear Hashem, it rubs off on you, and you will also act that way.

Related to our subject, the Derech Moshe writes that if one is cautious not to speak during the tefillah, this will train others to be cautious as well. They see that you don't talk during the tefillah, and they will also refrain. In contrast, if they see you talking, they will be tempted to do the same.

A story is told about a father who told his child, "Tonight is your bar mitzvah. It is time for you to be serious about tefillah. You must come on time, daven with kavanah, and make certain that you never speak by the tefillah."

That night, as the tzibur began davening, the father was still speaking with someone. The bar mitzvah bachur said, "Father, when will it be your bar mitzvah?" The nimshal is, you can't train others to be careful about not speaking by the tefillah if you aren't careful yourself.