

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Naso





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Do Your Best

Hashem instructed Moshe to count all Jewish males from age twenty and up, as it states (*Bamidbar* 1:3), מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמֵעַלָּה כָּל יֵצֵא צֶבֶא, "From twenty up, whoever goes into the army of the Jewish people, count them."

But for the tribe of Levi, Moshe was told to count the young children, too. As it states (*Bamidbar* 3:15), פֶּקֶד אֶת בְּנֵי לֵוִי לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם כָּל, זָכָר מִבֶּן חֹדֶשׁ וּמֵעַלָּה תִּפְקְדֵם Levi... Each male older than a month shall be counted.

Moshe asked Hakadosh Baruch Hu (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 3:16), "How can I enter their tents to know how many infants they have?"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied, עֲשֵׂה אֵתָּה שְׁלִי, וְאֲנִי אַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלִי, "You do what you can, and I will do the rest."

Moshe stood at the entrance of each tent and a *bas kol* came forth, announcing the number of infants living there.

As the *pasuk* (*Bamidbar* 3:16) states, וַיִּפְקֵד אֹתָם, מִשָּׁה עַל פִּי ה', "Moshe counted them, by Hashem's mouth." This means it was a combination of Moshe's counting together with Hashem (the *bas kol*), that Moshe could know the count of the Levi'im.

The question is if a miracle was going to occur, and a *bas kol* was required to help Moshe count the tribe, why did Moshe have to stand at the entrance of each tent? He could have stayed at home, and the *bas kol* would provide him with the exact count.

The answer is that a person has to do as much as possible, and then Hashem will help him.

The same applies to our battle against the *yetzer hara*. We do the best we can, and

Hashem helps us succeed. As it states (*Kiddushin* 30:), אֲלֵמָלָא הָקִב"ה עֹזְרוֹ לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ, "If Hashem wouldn't help him, he couldn't overcome the *yetzer hara*." Hakadosh Baruch Hu helps him, עֹזְרוֹ, but Hashem doesn't fight the *yetzer hara* alone. A person must do as much as he can, and only then will Hashem complete the task.

Torah for Everyone

Tzaddikim say, "The Shabbos *noch* (after) Shavuos is *noch* (still) Shavuos."

In the era of the Beis HaMikdash, one would still be able to bring the *korbanos* of Shavuos during the six days following Shavuos. Therefore, this week we will discuss several ideas related to Shavuos and mattan Torah. Naturally, these lessons are applicable the entire year.

There is a *minhag* to eat *milichig* foods on Shavuos. A unique quality of milk is that even when it spoils, it is still food, as it can become cheese.

We eat cheese on Shavuos to remind us that even if our deeds get spoiled (we committed *aveiros*, ר'ל), nevertheless, the Torah is still for us. There is still hope. We can improve our ways.

The Gemara (*Niddah* 9:) quotes in the name of Reb Meir that דָּם נֶעֱכָר וְנִעְשֶׂה חֵלֶב, milk comes from blood. When it was blood, it was not kosher. But once transformed into milk, it becomes kosher.

The Berzhaner Rav זת"ל says that we eat milk products on Shavuos to remind us that when we do *teshuvah*, all the bad (represented by blood) becomes permitted and good (represented by the milk). This is the strength of *teshuvah*.¹

1. Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 58:) say that it is forbidden to insult a *baal teshuvah* and to tell him, "Remember how

The Gemara (*Eiruvin* 13:) writes, "ר' מאיר" wasn't his real name. His name was ר' נהוראי. Why was he called ר' מאיר האיר? Because ר' מאיר האיר, "Reb מאיר enlightened (האיר) the eyes of the Jewish nation."

How did he achieve that?

He taught them that milk comes from blood. And thereby, he taught them that when one does *teshuvah*, all the bad can be turned into good.

The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos, Shavuos* תקס"ב) writes that milk is made up of three parts. The best part is the butter, the thick cream that rises to the top. Once the cream is removed, there are still some cheese particles remaining in the milk. When that cheese is also removed, all that is left is a watery substance, which doesn't have much of a purpose.

The Chasam Sofer explains that the creamy butter represents the *tzaddikim*, the cheese describes the *beinonim*, the average Yid. The weaker elements of the nation are represented by the watery whey, which doesn't serve much of a purpose.

However, when the three parts of the milk are together, it is a refreshing cup of milk, but when they are separated, a part of the milk will be discarded.

Hashem didn't want any segment of Bnei Yisrael to be excluded from receiving the Torah. Therefore, Hashem gave the Torah to the entire Jewish nation together. As a nation,

even the lowest Yidden have a portion in the Torah.

The Torah was Given to Us

It states (*Tehillim* 78:36-37) ויפתוהו בפיהם ובלשונם, "They deceived Hashem with their mouths. Their mouths lied to Him. ולבם לא נכון עמו, their hearts were not sincere."

Tosefta (*Bava Kama* 7:3) says that this *pasuk* alludes to when the nation said נעשה ונשמע, "we will do, and we will listen." The nation was praised immensely for saying this proclamation, but according to the Tosefta, at least, it seems that they weren't sincere. ולבם לא נכון עמו, in their hearts, they didn't completely want to accept the Torah.

Therefore, the next *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 78:38) states, והוא רחום יכפר עון, Hashem, forgive them for this lack of sincerity.

Furthermore, Hashem accepted their proclamation of נעשה ונשמע because a *bas kol* came forth and said in astonishment, מי גילה, "Who revealed this secret (preceding doing to listening) to my children, which *malachim* use?"

We learn from this that Hashem accepts our service, even if it isn't perfect.

In fact, it is our shortcomings that make us ideal candidates for receiving the Torah.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88) tells us that when Hashem wanted to give the Torah to the Jewish people, the *malachim* protested, "Why

you used to look, and what you used to do...?" This is because all his bad deeds were erased, thanks to his *teshuvah*.

Chazal say, בכל יום יהיה בעיניך כחדשים, you should consider the Torah as though you received it today.

Rebbe Shalom of Belz *zt'l* taught that this means you shouldn't say, "I did *aveiros*, and I am not worthy to study Torah," because the Torah was given today, and it isn't related to the Torah that was given yesterday.

A child's first food is milk. This is to hint to the person that he has the ability to be like milk, to totally change his ways and essence.

The Torah was given to the nation immediately upon leaving Mitzrayim to show that even when they were on a low level, the Torah is for them.

should you give the holy, precious, and hidden treasure (the Torah) to mortals?"

Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to reply to the *malachim*.

Moshe Rabbeinu told them, "The Torah says לא תחמוד; it is forbidden to be envious of others. Does this apply to you? Does the concept of jealousy exist among you?"

"It also states לא תנאף, 'don't commit adultery.' Do *malachim* have a *yetzer hara*?"

In this way, Moshe proved to them that the mitzvos are specifically intended for human beings and not for *malachim*.

Hashem gave us the Torah *because* we have a *yetzer hara*. The Torah speaks to people like us. Our faults make us fitting to receive the Torah.

At the holy moment of *matan Torah*, one would expect that Hashem would tell the nation the secrets of kabbalah and the like. But Hashem told them, "Don't kill. Don't steal. Don't be jealous..." because the Torah was given to human beings, to people who have these tendencies. And therefore, regardless of your deeds or your struggles, the Torah is speaking to you.

Chametz represents the *yetzer hara*. So why do offer a chametz *korban* on Shavuos?

According to this discussion, it is because it is the *yetzer hara* within us that grants us the right to receive the Torah.²

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88) says that when the Jewish people stood at Har Sinai, Hashem raised the mountain above their heads, forcing them to accept the Torah.

Tosfos asks: The nation already expressed their willingness and desire to keep the Torah when they proclaimed נעשה ונשמע. Why was it necessary to raise the mountain over

their heads? Why was it necessary to force them to accept something they already accepted?

My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zy'a, answered:

Chazal tell us that by *mattan Torah*, פסקה, זיהומתן, their impurity ceased, and their *yetzer hara* left them. But without a *yetzer hara*, the Torah isn't speaking to them, similar to the *malachim* who were unsuitable to receive the Torah.

A mountain represents the *yetzer hara* (see *Succah* 52:). Therefore, when Chazal say, "Hashem placed the mountain over their heads," this means Hashem returned their *yetzer hara*. Now they were fitting to receive the Torah.

Chazal (*Brachos* 63) ask, "Why does the Torah discuss the *nazir* after the laws of a *sotah*? The Gemara answers that one witnesses a *sotah's* disgrace, it is advisable that he should refrain from drinking wine by becoming a *nazir*." Wine leads to aveiros and adultery.

The Pri HaAretz asks that someone who saw the *sotah's* disgrace and punishment will have a natural repulsion to drink wine excessively and committing adultery. He is the last person who would have to become a *nazir* to avoid drinking wine. Why is he nevertheless advised to become a *nazir*?

The answer is, as Chazal say, "The greater the person, the greater his *yetzer hara*." After seeing what happened to the *sotah*, he has a heightened realization of the severity of sin. He is at a higher level. Therefore, he has a stronger *yetzer hara*. He must therefore increase his precautions and safeguards against sin.

2. There is a custom to decorate the beis medresh on Shavuos with trees that don't bear fruit. These trees represent the concept that even people on low levels, those who aren't producing any fruit, are special, since Hashem gave the Torah to them.

The Sotah

The Klausenberger Rebbe zy'a told the following story:

A husband brought his wife to the Chida and his *beis din* and told them of his suspicions. He said that there was a *stirah* and that his wife had become a *sotah*. The Chida ruled that the husband should divorce her. The other judges of the court were surprised at the Chida's ruling, given the lack of witnesses; there were only the husband's accusations.

The Chida advised the wife to accept a divorce willingly, but she spoke with *chutzpah* to the Chida, and refused to accept a *get*.

The Chida told her, "I want you to listen to something," and he read to her the *parashah* of *Sotah* as it is written in the Torah (*Bamidbar* 5). When the Chida was halfway through, the woman decided to leave. She wasn't interested and felt that she heard enough.

The woman was walking up the stairs to leave the courtroom just as the Chida read the words (*Bamidbar* 5:20) ואת כי סמית...יתן ה' אותך "and you, who sinned... Hashem will turn you into a curse... He will cause your legs to fall, and your stomach will swell..." As he read these words, the woman's legs fell off and her stomach swelled, just as it happened to the *sotah* in the Beis HaMikdash.

The Chida explained that when the woman and her husband were standing before him, he remembered a *brachah* that he had received from the Or HaChaim, to have the *kedushah* of a *kohen*. The Chida thought, "Why did I remember this blessing just now? It must be that I should act like a *kohen* and read the *parashah* of *sotah* to her, as *kohanim* would do in the Beis HaMikdash."

Fire

Fire is a common theme of *mattan Torah*. Here are some examples:

(*Shemos* 19:18), מפני אשר ירד עליו ה' באש, "Hashem descended on the mountain amidst fire."

(*Devarim* 4:11), וההר בער באש עד לב השמים, "and the mountain burned with fire up to the midst of the heavens."

(*Mussaf Rosh Hashanah*) דברות קדשך מלהבות אש, "Your holy words, from flames of fire."

It is forbidden to forget *mattan Torah*, as the Torah states (*Devarim* 4:9), רק השמר לך ושמור, נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך... והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך יום אשר עמדת לפני ה' אלקיך בחורב... וההר בעור באש עד לב השמים, "You must be cautious, and you must carefully guard your soul that you don't forget all that you saw with your eyes...and you must tell them to your children and your grandchildren the day you stood before Hakadosh Baruch Hu... and the mountain burned with fire up to the midst of the heavens."

Ramban on this *pasuk* explains, "We mustn't forget the מעמד הר סיני, with all its details. הקולות והלפידים... ודבריו אשר שמעת שם מתוך, "The voices and the torches...and His words that you heard from the flames."

These sources imply that part of our obligation to remember *mattan Torah* is to remember that the Torah was received amidst fire and flames.

The Tur (*Orach Chaim* 47:6) discusses *birchas HaTorah*, אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים. The Tur writes, "When you say this *brachah*, bless Hashem for מעמד הר סיני, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu chose us from among all nations of the world and He brought us to Har Sinai, where we heard his words *from amidst fire*, and He gave us His holy Torah, which is our life; the Torah which was Hashem's treasure that he was משהתעשע, derived pleasure from every day."

We understand from this Tur that a primary aspect of *mattan Torah* is that it was given with fire.

The nation proclaimed, נעשה ונשמע, that they wanted to accept the Torah, so why was it necessary to raise the mountain above

them, and to coerce them into accepting the Torah?

Tosfos (*Shabbos* 88.) answers that Hashem feared they might change their mind when they see the fire on Har Sinai. Therefore, they had to be forced to accept the Torah.

We wonder why it was necessary to have the fire on the mountain. Let there be no fire and no need to raise a mountain above their heads.

The answer is that the fire had to be present. It was an integral part of *matan Torah*. Torah must be studied with a fiery *hislavavos*. It would be impossible to receive the Torah without fire.

The Midrash Tanchuma (*Tisa* 31) states that "The first *luchos* were given בפומבי, in public, therefore the *ayin hara* affected them and they were broken. By the second *luchos*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, אין לך יפה מן הצניעות, the most beautiful thing is *tznius*, modesty, without publicity. As it states (*Michah* 6:8), מה ה' דורש ממך כי עם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם ה' אלקיך, "What does Hashem want from you? Only that you do justice, love to do deeds of kindness, and to be *tzanua* (humble, private) with Hashem your G-d." Therefore, the second *luchos* that were given in a more modest setting didn't break.

The Sfas Emes (*Ki Tisa* תרל"ט) asks: (1) אין לך יפה מן הצניעות, modesty is the most beautiful thing, why didn't Hashem give the first *luchos* in a more modest manner? (2) Hashem knows the future. He knew that the *luchos* would break because they were presented in a loud manner. So why didn't Hashem give it in a concealed, *tzanua* mode, so that the *luchos* would endure?

The Sfas Emes explains that *hislavavos* is the preferred way to serve Hashem. And this is the reason the first *luchos* were given with *hislavavos*, in public.

But after sinning with the *egel* the *luchos* had to be given in a *tzanuah*, concealed manner, or the *kelipos* would prosecute and prevent it.

The Sfas Emes explains that the same happens when a person serves Hashem. The ideal way to serve Hashem is with enthusiasm and *hislavavos*. But there will be times when he falls from that level. Then he should serve Hashem in a more *tzanuah*, modest manner.

But even then, the Sfas Emes explains, his *avodas Hashem* is founded and based on the times when he managed to serve Hashem with *hislavavos*. Those times give light and *chiyus* to his more moderate *avodas Hashem*.

Chinuch

Chinuch should also be with 'fire,' with *hislavavos*. You should train your children to be passionate about Torah and mitzvos.

Rebbe Asher of Stolin zt'l hired a teacher to teach his son, the Beis Aharon zt'l. One day, Rebbe Asher listened in. He heard the *melamed* read the *pasuk* (*Bereishis* 24:3), ויען לבן, ובתואל, "Lavan and Besuel answered..." And Rashi writes, רשע היה וקפץ להשיב לפני אביו, "Lavan was a *rasha*, and he jumped to speak before his father."

The *melamed* taught this *Rashi* very serenely, and Rebbe Asher was displeased, "By teaching that way, how do you expect to bring *yiras shamayim* into my son?"

The *melamed* didn't know what he did wrong. He had explained Rashi correctly. Rebbe Asher told him, "This is how you should read the Rashi: רשע היה, 'Lavan was a *rasha*!' He read these words with obvious disdain of Lavan. קפץ להשיב לפני אביו, "He jumped to speak before his father!" Rebbe Asher repeated the exact words as the *melamed*, only with added emotion, so the student will grasp how wrong it is to speak before one's father. *Hislavavos* makes a strong impression on a child. The same lesson takes on an entirely new meaning when *hislavavos* is there.

A father studied a chapter of *Mishnayos* with his son each day, but the child didn't remember anything. When the father would

ask the child the following day to repeat what he learned, he couldn't.

The father assumed that his son was born with poor memory.

One day, father and son were passing through a marketplace where vendors were shouting out their wares. When they got home, the father heard his son repeating the vendor's chants – word for word. He realized that his son did have a good memory. So why doesn't he remember Mishnayos?

He discussed the matter with one of the *gedolim* of Yerushalayim. The *gadol* replied, "If you learn Mishnayos with your son with the same passion the vendors announce their wares, your son will remember the Mishnayos."³

Time

When the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* visited Eretz Yisrael, he was invited to test the children studying in the cheder Eitz Chayim.

The Rebbe asked a child, "What does it mean (*Bamidbar* 2:16), ⁴שניים יסעו?"

The boy replied that it means "the years are flying by." (Or, as it he said in Yiddish, די יארען פארען).

The Rebbe replied, "You deserve a *psak* (rebuke) because you didn't know the correct translation of these words. But for me, the entire journey from America was worthwhile, just to hear you say this *mussar*: The years are flying by."

As the saying goes, "time flies," and fortunate are those who grasp it, and use it wisely.

As a *bachur*, the Steipler Gaon *zt'l* learned in the Navordok yeshiva. Once, when he was home, a neighbor asked him, "When are you planning to return to the yeshiva?"

"I'm going back tomorrow, he replied."

"I want to send a letter to my son (who also learned in Navordok). Can you take it to him?"

The Steipler took the sealed letter, but the First World War broke out, making travel impossible. He never returned to the yeshiva.

3. A father once told the Yismach Yisrael of Alexander *zt'l* that his son didn't *bench* after meals. The Yismach Yisrael told him that he doesn't have to worry about. "However, you should be careful to *bench* properly, and you will see that your son will do so as well." When a child sees his parent's dedication, he will follow in his ways and do the same.

Reb Avigdor Miller *zt'l* was once speaking to his students about the dangers of television. One student was ready to take action. When his father was upstairs, smoking a cigarette and reading the paper, the boy was downstairs, smashing the television with a hammer. The father ran downstairs, livid. The son explained that Reb Avigdor Miller taught him that television is bad for us.

The father called Reb Avigdor Miller. "How dare you turn my son against me! I demand that you come here right now and pay me for the damages..."

The father carried on and on, and Reb Avigdor Miller listened in silence. Then Reb Avigdor Miller said, "I always wondered where your son gets his passion from, and now I see that it comes from you, as you are also very passionate in your own beliefs."

The father realized that it was true. His son had inherited his temper and passion. This realization calmed the father, somewhat, and eventually, a relationship developed between this man and Reb Avigdor Miller, and he became one of Reb Avigdor Miller's followers and financial supporters.

4. Literally, the *pasuk* means that the camp of Reuven (together with Shimon and Gad) traveled second, when the nation traveled in the desert. Yehudah Yissachar and Zevulan traveled first (*Bamidbar* 2:9).

Eight years later, the Steipler met the "son". "Your father sent you this letter eight years ago, but due to the war, I wasn't able to deliver it until now."

The man took the letter in awe. His father had since passed away, and now he would be receiving a message from him! He felt like he was receiving a hidden *צוה*, will written by his father to him.

The letter read:

"To my dear son...

When you return from yeshiva, don't forget to bring home some of the delicious salty herring which is sold next to your yeshiva". End of letter.

The lesson is to never waste an opportunity. These were the parting words of a father to his beloved son, and the father missed the opportunity to write words of *yiras Shamayim* and encouragement to his son. Every moment is a precious opportunity; it is a shame to waste it.

As the Beis Avraham once shouted from the depths of his heart, *מען זאל זיך נישט דרייען ווי א נער אויפן מארק*, "We shouldn't be wander around like a fool in the marketplace." The wise merchants seek merchandise that can be sold for a profit. The fool walks around the market, not recognizing the great deals and opportunities in front of him. He buys things of little value, and he ends up losing money instead of gaining.

We shouldn't be like the fool. There are so many opportunities available to us.

A *bachur* once asked the Steipler, "Which yeshiva should I learn in?"

The Steipler told him, "It doesn't matter. The main thing is, don't waste your time."

It states (*Iyov* 1:7), *ויאמר ה' אל השטן מאין תבוא ויען*, "Hashem said to the Satan, 'Where are you coming from?' The Satan replied, 'I was flying around, going around the earth.'"

We can explain that Hakadosh Baruch Hu asks the Satan, who is the *yetzer hara*, *מאין תבוא*, where do you come from? This means, "What tactics do you use to ensnare people into your trap?"

The *yetzer hara* replies, *משוט בארץ והתהלך בה*, "I get people to go around the earth, to travel here, and visit there. And it is all *משוט* (foolishness (from the word *שוטה*)). In other words, I encourage them to waste their time."

On Yom Kippur, the *kohen gadol* pours *ketores* on hot coals that are in a *מחתה*, fire pan. When the fire goes out, and the *ketores* are consumed, the *kohen gadol* enters the *kodesh kadoshim* another time to remove the empty *מחתה*.

Taking out the empty utensil is considered part of the Yom Kippur *avodah*. Before he does this service, he must immerse himself in a mikvah.

Why is that necessary? Why can't he leave the empty *מחתה* in the *kodesh kadoshim*, and next year, on Yom Kippur, when he enters again to bring offer the *ketores*, he can remove the empty pan when he leaves.

The answer is that empty things do not belong in the *kodesh kadoshim*.

Let this be a lesson on time. Time shouldn't be wasted, especially on holy days, like Shabbos and *yom tov*, the time should be filled. It is disrespectful to leave empty things before Hashem.

Torah

On the topic of time, Chazal say that we should have set times for Torah.

But setting times isn't enough. We have to take advantage of those times, too.

Some people have set times for studying Torah, but they can't begin studying without a coffee. So, they arrive on time to seder, but the learning doesn't start. First, the coffee needs to be prepared. While in the coffee room, they meet up with some friends, and

they have conversations. Many important issues need to be discussed.

Then it is time to go into the beis medresh. With the coffee in hand, they walk towards their seat, but on the way, they stop by some of the people in the beis medresh to share a few words. You have to be polite, after all. How can you ignore ur neighbors?

When they are finally seated at their place, it is time to take inventory, to see who came and who didn't show up yet.

Next, it is time to speak to the *chaovrusah*. It is twenty-three hours since they were last together, and they have to catch up on what happened in their lives. Furthermore, they have to chat a bit to get into the mood of studying Torah.

I guess they will be rewarded for trying to learn Torah and for coming to beis medresh, but one thing is for sure, they won't get much learning done.

The correct way to do it is to come on time and to begin learning. If you need a coffee, come earlier. But get into your Torah studies as quickly as possible.

As it states (*Avos* 4:10), *הוי ממעט בעסק ועסק*, בתורה, and the Lev Simchah (Gur) zt'l explains, "Minimize your preparations for Torah. Just start studying." Don't look for the best seat, the best coffee, the best mood. Just begin studying Torah.

Reb Pinchas ben Yair (*Avodah Zarah* 20:) teaches, *תורה מביאה לידי זהירות, וזהירות מביאה לידי נקיות*, "Studying Torah leads to being cautious with the mitzvos. Being cautious with the mitzvos leads to being swift to perform the mitzvos..." Reb Pinchas ben Yair has a fairly long list, showing how the acquisition of one good attribute leads to acquiring the next one until one gets to the top of the ladder of perfection, and reaches very high levels.

The Mesilas Yescharim bases his *sefer* on this order.

If you would ask someone, "How do you become a *zariz* in *avodas Hashem* (to perform mitzvos swiftly)?" he might reply that you should buy an alarm clock so that you can wake up on time, and you should get dressed quickly, and rush off to shul, etc. These ideas are helpful, but there is another method. Reb Pinchas ben Yair says that when you train yourself in *zahirus*, to be diligent and cautious to keep the mitzvos, that will lead you to the next level, *zrizus*.

Another example, Reb Pinchas ben Yair says, *טהרה מביאה לידי חסידות*, "purity leads to chassidus." If you will ask someone, "How does one become a chassid?" He will tell you the counsel that is written in Mesilas Yescharim (ch.21):

You should meditate on Hashem's greatness and kindness. This contemplation will help you love and fear Hashem, which are the foundations of chassidus.

However, there is another way to attain chassidus. He should acquire *טהרה*, purity, and *טהרה מביאה לידי חסידות*, purity leads to chassidus.

Purity means to do everything for Hashem's sake, without involving his own intentions and personal benefit. Reb Pinchas ben Yair tells us that acquiring the trait of *טהרה* will lead him to the next level, chassidus.

The first on the list is Torah, as Reb Pinchas ben Yair says, *תורה מביאה לידי זהירות*, "Torah leads to *zehirus*..." But how does one get to Torah? What steps should one take to become a *masmid*? Reb Pinchas ben Yair doesn't tell us.

This is because there are no steps that lead up to Torah. You just take a *sefer* and begin learning. It is that simple.

Some people wait for "something" to happen, that will bring them closer to the Torah, but there is nothing to wait for. You can begin now.

At a wedding, how can one tell who is the chasan? The chasan is dressed in his

Shabbos clothing, but so are many of the guests. So how do you know who is the chasan?

There's a way to find out. The one who goes home with the kalah, is the chasan.

Shavuos was a chasunah, and the Torah is the kalah, but who is the chasan? We are now a few days after Shavuos. Those who took home the Torah, study it, and cherish its words, they are the *chasan* of the Torah.

No preparation is needed. Reb Pinchas ben Yair didn't tell us what steps lead to Torah because all one has to do is begin.

Holding on to Inspiration

This week's parashah discusses the חנוכה המזבח, the korbanos that were brought to dedicate the mizbeiach.

When were those korbanos brought? It states (7:84), זאת חנוכת המזבח ביום המשח אותו, "This is the *chanukas hamizbeiach* on the day the *mizbeiach* was anointed." This means the חנוכה began on rosh chodesh Nisan, when the mizbeiach was anointed.

But it also states (7:88) זאת חנוכת המזבח אחרי המשח אותו, "This is the *chanukas hamizbeiach* after it was anointed." This implies that the חנוכה began after rosh chodesh Nisan (see Rashi 7:84).

Rashi answers that the חנוכה began on rosh chodesh Nisan, as it states ביום המשח אותו. But we still don't know what came first, the anointing or the korbanos. So, the pasuk clarifies, זאת חנוכת המזבח אחרי המשח אותו, that the korbanos were brought after the anointment, and not before. As Rashi writes, "The *mizbeiach* was anointed first, and then they brought the *korbanos*."

The Imrei Emes zy'a says that the Torah writes ביום אחרי to hint that when one merits a day of inspiration, he should make sure it remains אחרי, afterward, as well.

We made kabalos tovos on Shavuos, we accepted the Torah, we said נעשה ונשמע, and we were inspired. Now, we must make sure

we keep these resolutions, אחרי, after Shavuos passes, too.

A Stoliner chassid was with his Rebbe, the Beis Aharon, for Shavuos. When he returned home, his friends asked him, "How did the *yom tov* pass?"

He replied, "It didn't pass. It went into me."

Because the goal is not that *yom tov* should pass. The goal is for the inspiration to become part of us and change us.

We accepted the Torah, and this should have long-lasting results.

About *mattan Torah* it states, וקדשתם היום, "Sanctify yourselves today and tomorrow." The goal is ומהר, to hold on to the inspiration tomorrow - even after Shavuos passes.

Also, after *mattan Torah*, Hashem said (Devarim 5:27), לך אמר להם שובו לכם לאהליכם, "Tell the nation to return home." Hashem was saying that the nation can't remain, eternally, at the exalted levels that they experienced at *mattan Torah*. They must return home.

The *yetzer hara* and the *yetzer hatov* explain Hashem's command "to return home" in two very different ways.

The *yetzer tov* says, שובו לכם לאהליכם, you should return home and go back to living in this physical world but let there remain a spiritual imprint from the experiences you had at *matan Torah*. Let the inspiration stay with you forever.

The *yetzer hara* tells people that when Hashem said, שובו לכם לאהליכם, He meant they should return to their old ways, and there should be no sign that they received the Torah.

In *Oz Yashir* we say, אמר אויב... שלל, "The enemy says... שלל." *שלל* is *roshei teivos* שובו לכם לאהליכם, "return to your tents." The enemy is the *yetzer hara*, and he tells us to return to our tents, to our old ways. But we listen to the *yetzer hatov*, and we allow the light of

Shavuos to remain with us, even after returning home.

As it states in *Eishes Chayil*, במח בה לב בעלה, ושלל לא יחסר. Even after *yom tov* passes (as implied by שלל, which stands for לאהליכם) we remain with the inspiration and passion for Torah we had on Shavuos.

The *chachamim* call the *yom tov*, שבועות and the Torah calls it, עצרת. Both names tell us that we should hold on to the *yom tov* even after it passes, as we will explain:

שבועות means to swear. The Beis Avraham *zt'l* says that this is because on Shavuos everyone gives his word and promises to keep the Torah. It can be compared to soldiers who are sworn in when they are conscripted into the army. We joined Hashem's army, so we must also give our word and promise that we will accept the yoke of Heaven and abide by all the Torah's laws.

The other name for Shavuos is עצרת, which means to hold back. It is called עצרת, because accepting the Torah on Shavuos isn't sufficient. We must עצרת, hold on to it, even after *yom tov* passes.⁵

Before the Torah was given, the *pasuk* describes Har Sinai as follows (*Shemos* 19:16): ויהי קולות וברקים וענן כבד על ההר "There were voices and lightning, and a heavy cloud on the mountain."

During *mattan Torah*, it states (20:15), וכל העם רואים את הקולות ואת הלפידים "The entire nation saw the voices and the torches..." Before *mattan Torah* there was lightning (ברקים), and after *mattan Torah* there were torches (לפידים). Lightning is an intense light that shines for a second and disappears—a torch burns for a long time.

The Divrei Shmuel *zt'l* explains that before *mattan Torah* they didn't have vessels to accept the tremendous holy light, therefore

5. The Nesivos Shalom *zt'l* once asked some *bachurim*, students of his yeshivah, "When is the moment *mattan Torah* happens for us?"

One *bachur* replied, "It's on Shavuos, by *alos hashachar*."

Another *bachur* said, "It happens when we read the *aseres hadibros*."

A third *bachur* said another time.

The Rebbe replied, "*Kabalas haTorah* happens when a person accepts the yoke of Torah."

Based on this, *kabalas haTorah* can happen throughout the year, too. Whenever one accepts the yoke of Heaven, that is *kabalas haTorah*.

There's a mitzvah to remember *mattan Torah* every day. Reb Tzaddok HaCohen *zt'l* said that the mitzvah is to remember that the Jewish nation said ונעשה ונשמע, and they accepted the yoke of Torah. We should remember that, and emulate their ways.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* said, "There are many deeds of *chassidus* and righteousness that a person can do, but the most precious service before Hakadosh Baruch Hu is to make Hashem happy by studying Torah. The proof is that the *yetzer hara* doesn't try so hard to prevent people from acting with *chassidus*, as he invests all his strength to prevent people from studying Torah."

We thank Hashem, מודים אנחנו לך ששמת חלקנו מיושבי בית המדרש ולא שמת חלקנו מיושבי קרנות, "We thank you, Hashem, that you placed our portion among those who sit in the beis medresh, and not among those who sit at the street corners."

In *Tikun Leil Shavuos* we read the beginnings and the ends of several parts of the Torah. It is like we are reading the corners, the קרנות. We thank Hashem that we are not יושבי קרנות, only studying the corners of the Torah. *Be'ezras Hashem*, we will study Torah throughout the year, and we will learn the entire *masechtos* – and not just its corners. (Attributed to the Ben Ish Chai *zt'l*).

it came like lightning and immediately disappeared. During *mattan Torah* they also received the appropriate vessels to retain the glow and spirituality, enabling them to maintain the inspiration of the Torah.

If Not Now, When?

Towards the end of his life, the Imrei Emes *zt'l* said, "When I was young, there were many sections of the Torah and aspects of *avodas Hashem* that I planned to get to later in my life. But now I know that whatever one doesn't grasp in his younger years, he will never end up getting." Therefore, there is no time like the present.

Sometimes people say, "I can't Torah study in this place." They say that this *beis medresh*, *yeshiva*, neighborhood, etc., isn't conducive for studying Torah.

They are mistaken because every place is conducive for Torah study.

Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* proves this from *mattan Torah*. The Torah was given in the desert – and not in Eretz Yisrael. Furthermore, we don't know precisely where Har Sinai is located. This teaches us that the place isn't important. Every place is a good place to learn Torah.

Some people say that the time isn't ideal for them to study Torah. Either they are busy, or they just started the day "on the left foot." They just want the day to pass, with the hope that tomorrow will be a better day. People also blame their *parnassah* for not allowing them to devote time to Torah study.

Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* disproves this concept, too, from *mattan Torah*. There is a *machlokes* whether the Torah was given on the 6th or the 7th of Sivan. This means we don't know precisely when the Torah was given. Furthermore, the Torah never tells us an exact date for Shavuot (other than that it is fifty days after the second day of Pesach). Unlike all other holidays, no date is stated for Shavuot. This is because the exact day

doesn't matter; every day is a good day for Torah.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* asked someone why he doesn't set aside time to study Torah. The man replied that he is busy working, and he doesn't have time for Torah study.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner told him that he is speaking like the nations of the world. Hashem offered them the Torah, and each nation replied that the Torah laws don't let them live.

When Hashem offered the Torah to Edom, and they heard that the Torah prohibits murder, Edom said, "Our forefather, Eisav, received the *brachah* על חרבך תחיה, to live by the sword. If we accept the Torah, how will we live?" Similarly, all nations said that if they accept the Torah, they won't be able to live.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner told him, "You're saying the same thing because you're saying that if you accept the yoke of Torah, you won't have *parnassah*, and you won't be able to survive!"

When one owns cattle, he can decide when he wants to shecht the animals – either immediately or in the future. There is no rush. But when it comes to milking a cow, he must milk the cows every day, or the milk will be lost. There's a custom to eat *milchigs* on Shavuot. Perhaps this is to remind us to grab every opportunity for Torah and mitzvos.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88.) tells that Hashem raised the mountain over the Jewish nation and said, "If you don't accept the Torah, שם תהיה קבורתכם, "You will be buried there." The question is: It should have stated פה תהיה קבורתכם, "You will be your burial here." Why does it say שם, "there"?

Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l* answered that the Gemara is hinting that if a person will say "When I get 'there' I will start learning Torah..." or "When times are better, I will devote myself to Torah" שם תהיה קבורתכם, the attitude of שם, "there" (pushing things off

until he gets "there") תהיה קבורתכם, will bury him. Instead, he should grab the reins of his life and devote himself to studying Torah. There is no time like the present.

Hashem is with Us

The words, כי אתה עמדי, "You [Hashem] are with me," are the most comforting and encouraging words one can hear.

It states (*Tehillim* 23), לא אירא רע כי אתה עמדי, "I am not afraid because You are with me."

Think of a child who is alone in the forest at night, and he is terrified. With every rustle of the leaves and every branch that falls, he thinks thieves or wild animals are coming after him.

But then he sees his father. His father is with him in the forest! And he isn't afraid anymore.

This is how we should always feel. We should not be afraid because Hashem is with us.

Some people ask, "How will I have enough money to marry off my children?"

Some are worried about *shidduchim*. "Will I ever find my *bashert*?"

There are countless worries in the world. Dovid HaMelech says that he doesn't have any concerns. לא אירא רע כי אתה עמדי, "I am not afraid because You are with me."⁶

Hashem will help. Hashem is with me, and everything will work out.⁷

I spoke to a *yungerman* who was trapped during the Meron tragedy, and he told me how his life was saved.

His shoes are perpetually loose due to his torn shoelaces. A moment before the episode occurred, he felt his shoe slipping off, so he jumped and wiggled his feet, as this is how he puts his shoes back on. Just then the crunch occurred. He was suspended mid-air. And that saved him.

Had he jumped a second later, it would be too late. If he jumped a second earlier, he would be back on the ground.

He was wounded mildly because for fifteen minutes, he was pressed above his thigh. When the Hatzalah people checked him, they told him that the wound was a centimeter away from his thigh bone.

He was saved by a fraction of a second. A moment earlier or later, he would be critically wounded. As it states לרגעים תבחננו, Hashem plans everything down to the last second.

Many other miracles happened in Meron, at this time of הסתר פנים and tragedy. These stories of hashgachah pratis remind us that at all times, לא אירא רע כי אתה עמדי, "I have nothing to fear because You are with me."

It states (*Shemos* 20:18), ומושה נגש אל הערפל אשר, שם האלקים, "Moshe approached the darkness..." (the dark cloud that hovered over Har Sinai at *mattan Torah*). The Baal HaTurim writes, הערפל is *gematriya* שכינה.

6. Before surgery, *r'l*, one doesn't say, "The doctor is probably good. After all, he has a diploma, and he went to college." He checks out the doctor, ensuring that he is reliable and has a good track record.

But when people fly on a plane, they don't check out the pilot's credentials. What's the difference? If the pilot flying the plane isn't competent, it is also a life-and-death predicament?

The answer is that the pilot is with you on the plane, and he is afraid for his life too. Therefore, you trust that he knows what he's doing. But during an operation, the doctor isn't in any danger. The patient is in danger all by himself, and therefore he is afraid.

7. The Kotzker zt'l said, "It's a good thing that worrying doesn't help. If worrying helped, people would worry even more."

The Nesivos Shalom *zt'l* says that this hints that when one endures "darkness" in his life (ערפל), and he is going through hard times, he isn't alone. Hashem is with him. The Shechinah is there.

It is the way of the Jewish nation to seek and to find the silver linings and comfort within every trouble and hardship. As the Gemara (*Chagigah* 5.) states, כל שאינו בהסתר פנים, אינו מהם,⁸ and the Beis Aharon *zt'l* (p.7:) translates it:

כל שאינו, whoever doesn't seek,

פנים, Hashem's countenance, and kindness,

הסתר, which is concealed within the tzaros,

אינו מהם, isn't a Yid, because Yidden find Hashem's kindness in every situation.

This means (a) they find the good that will come out of the hardship. Because what seems terrible now is also for the good. Sometimes we can understand the good that will come from it.

(b) Furthermore, Klal Yisrael focuses on all the good they have in their lives. Because even when one goes through difficult times, there is still a lot of good. Yidden focus on the good, and they recognize that Hashem's kindness is constant, even during difficult times.

Chapter 42 in *Tehillim* encourages Yidden in *galus* and tells them that good times are yet to come and that one day, all our troubles will disappear.

The chapter reviews various miracles, and kindness Hashem did to us in the past, when the Beis HaMikdash stood, and it encourages us that good times are coming.

One pasuk of this chapter states (42:6) ישועות פני, that we will yet see "the salvation of Hashem's face." Another pasuk, in the

same chapter, states (42:12) ישועות פני, that we will see "the salvation of my face."

Both expressions are correct because when we receive Hashem's salvation (ישועות), we will be saved (ישועות פני). Nevertheless, Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh *zt'l* asks why the chapter uses these two different expressions. Why does it change from ישועות פני to ישועות פני?

Another question on this chapter is in pasuk (42:8): תהום אל תהום קורא לקול צנור, "The depths of the sea call to each other, to the voice of Your channels..." This pasuk refers to the many tzaros we suffer in *galus*. תהום אל תהום, when one misfortune ends, another one calls and begins. קול צנור, "the voice of Your channels" is the roaring sound of water pouring through a pipe, and it also represents the great tzaros of *galus*.

Once again, Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh asks, why does the chapter change its terms? Why are the troubles of exiles called תהום and צנור? What is the difference between these two kinds of problems?

Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh *zt'l* answers that תהום is the sea, and it represents when one feels, allegorically, that the entire sea, with its endless and seemingly uncontrolled waters, are fighting against him, seeking to drown him.

צנור is a channel of water, or water pouring through a pipe. The water in the pipe is limited and can be controlled and directed to flow in a particular direction.

We think the troubles of *galus* are תהום, endless like the sea, and overwhelming and out-of-control like the roaring waves. In reality, the problems are more accurately compared to a צנור, a channel of water, which waters are directed and controlled.

8. Literally, the Gemara is saying that every Yid suffers in *galus*. If everything is perfect in life, אינו מהם, it's a sign that he isn't a Yid. Because the reality of life in *galus* is הסתר פנים, that there are hardships and struggles.

The roaring is limited and is directed and channeled. It isn't out-of-control. Be patient, let the strong current pass, and things will be good for you again.

The *pasuk* concludes, כל משברך וגליך עלי עברו, "All Your strong waves pour over me." Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh explains, "All troubles pour over me, but I remain strong. Why? It is because I know that these hardships are משברך... גליך, Your waves, and under Your control. You won't let the waters swallow me up and sweep me away."

The Gemara (*Yevamos* 121) states:

Rabban Gamliel said, "Once I was on a ship, and I saw another ship capsized out at sea. I was very distressed because I knew that the great scholar Reb Akiva was on that boat. When I arrived to dry land, I spotted Reb Akiva. I asked him, 'My son, who saved you?'"

"He replied, 'I grabbed onto a plank that used to be part of the ship. Every wave that came towards me, I lowered my head.'"

The Gemara concludes, "The *chachamim* learned from this episode, 'If *resha'im* come to a person, lower your head.'"

As Rashi explains, "Don't start up with *resha'im*... Let the time pass."

This is how we should deal with all *tzaros* of life. Don't panic; be patient. The waves are limited, and they are led from Above. Very soon, the problems will end, and you will be singing about Hashem's salvation.

Don't Ask Questions

But sometimes, the hardships are very severe, and we have questions without answers.

But the truth is that we aren't capable of understanding Hashem's ways, and we cannot expect to have answers to all questions.

As a great tzaddik said, "It would be a terrible distress and shame if I would be serving a god that I can understand."

If everything that happened in the world made sense to us, that would mean our mind is like Hashem's mind, but it isn't so. Hashem's thoughts are beyond ours. Therefore, we don't understand, and we also humble enough to realize that we can't ask questions. We trust that everything is for the good.

It is a great accomplishment, and even a פלא, wonder, that Klal Yisrael continues to believe in Hashem, despite all the hardships. As it states (*Tehillim* 89:6) ויודו שמים פלאך ה' אף, and the Yismach Yisrael of Alexander zt'l (*Tiferes Rabboseinu* 51) writes in the name of his grandfather, Reb Feivele zt'l, that the translation is as follows:

ויודו שמים פלאך, the heavens praises Hashem for the greatness and the wonder of the Jewish nation, that אמונתך בלילות, that they continue believing in Hashem even at the darkest moments of life.

It states (*Tehillim* 115:2) למה יאמרו הגוים, the goyim ask למה, why? But the Jewish nation doesn't ask this question. They say, "This is Hashem's will, and I don't need to understand why." אשרי העם שככה לו, fortunate is the nation that instead of asking למה, they say ככה, "this is what Hashem decided, and I trust His judgment."

When the Akeidas Yitzchak of Alexander was in the death camps of the holocaust, his chasidim asked him to say *divrei chizuk* that would give them strength and encouragement during those hard times. The Akeidas Yitzchak told them, "It states (*Tehillim* 92:3) להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות, 'to speak about Your kindness at day and Your emunah at night.'"

What does it mean אמונתך, Hashem's emunah?⁹

9. If it stated, ואמונה בלילות, it would mean that we have *emunah* in Hashem during the difficult moments of

The answer is that Hashem has *emunah* in us. He trusts that we will continue believing in Him בלילות, even when it is nighttime and dark in galus.

We will be rewarded immensely for not asking questions on Hashem.

Nadav and Avihu were Aharon's children who were niftar when they brought foreign fire (אש זרה) on the mizbeiach. Aharon didn't complain; he didn't ask questions on Hashem. As it states וידום אהרן, "Aharon was silent."

The Yesod HaAvodah (letter #41) teaches that Aharon's reward for his silence is that his sons became reincarnated, and they became part of Pinchas's neshamah, as the Zohar (vol.3 215:) says that this happened when Pinchas killed Zimri. The neshamos of Nadav and Avihu became part of Pinchas's neshamah.

Pinchas became Eliyahu HaNavi, who lives on forever. Thus, Aharon's children live forever. This was his reward for remaining silent and not asking questions.¹⁰

May we be *zoche* to accept the will of Hashem with happiness.

life. But it states אמונתך, "Your *emunah*." What is Hashem's *emunah*, which we speak about it בלילות, in the dark moments of life?

10. After Shema at night we say אמת ואמונה. We discuss *emunah* at night. The Sfas Emes (Chaya Sarah (תרנ"ב) explains that the primary *emunah* is to believe that even when everything is dark, and there are hardships, that even then, everything is from Hashem and for our good.