

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita

Acharei





©

copyright 2019

For subscription & comments
Email: **Mail@torahwellsprings.com**

Parshas Acharei Mos

The end of *parashas* אחרי מות lists the *arayos* (forbidden marriages). As an introduction to this section, the Torah writes (18:3), כמעשה ארץ מצרים אשר ישבתם בה לא תעשו, וכמעשה ארץ כנען אשר אני מביא אתכם, שמה לא תעשו, "The deeds of the land Mitzrayim, where you lived, don't do. The deeds of the land Canaan, where I am bringing you, don't do." This *pasuk* is prohibiting us from acting in the ways of the Egyptians and Canaanites.

Many explain that the Egyptians and the Canaanites sinned with *arayos*, and the Torah is warning us that we shouldn't follow their ways.

The Sfas Emes (תרל"ה ותרל"ו) notes that since the Torah could have told us that *arayos* are forbidden, without stating we shouldn't follow the ways of the Egyptians and Canaanites, it must be that this *pasuk* is adding another lesson.

The Sfas Emes therefore explains that the *pasuk* is referring to permitted deeds, and is urging us to perform all permitted deeds in a "Jewish way" and not in the ways of the Mitzrim and Canaanites. Because there is a Jewish way of living, and a non-Jewish way. Everything we do should be done as Yidden perform it.

This rule applies to all aspects of life. A Yid rises in the morning, goes to work, eats, and performs all his deeds in a Jewish way.

One example is eating. The eating of a Yid isn't the same as the nations of the world. A Yid eats with holiness, with good intentions, with saying the *brachos* before and after each meal.

There was a tzaddik who ran an inn. Once, the tzaddik noticed that one of his customers was eating and drinking without saying a *brachah*. The tzaddik went

over to him and said, "The food we eat and drink have *neshamos* in them. When we make a *brachah* with *kavanah*, the *neshamos* receive their *tikun*. There are *neshamos* who wait a very long time for their rectification, and when a Yid says a *brachah* over food, those souls can go to Gan Eden. It's possible that someone's deceased father's *neshamah* is in the food he's eating. For that reason, it isn't good to eat without a *brachah*..."

The man cried out in agony, "I just remembered that today is my father's *yahrtzeit*!" He did *teshuvah* and was careful with his *brachos* from then on.

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "My teacher, the Arizal, told me that attaining *ruach hakodesh* is dependent on how much *kavanah* one has when he makes *brachos* on food. When the *brachos* are said with *kavanah*, it destroys the *kelipos* (impurities that are in the food) which makes the

food pure to receive holiness. The Arizal warned me about this a lot."

Reb Chaim Vital adds, "A person must be extremely careful with *ברכת נהנין*, because the person... becomes holy from these *brachos*, as it says, *וְתוֹרַתְךָ בְּתוֹךְ מִעֵי*, your Torah is in my stomach, and a divine spirit comes to the person."

Another aspect of eating as a Yid is to eat with *derech erez*. A Yid doesn't gobble up the food as though famished.

The phrase *ונברך עליה בקדושה ונטהרה*, "We will bless You...with holiness and with purity..." is only said in the *brachah על המזון*, and not in *ברכת המזון*. Rebbe Ahron of Belz *zt'l* explained that when Yidden eat bread it automatically turns it into a holy service. He first washes and dries his hands; he puts salt on the table, and so forth. The entire process expresses holiness. But when one takes a piece of cake to calm his hunger, he might even eat it

while walking around the house. He tends not to eat it with the proper *derech erez*. Therefore, specifically in Al HaMichyah we say *ונברך עליה* *בקריושה ובטהרה*, to remind us to eat with holiness and purity.

Tzaddikim from the Bobov dynasty sought to say *על המזון* every day, so they could say the words *ונברך עליה בקריושה ובטהרה*.¹

The *Zohar* (*Eikev* 272.) states, "Eating is a war (*מלחמה*)." It isn't easy to eat properly, but there are several tips to help us eat with *kedushah*, as a Yid should.

One counsel is to wait a little

bit before eating. Postpone the meal for a short while, and also in the middle of your meal, stop eating for a few moments. This weakens the *yetzer hara*, who desires that a person be totally absorbed in the food.

The Baal HaTanya writes, "When one desires to eat, and he pushes off the meal for an hour, or less, he is conquering the *sitra achara* (*yetzer hara*) below, and Hashem's honor and holiness escalates Above. And because of this *kedushah*, he will receive immense help from Heaven, to succeed in his *avodas Hashem*...."²

1. Rebbe Zev of Zhitomir *zt'l* once looked out his window, and said to his *chassidim*, "I just saw a pancake running down the street."

The *chassidim* looked out the window to see what their Rebbe was referring to, but all they saw was someone running down the street, with his tallis and tefillin tucked under his arm. The Rebbe explained, "His mother-in-law just made cheese pancakes, and she told her son-in-law to *daven* quickly so he could eat them while they're still hot. He ran to shul so he could get home quickly to eat the pancakes. The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* taught that a person is where his thoughts are. This man was thinking about the pancakes, and therefore, that's how he appeared to me — like a running cheese pancake."

2. One Friday night, the *chassidim* sat together at a *zits* (Chassidic

Reb Ahron Luria (the Avodas Panim) *zt'l* asked Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* for advice for *kedushas achilah*. Rebbe Shlomke told him to remember Hashem while eating. He said that this counsel is alluded to in *Megillas Esther*. It states, **יבוא המלך והמן אל המשתה אשר אעשה להם**, "Let the king and Haman come today to the meal which I will make for them" (5:8). The King represents Hashem, and Haman is the *yetzer hara*. The *pasuk* advises, **יבוא המלך והמן אל המשתה**, bring the King to the meal. Remember that Hashem is there, by your meal, watching you eat. With this awareness, you will eat with more *derech eretz*.

Inevitably, Haman, the *yetzer hara*, will also come to the meal. He comes to every meal, urging people to gobble down the food, to eat without saying proper *brachos*, to overeat, to eat unhealthy foods, and so on. We can't prevent Haman from attending, but invite Hashem too, and this will help you eat properly.

The *pasuk* concludes, **ומחר אעשה כדבר המלך**. If you will remember Hashem at the meal, then **ומחר**, "eventually, **אעשה כדבר המלך**, I will do as the King desires," and I will eat properly, as a Yid should.

The Rebbe of Toldos Ahron (Rebbe Ahron Roth) *zt'l* would

gathering) and their discussion was on the importance of eating with *kedushah*. The next morning there was a *kiddush* in shul, and hot kugel was served. Reb Ahron, the Rav of Zhitomir *zt'l* (who attended that Friday night *zits*) decided he wouldn't eat the kugel immediately. He would wait a few moments, to weaken the grip of the *yetzer hara*. In the meanwhile, he began cutting the kugel into small pieces, and he found a needle inside. If he had eaten quickly and swallowed the needle, his life would be in danger. Since then he used to say, "I make sure to attend every Friday night *zits*, because the *zits* saved my life."

often talk with his chassidim about the importance of overcoming *taavas achilah*, the lust for food. (He wrote a holy *sefer* called *Shulchan HaTohar*, on this topic.) One of his students, Reb Ahron Cohen, (author of *Beis Ahron* on *Shas*) asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l*, "How does one overcome *taavas*, temptations, and eat properly?"

The Chazon Ish told him, that by the rules of nature that Hashem implanted in the world, a person never has two passions at the same degree of intensity. One *taavah* is always stronger than the other. If he desires one matter immensely, he will automatically desire other matters less. "Therefore," the Chazon Ish said, "I advise you to desire Hashem and His Torah immensely, and then you won't desire food so much. I'm certain that the *קניזת דהרושן* didn't taste the flavor of kugel because of his intense desire for Torah."

Tefillah

Some people leave shul in the middle of *chazaras hashatz* (while the *chazan* is repeating *Shemoneh Esrei*), rushing to get to work. They think rushing out will earn them more money. Reb Ezra Barzel said rushing out before davening is over is like someone who rushes to go to work, and forgets to take along the keys to his business.

Reb Ezra Barzel was referring to those who leave the *beis kneses* before *birchas cohanim*, which carries the keys for *parnassah*. (In several other cities in Eretz Yisrael *birchas cohanim* is said every day). Reb Barzel's lesson also applies to those communities who don't say *birchas cohanim* daily. They would be more successful if they stay until the end of the *tefillah*. *Parnassah* comes from *tefillah*, and to leave early is like rushing off to your office without the keys to gain entry.

In some siddurim the words *ירידת השפע*, which mean "the descending of bounty" appear right before *אשרי למנצה ובה לציון*. We pray for bounty in *Shemoneh Esrei* and when we say *אשרי, למנצה, ובה לציון* the bounty comes down. But how can a person get the blessings Hashem prepared for him if he leaves beforehand?

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir *zt'l* saw someone rushing out of beis medresh before the end of the *tefillah*. Rebbe Yechezkel showed him the words *ירידת השפע*, written in the siddur before *אשרי*, and asked him how he expects to get the bounty if he leaves before the end of the *tefillah*.

Reb Anshil Shwartz *zt'l* of Chaifa would spend many hours davening, and then he would say *Tehillim*, and several other supplications, each morning. He got around to opening his store around two in the afternoon. Someone saw Reb Anshil davening late in the morning and asked,

"Reb Anshil, what will be with your costumers?" He replied, "They aren't waiting in the sun."

He had ample *parnassah* all his life despite — or rather because — he davened well and didn't rush off to work.

A non-religious Yid was once in Yeshivas Kfar Chasidim when they were davening *Minchah*. Afterwards, people asked him for his impressions. He replied, "I saw *bachurim* swaying back and forth, but there was this elderly man, standing near the front wall, and it appeared that he was truly speaking to Someone." That man was Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l*.

People said similar things about the *tefillos* of Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l*. People had the impression that if they would disturb him in the middle of his *tefillos*, he would respond, "Don't you see I'm in the middle of speaking with some-One."

Reb Zev Kahn *shlita*, the *mashgiach* of Meor HaTalmud, Rechovot, tells that his mother lived in Copenhagen until the ripe old age of 101. That wasn't uncommon in Copenhagen. Many people of the Jewish community lived very long. The community members decided it's because the entire community was careful to come on time to *tefillah*.

The leaders of this community told the wonder of their longevity, with their explanation, to Reb Shmuel Wosner *zt'l*. Reb Wosner replied, "I was born in Vienna, and there too, people lived long. It wasn't because of the location, because *lehavdil* the non-Jews weren't

living as long. Everyone wondered which merit is causing their longevity. But then someone died at seventy years old, which was young for their community. That person wasn't cautious to come on time to minyan. That is when they realized that the long life that most of the community was enjoying was due to their caution to come to minyan on time.³

There was a *din Torah* between two people regarding a large sum of money. They brought their case to a *dayan* and expressed their urgency to get a *psak* as quickly as possible. The *dayan* listened to each person's claim and told them he would have an answer for them before Shabbos.

3. A source to this concept is *Megillah* (27:), which states that the students of Reb Preidah asked him why he was living long, and he replied, מימי לא קדמני אדם לביהמ"ד, "No one ever came to beis medresh before me"

People say that *שיבה* is *roshe teivos* בשעת התפילה, "Silence is good during *tefillah*," and the reward for being silent is *שיבה*, a long life. We can also say that *שיבה* is *roshei teivos* for בדייקנות יהיה בשעת התפילה, one should come on time to *tefillah*. The reward is *שיבה*, long life.

Thursday night, he spent many hours writing up the *teshuvah* (responsa), explaining his halachic ruling, which would obligate one party to pay a lot of money. He wanted to keep his promise and send them the *teshuvah* before Shabbos, but his fax machine wasn't working, and when it finally was fixed a wire ripped. By the time the machine was working properly it was already after *chatzos*, midday. This *dayan* had a *kabbalah* not to do any *melachah* (work) on Friday after midday. He felt bad he wasn't able to keep his word, but he felt he should keep his *kabbalah* in honor of Shabbos, not to work after *chatzos*.

That Shabbos came the sad tidings that one of the litigants died. This was the man who the *dayan* ruled that he must pay his friend a large sum of money. The *dayan* realized that had he sent out his *teshuvah* on Friday afternoon, he would feel guilty for that

person's death. He would think that his ruling distressed him so much, causing him to die. By keeping his *kabbalah* he was rescued from a life with a terrible conscience.

So many things can be learned from this story.

(1) *Hashgachah pratis*. The *dayan's* fax machine broke, and then a wire ripped. This wasn't by chance. Hashem arranged all of this so the *dayan* shouldn't live the rest of his life with a guilty conscience that he caused someone's death.

(2) When you have a good *kabbalah*, keep it under all circumstances. See how much good this *dayan* received by upholding his *kabbalah tovah*.

(3) Although one must try to keep his word, if circumstances prevent you from doing so, don't fret and feel bad about it. Trust that this is for the best, as in the story above.

Yesurim

Reb Eliyahu Meir Bloch *zt'l*, *rosh yeshivas* Telz, lost his entire family in the Holocaust. Nevertheless, on his first Purim in America he danced with his students, and there was a lot of joy. Someone said, "It can't be that Reb Bloch's joy is genuine. How could he possibly be happy after losing his family in the war?"

Reb Bloch overheard this remark, so he gathered the students and told them: When the Yam Suf split, Hashem didn't permit the *malachim* to sing *shirah*. Hashem said, "My creations are drowning in the sea and you will be singing *shirah*?" But Klal Yisrael did sing *shirah*. They said *Oz Yashir*. Why did Hashem permit them to say *shirah*? He could have told them as he told the *malachim*, that it was an improper time to sing *shirah* at this time.

The answer is, a *malach* isn't

able to do two things at once. They can't mourn for the perishing Egyptians and rejoice the Yidden's salvation at the same time. They can't be happy and sad simultaneously. Therefore, Hashem forbade them from singing *shirah*. It isn't proper to totally disregard the destruction that was taking place at that time.

The Jewish nation, however, is capable of juggling both emotions simultaneously. They are able to rejoice and sing *shirah* for the miracles Hashem performed for them, and simultaneously mourn and sympathize in Hashem's distress for the deaths of the *Mitzrim*.

Reb Bloch concluded that his heart is very broken by the Holocaust. His heart bleeds for them. But this doesn't prevent him from dancing and being happy on Purim. Because Yidden can experience both emotions, joy and distress, at the same time.

We can explain this with a *maschal*:

Someone owned an apartment on the top floor that was filled with old boxes and other items. It was impossible to live there. However, he could build on the roof and live there. Similarly, tragedies can fill people's hearts and prevent them from experiencing *simchah*. But they can rise to a higher level, and have joy there, on the higher plane.

The author of *Rimzei Machshavah shlita* is plagued by a grave disease (may he have a *refuah sheleimah* quickly) and, marvellously, he keeps himself happy, even in this hard time. He writes in his *sefer* that it is all a matter of perspective. The letters בשמחה, joy, rearranged, spell מוחשבה, thought, for with a positive outlook, and with right thoughts, one can be happy under all circumstances.

He writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu never takes away from a person his right to be happy.

Even when Heaven sends him presents [the Rimzei Machshavah called his illness a present]... nevertheless, he remains *baal habayis* over his thoughts. He can think about the many wonders Hakadosh Baruch Hu performs for him, he can see how Hakadosh Baruch Hu is with him with every step. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't abandon anyone, not even for a moment. If a person would think for a moment about these matters, and how Hakadosh Baruch Hu is thinking about him, he would be very happy. Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends life and happiness every moment. It is up to the person's perception and decision. It's the person's choice to be happy or distressed..."

There was a student who repeatedly complained to his rebbe about the hardships he was enduring in life. The rebbe realized that his primary problem was his negative outlook on life. The rebbe

invited the student to his home and gave him some water to drink. Then the rebbe took a handful of salt and added it to the water. The student, obviously, didn't want to drink it anymore. Then the rebbe brought his student to a river, threw a handful of salt into it, and asked the student to drink the water. This time the student drank the water. It was sweet.

The rebbe explained, "I poured exactly the same amount of salt into the cup as I poured into the river. Yet you didn't want to drink from the cup, but you drank from the river. This is because the river has more water, so the salt isn't dominant. The cup is small, the salt is concentrated, and therefore unbearable. The same thing is with *yesurim*. If you focus on them, the *yesurim* become concentrated and very painful. But if you will focus on all the good in your life, the hardships will still be there, but they won't bother you as much.

Bitachon

Someone came to the Pnei Menachem zt'l of Gur before Pesach, and said, "I have a surgery scheduled for *isru chag*, after Pesach, and I'm very worried about it..." The Pnei Menachem asked him for the name of the surgeon, and then the Pnei Menachem said, "You don't need a procedure. Call the doctor and cancel your appointment."

The chassid did as he was told and was relieved that he doesn't have to go under the knife. He trusted in Hashem that he would have a *refuah sheleimah* some other way and celebrated the seven days of Pesach with immense joy.

The night Pesach was over, the Rebbe sent a message to the chassid: He should call the doctor and reschedule the procedure. The chassid said, "It's impossible to schedule an operation for tomorrow. The slot was certainly taken by someone else. I'll have to wait a long time for my turn."

The messenger told him that

the Rebbe said he should try and call the doctor anyway. Perhaps the date was still open. He did that and indeed the prescheduled date was still available.

The story behind the scenes was that when the ill person came to the Pnei Menachem before Pesach, the Pnei Menachem saw that he was very anxious about the surgical procedure and he wouldn't be able to celebrate Pesach with joy. Therefore, he told him to cancel the operation. Immediately after the chassid left the room, the Rebbe contacted that surgeon (remember, he asked for the surgeon's name) and said, "One of my chassidim will soon call you and ask you to cancel his appointment. Tell him that you canceled the appointment, but really keep it. I will tell him later on to go through with the surgery." That is how the chassid celebrated the *yom tov* with joy, and had the surgery he needed, on time.

Another benefit earned was that throughout Pesach, this chassid placed his trust in Hashem to heal him, and indeed in the merit of *bitachon* he had his salvation.

There was a tzaddik who wanted to be with Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin for Shabbos, but Rebbe Moshe Kobriner refused. He explained to the tzaddik that they have very different ways of helping the people who come to them for salvations. Thus, they were on two different pages, and there wasn't peace between them. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner explained, when someone came to that other tzaddik with a problem, that tzaddik would find a logical solution for the person. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner wouldn't give any solution at all. He would strengthen the person with *emunah* and *bitachon*, and with *emunah* and *bitachon* he would have his salvation.

Rebbe Moshe Kobriner told the tzaddik, "You solve

problems with counsel, which is wisdom, and wisdom has a limit. But I help them with *emunah*, which doesn't have limits."

The tzaddik replied, "I should be healthy as you are correct!" and they spoke amicably with each other, and were friends from then on.

It states (*Tehillim* 22:5), כך בטחו, "Our forefathers trusted in You. They trusted and You saved them." The word בטחו, "trusted in You" is repeated twice in this verse. The Shevet Mussar points out, the *pasuk* could have said, כך בטחו אבותינו, our forefathers trusted in You, ותפלטמו, and You saved them.

He answers that בטח means trust, and it also means certain. As it states (*Bereishis* 34:25), ויבאו על העיר בטח, "they came to the city (Shechem) with certainty." Thus, the *pasuk* is saying, כך בטחו אבותינו "Our forefathers trusted in You. בטחו, they were certain You will help them. ותפלטמו, and

you saved them." Because the ultimate level of *bitachon* is when one is certain Hashem will help.

The next *pasuk* states, כך בטחו, ולא בושו, "They trusted in You and they weren't ashamed." The Ben Ish Chai explains that there are people who trust in Hashem, but they don't tell it to others, because they fear that if the miracle doesn't happen everyone will laugh at them. But Dovid HaMelech proclaims that our forefathers trusted in Hashem ולא בושו, and they weren't ashamed to tell it to others. They were so certain they would get their salvation; they weren't ashamed to reveal their *bitachon*.

To explain this lesson, the Ben Ish Chai tells the following story that happened with Reb Moshe Galanti *zt'l*. There was a drought in Yerushalayim; all the wells were dry. Reb Moshe Galanti declared a day for *tefillah*, to be held by the *kever* of Shimon HaTzaddik. He told the people of

Yerushalayim to come to the *kever* of Shimon HaTzaddik with raincoats and umbrellas, because on the way home it will be raining.

An Arab guard saw the group of Yidden walking with their boots and rain gear, and thought it was ridiculous. The skies were clear, and it hadn't rained the entire season. "Who told you to wear the rain gear?" he asked them, and they pointed to Reb Moshe Galanti. When Reb Moshe passed, the guard smacked him on his face.

Reb Moshe Galanti looked at him and didn't respond. When they came to Shimon HaTzaddik's *kever*, they poured their hearts out in *tefillah*, and it began to rain and pour. The guard who mocked Reb Moshe Galanti carried him home on his

shoulders. He asked him *mechilah* for mistrusting him, and promised to serve him for the rest of his life.

If it didn't rain, Reb Moshe would have been very embarrassed. He told everyone to come with their rain gear, and it didn't even rain! But he trusted in Hashem, certain that Hashem will send rain. This is an example of *בך בטחו ולא בושו*, to have *bitachon*, without shame.

Similarly, the Gemara (*Taanis* 19) tells us that people asked Choni HaMaagal to pray for rain, and he replied, "Tell everyone to bring in the *korban Pesach* ovens (made from clay) so they won't become ruined by the rain." He was certain Hashem will listen to his *tefillos* and bring rain. He wasn't afraid to be embarrassed by his announcement.⁴

4. On Purim we sing, *להודיע שכל קוּיך לא יבושו*, "To reveal that all those who trust in You will not be ashamed..." The Degel Machaneh Efraim (*Purim*) writes that *כל* means *שהוא כל*, even a little bit. This hints that even a little bit of *bitachon* is sufficient, and Hashem will help them.

To Bridge the Gap

The Tzanzer Rav's doctor asked him, "What do you do?" "I'm an engineer" the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz replied. "I build bridges."

The doctor was shocked. The Tzanzer Rav explained, "I'm building a bridge to bridge the gap between my mind and my heart." The mind can know many matters. It can know *emunah*, it can know that the purpose in life is Torah and

mitzvos, it can know that we can rely on Him. But when a test comes along, the heart doesn't collaborate with the heart's knowledge. There remains a gap between the mind's awareness and the heart's emotions, and our job is to bridge that gap.

The Dubno Magid *zt'l* told the following *mashal*: A teacher was walking with his students through a thick forest and told his students, "If you see dogs,

It states (*Vayikra* 11:27), כל הולך על כפיו טמא הוא. The Divrei Binah explains, כל הולך על כפיו, whoever trusts in the work of his hands, הוא, טמא, is *tamei*. Because we believe that *parnassah* comes by Hashem's *hashgachah*, and not by the work of our hands.

Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l* taught that businessmen must believe that everything that happens in their business, including what they buy, the price they pay, and everything else that happens were all planned by Hashem's *hashgachah pratis*. He adds that whoever believes in this, אני ערב בעדו כי השי"ת יעזור לו בהצלחה, "I guarantee, Hashem will grant him success."

The greatest fortune is to believe and to trust in Hashem. It states (*Tehillim* 118:7), ה' לי בעוזרי ואני אראה בשנאי. Rebbe Dovid of Tolna *zt'l* explains that Dovid HaMelech was saying that he wishes for all his friends they should have *bitachon*. For all his enemies, he wishes and curses them they should think they do everything on their own. He explains: ה' לי, the belief that Hashem is standing at my side to help me; בעוזרי, I wish this notion of *bitachon* for all my friends and aides. ואני אראה, the notion that I do things, and matters go according to my decisions; בשנאי, I wish this outlook for my enemies.

don't be afraid. Just say, *ולכל בני ישראל לא ידרין כלב לשוננו* dogs will scatter.”

A pack of large dogs approached them. The teacher was the first to run, and the entire class ran after him. When they calmed down, the students asked, "Why were you afraid? You said we just need to say the *pasuk* and the dogs won't harm us."

The teacher replied, "When I heard the dogs barking, I became so afraid, I forgot the *pasuk*."

This is because his mind knew the *segulah*, but his heart didn't rely on it.

The same can be with *emunah*. One can know about *emunah* intellectually, but if the heart hasn't internalized the lessons, the concepts of *emunah* will not change how he reacts to life's challenges.

The Tzaddikim of Slonim *zt'l* say, "The distance between the mind and the heart is greater than the distance between

heaven and earth." Therefore, much review is necessary, so the heart will accept the messages of the mind.

Indeed, the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz, who was busy constructing a bridge between his head and heart, would spend a lot of time reviewing *emunah*. For example, the *Darkei Chaim*, written by the Tzanzer Rav's *gabai*, says, "The Tzanzer Rav would often awaken...and for a quarter hour to a half hour he would say things like, 'There is only one Creator, as everyone knows, and we must serve solely Him... No mind can perceive Hashem... Man has free will to choose Torah... There is no place where Hashem isn't there. I don't want anything other than to serve Hashem...'" In that way, the *emunah* that was in his mind crossed the bridge and reached his heart.

A lecturer was talking about anger, impressing on the listeners to distance

themselves from anger at all times. He spiced his speech with *midrashim*, *mussar* works, and anecdotes, and the entire community was inspired.

He hollered, "Even if you have good reason to be angry, don't do so. It's never a wise idea. One must control his anger at all times. There should never be a moment when one loses his temper..."

Just then, someone came up to the podium with a hot tea. But this person wasn't careful, and he placed the tea on the slanted lectern. The hot tea spilled on the speaker's new suit.

"Ouch!" he shouted, and then he said, "Why can't you be more careful? You always do things like this! This isn't the first time..." The speaker carried on and on. He couldn't control his anger.

How did this happen? Didn't he just say that there's never a valid reason for anger and one

must control his anger at all times? The answer is, he knew these ideas in his mind, but his heart wasn't convinced. The mind's knowledge, alone, isn't sufficient to bring about change.

Someone was having nightmares that someone was speaking *lashon hara* on him. He remembered the dreams by daytime, and they robbed his peace of mind.

"It's just a dream," his wife would tell him. "Don't worry about it."

But the nightmares continued. Once, he told his wife, "It's terrible! There were many people there, in my dream, and he was saying the worst things about me, in front of all of them..."

His wife reminded him that the *pasuk* states, *הרהלונות שוא ידברו* "Dreams tell nonsense."

"I know that it's just a dream, and I know that dreams are nonsense, but how does that help me? I

still have a great problem, because in my dreams he's talking about me!"

Intellectually he knew that it was just a dream, and not real, but his heart didn't know that.⁵

The following is a story about a teacher who acquired *emunah* properly:

A *melamed* was teaching Gemara to his eight-year-old students, when suddenly he looked worried. He told his class that he had to go out for a minute, and they should review the Gemara on their

own. This story happened in the pre-cellphone era, so he went into the teachers' room and placed a phone call. The principal overheard parts of the phone call, and it seemed that there was some problem.

After the five-minute phone call, the teacher put his worries behind him, and went back into the classroom and continued the lesson with his usual enthusiasm. The principal listened from behind the door, and heard that everything was in order, as usual.

5. People tell a story about a young man who was confined in a mental asylum, because he thought he was a mouse. His wealthy parents hired a psychologist to speak with the lad every day. The psychologist had the young man repeat, "I'm not a mouse" several times, until he was cured and his parents were notified that they can finally take him home.

The glad parents picked up their son, and were happy to see that everything was well with him. They came to the driving lot, where the parents' car was parked, and suddenly the boy runs away and crawls under one of the cars. The exasperated parents asked him, "Why are you doing under the car?" He replied, "I saw a cat in the parking lot."

"So what? You've been cured. You aren't afraid of cats anymore. You know that you aren't a mouse."

The boy replied, "Yes, I know that I am not a mouse, but the question is whether the cat knows it?"

Later the principal asked the teacher, "I know you never leave the classroom in the middle of the class. Why did you leave today to make a phone call?"

The *melamed* answered, "My son's *chasunah* is approaching. A few weeks ago, I took out a large loan to cover the expenses of the wedding. I kept the money in an old jacket I hardly ever wear. As I was teaching the children today, something my wife announced a couple of days ago popped into my head. She said she would be cleaning out the closets for Pesach and is going to throw out all the old clothing. I quickly called her to tell her she shouldn't throw out my old jacket."

"And what happened?"

"She said she threw out the jacket yesterday, and she added that the sanitary department had already taken the garbage away. There is nothing we can do."

"How were you able to teach after that? Anyone else in this

situation would be broken. I was listening from behind the door, and I heard you teaching with enthusiasm."

The *melamed* replied, "I am a student of Reb Gad'l Eisner *zt'l*. He taught us, 'If it weren't for moments like these, when we are confronted with great tests, what purpose does life have?'"

This *melamed* knew intellectually that everything is from Hashem, and for the best, and he succeeded to bring that awareness to the heart. That isn't a simple accomplishment — it is the product of many reviews and attempts to live with *emunah*. But as Reb Gad'l Eisner said, "If it weren't for moments like these, what purpose does life have?"

Beginnings

For many yeshiva *bachurim* and *kollel yungerleit*, a new *zman* for Torah study is about to begin. Therefore, this is a good time to discuss the importance of new beginnings.

It is always important to make the beginnings good.

An example is a new day. Tzaddikim taught that a person's first thought in the day, the first words he speaks each day, and his first action (מהשבה דיבור, ומעשה) should be for Hashem. For example, upon awakening, the first thought should be, "I want to have a day filled with *avodas Hashem*." Or one can awaken with thoughts of *emunah*.

One's first words should be holy, too. Indeed, we begin the day saying מודה אני. Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli ז"ל would begin the day saying, "A good morning for all Yidden."

One's first deed should also be *avodas Hashem*, such as washing *negel vasser*. Afterwards, have some more good thoughts, speech, and deeds. Make the beginning of the day good, and that sets the momentum for everything that follows.

These ideas also apply to the

beginning of a learning session. When one begins learning, it is advised to begin the *seder* with *hasmadah*. There are people who begin their learning session with conversations with their *chavrusah*. This is often not a wise idea, because one conversation leads to the next. Significant amount of time can pass, and they didn't begin studying Torah yet. Instead, we suggest a *taanis dibur* for the first fifteen minutes of the *seder*, solely speaking Torah. The beginning will be good, and the rest of the learning time will continue in that spirit.

A new *zman* of Torah is beginning for many *bachurim* and for many *kollel yungerleit*, and we urge them to make the beginning of the *zman* good, with *hasmadah* and enthusiasm. Perhaps with time the *hasmadah* and enthusiasm will cool down, but since they began on a positive note, it is likely that

they will continue learning well throughout the *zman*.⁶

Kevias Ittim for Torah

Tzaddikim of Slonim *zt'l* would say: Each hour of the day that passes without Torah study is a zero. Each hour of Torah study is a one. If you place the “one” before all those zeros, it becomes a very significant number.

How does one place the one before the zeros? Perhaps the zeros will come first, before the one? The tzaddikim of Slonim *zt'l* said, if the hour you designated for Torah study is the most important hour of the day for you, then that hour is counted first, and

it is like you have a very large number of hours of Torah study. But if you find your financial pursuits to be the primary part of your day, you are left with many zeros, and then the “one” comes at the end.

The Gemara debates whether the Torah was given on the 6th or the 7th of Sivan. But all opinions agree that the Torah was given on Shabbos. This hints that just as no one would consider desecrating Shabbos, *chalilah*, so one mustn't desecrate these times set for learning Torah. No financial gains should draw us away from those times set for Torah study.⁷

6. When preparing a coffee, one uses boiling hot water. He won't drink the coffee at that temperature, though. He will wait until the coffee cools down, somewhat. But it is important for him that the beginning should be piping hot.

Similarly, one should begin the *zman* with fiery enthusiasm. The enthusiasm and the *hasmadah* will likely not remain at this high gear throughout the entire *zman*, but it is important to begin in this ideal state. If he will start off lukewarm, not totally focused on Torah study, as time goes on, it is likely that he will become even less interested. Therefore it is important to make the beginnings good.

7. Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a* was renowned for his love

The Ramchal zy'a says one should consider his set times for Torah as though he is in the middle of *Shemonah Esrei* and he simply cannot interrupt. (Similarly, when you see others learning Torah, don't interrupt them, as you wouldn't interrupt someone who is saying *Shemonah Esrei*.)

Reb Binyamin Rabinowitz זt'l was the *rosh yeshiva* of Toldos Aharon. On Shiva Asar b'Tamuz, a student saw Reb Binyamin Rabinowitz learning eight hours straight, without interruption! Generally, on a fast day people are weaker,

but he was learning with *hasmadah* the entire day, without taking any breaks. The student was amazed, and he asked Reb Binyamin how he did it. He replied:

"I didn't begin studying eight hours straight. I started with a *kabbalah* that I wouldn't interrupt my learning for five minutes. I kept this *kabbalah* for several months. Then I added on another five minutes. A few months later, I added another five minutes. Now I'm an old man. Those five minutes have accumulated. Now, I'm up to

and passion for Gemara. He would say: "Someone who doesn't study Gemara, is נישט קיין מענטש און נישט קיין איד און נישט קיין מענטש, "He isn't a Yid, and he isn't even a human being."

He explained that this is the reason the *brachah* השיבונו in *Shemonah Esrei*, which requests for success in doing *teshuvah*, begins with a request for Torah. As we say, השיבונו אבינו לתורתך. This is because without Torah one is נישט קיין מענטש און נישט קיין איד און נישט קיין מענטש, "not a Yid, and not even a human being." It is impossible for a person to succeed in doing *teshuvah* without dedication to Torah study.

It is written: ותהי ראשית ממלכתו בבל (*Bereishis* 10:10). Rebbe Mordechai Mordechai of Lelov זt'l would say that implied in this *pasuk* is, ותהי ראשית בבל "One should begin with Talmud Bavli." That is the first step in the process of *teshuvah*.

learning eight hours straight, without interruption."⁸

The father of the Shlah Hakodesh, Reb Sheftel Ish Levi *zt'l*, teaches that just as we daven each day, and we wear tefillin each day, studying Gemara, Rashi and Tosfos each day is no less of an obligation. A day shouldn't pass when one isn't involved in Torah.

Sometimes people feel that they need every minute of their day to earn money and they don't have time for Torah study. We remind them the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah*

19) which says, "Whoever studies Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu fulfills his desires....Whoever studies Torah, his assets prosper." Torah study is *mesugal* for wealth and success.

A chassid once wrote a *kvittel* to Rebbe Yochanan of Rachmestrivka *zy'a* stating that he wants a *brachah* for *hatzlachah* in everything he does."

Rebbe Yochanan Rachmestrifke told him: "Dovid HaMelech was also a great Rebbe. His counsel for *hatzlachah* was to study

8. As we say in the morning, שתרגילנו בתורתך, "make us accustomed to Your Torah," because to a large degree *hasmadah* in Torah is a matter of becoming accustomed.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* said that although being accustomed to something has a negative side, for then he doesn't have the freshness and newness as someone starting to study Torah for the first time, nevertheless, we request שתרגילנו בתורתך, that we should be accustomed to learning Torah. This is because it is possible to be accustomed to Torah, and yet daily study with a new, refreshed vigor. An example of this, he said, is eating. People eat every day, yet they never become bored. When a plate of food in front of them, they can eat it with gusto, like they never had it before. We should similarly be accustomed to learning Torah, yet it should always be like new and cherished in our eyes.

Torah. As it states (*Tehillim* 1), *כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו... וכל אשר, יעשה יצליח*, 'He only desires Hashem's Torah...whatever he does, will succeed...' This isn't solely a *brachah*, it's a guarantee. If you study Torah, you will succeed in everything you do."

Bearing Shame

There was a person who lived in Zhitomir who was shunned and humiliated by his neighbors, because many years before, he was accused for committing severe sins. At that time he was dragged through the streets of Zhitomir, with everyone shouting *ככה יעשה לאיש נבלה בישראל*, "אשר יעשה נבלה בישראל", "So shall be done to the man who does disgraceful things in Yisrael."

Twenty years passed since then, and although he had become wealthy in the interim his reputation was ruined; his name was never cleared. Now his children were ready for *shidduchim*, but no one wanted to be *meshadach* with him due to his reputation.

But the people of Zhitomir were about to be surprised.

Rebbe Boruch'l of Mezhibuz *zt'l* came to Zhitomir to spend a Shabbos there. The people of Zhitomir rejoiced, and they all came to the outskirts of the city to greet him. The man who was humiliated twenty years ago also came to greet Rebbe Boruch'l.

Rebbe Boruch'l sat in his wagon greeting all the people of Zhitomir, and when the humiliated man put out his hand, Rebbe Boruch'l invited him to ride in his wagon. Needless to say, everyone was shocked when those two traveled the rest of the way to Zhitomir together.

Many respected people were there, among them very wealthy people and great Torah scholars. Why did the Rebbe choose to honor this otherwise simple person, whom they degraded? They asked this question among themselves, but they wouldn't

dare ask Rebbe Boruch'l himself.

As they traveled, Rebbe Boruch'l asked his companion whether he could stay at his home. Obviously, he was overjoyed to have the merit. The people of Zhitomir were upset once again. From all the prominent people of the city, why should the Rebbe be hosted specifically in his home? But of course, they didn't say anything.

Shabbos was very uplifting and inspirational for the entire city. Sunday, people flocked to the Rebbe for a *brachah*. The host also came for a *brachah*. The Rebbe asked him, "Do you have children in *shidduchim*?"

The man replied, "Yes, I have a daughter of marriageable age, and that's why I came to the Rebbe, to ask for a *brachah*..."

The Rebbe said, "I have a son..." and the Rebbe suggested they be *mishtadech*

together. The simple man was overjoyed. The Rebbe shook his hand, "Mazal Tov! Mazal Tov!"

The news of the unusual *shidduch* spread quickly. The people of Zhitomir were mystified. Why would Rebbe Boruch'l, a grandson of the Baal Shem Tov *zy'a*, take a simple *mechutan*, who didn't have *yichus*, Torah, and not even great wealth. Their primary reason they disliked the *shidduch* was because of the man's reputation. Twenty years earlier, that man was accused of severe sins, and was harassed and humiliated in public, so others shouldn't follow his example. Is it fitting that he be the Rebbe's *mechutan*?

When the *shidduch* was announced, the people of Zhitomir felt that they have to speak up. It was beneath the honor of Rebbe Boruch'l, and of his grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l*, that this *shidduch* should go through.

They told the Rebbe their concerns. "He committed grave sins twenty years ago, and who knows what's happening now..."

The Rebbe moaned, "When I first saw him in the outskirts of Zhitomir, I felt a strong desire to be his *mechutan*. That's the reason I invited him on the carriage and asked him if I could stay at his home. When he came to me on Sunday, I once again desired immensely to be *mechutanim* with him. It seemed to me that it was destined from heaven. But now, I hear your concerns. I will think about it and see what I will do."

Rebbe Boruch'l was confused, uncertain what he should do. But in the meanwhile, he decided he would visit the widow of the Or HaMeir, who used to be the Rebbe of Zhitomir.

The almanah told him, "Yesterday, when I heard about the *shidduch*, I discovered that you are a true

tzaddik, a *gadol hador*." Pointing to a window, she said, "My husband and I stood near that window twenty years ago when they were pulling your *mechutan* through the streets of Zhitomir. My husband, *zt'l* said, 'Look how everyone is running after this person who is totally clean from sin. All the accusations are false. I hope I shall be so clean from sin as he is, when I am brought to the court in heaven. But this man will benefit from his humiliation. In this merit, he will become *mechutan* with one of the *tzaddikei hador*.' So when I heard you made a *shidduch* with him, I knew you are a *tzaddik hador*..." The *almanah's* words quickly spread through the Jewish community. Everyone rejoiced, and they immediately went to the simple man's home and wrote the *tena'im* with joy and happiness.

This story is an example of the immense benefits one might earn from humiliation.

The *Sefer Chassidim* (116) states, "If you see a wealthy, successful *rasha*, and because of his wealth respected and scholarly people are being *mishadech* with him, don't be surprised about that. Know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave him the wealth so tzaddikim should agree to marry their children with his. If it weren't for his wealth, they wouldn't be *meshadech* with a *rasha*. Why did the *rasha* merit wealth and that tzaddikim should be *meshadech* with him? It's in his parents' merits. Or it's because they embarrassed and humiliated him beforehand, and because of the shame he was blessed with wealth and to have sons-in-law *talmidei chachamim*."

When the *tana'im* and *amora'im* would proclaim a fast day, it would rain as soon as they began praying for rain. However, the Gemara (*Tanis* 24) tells of a time when there was a drought, Reb Pappa decreed a fast day, he prayed

for rain, but it didn't rain. Reb Pappa became weak, so he ate a spoonful of porridge. Reb Nachman saw this and said, "If you will take another spoon of porridge, perhaps then it will rain." Reb Nachman was teasing him, implying, *how do you expect it to rain if you aren't fasting?*

The Gemara says, "Rav Pappa was embarrassed, he felt humiliated, and then it rained."

The Yaavatz explains, "[Rav Nachman] teased him intentionally, so Reb Pappa would be embarrassed, and thereby, his *tefillos* would be answered."

The Gemara (*Tanis* 24-25) states, "Every day a *bas kol* proclaims, 'The entire world receives *parnassah* in the merit of My son Chanina, while my son Chanina only has a *kav* of carobs to eat, from one week to the next."

On *Erev Shabbos*, Reb Chanina's wife would throw some weeds into the oven, so

smoke should come out of their chimney, so the neighbors would think that she was also baking challah for Shabbos. She was embarrassed that people should know she doesn't even have challah for Shabbos.

An evil neighbor who knew of their desperate poverty, knocked at their door. Her intention was to look in the oven and humiliate Reb Chanina's wife, because she suspected that there was nothing inside.

Reb Chanina's wife ran to the next room. The neighbor let herself inside, opened the oven, and saw it was filled with *challos*, and that the kneading bowl was overflowing with dough. She shouted, "Mrs.! Mrs.! Bring your stick to take the challos out, because they are going to burn."

Reb Chanina's wife replied, "That's why I went to this room; to bring the stick."

The Sfas Emes (on Shas) writes, "The *tzadekes* wasn't lying when she said she went to get the stick. Since she had so much shame, she knew that a miracle would happen to her, and she went to bring the stick."

Tzaddikim say that when one is silent after being humiliated, it is an *eis ratzon*. All of his *tefillos* and *brachos* will be answered. We share a story related to this concept.

A prestigious, rabbinic family had an embarrassing secret, which they tried to conceal.

One of their sons was sitting with his classmates eating lunch, when one of the *bachurim* revealed the secret in front of everybody. The son was very embarrassed, but he didn't answer back. Instead, he stood up, held back his tears, and said, "I forgive you," and left the lunchroom. He knew that since he didn't answer back, he had the power to give *brachos*, and he sought where

he could use it. His first thought was to bless an older cousin, who learned in a nearby yeshiva and needed a *shidduch*. He went to his cousin's yeshiva, but his cousin wasn't there.

The *bachur* quickly went home and blessed his sister to become a *kalah*. He

added, "Within a month, you will be engaged."

Shocked, she asked, "How do you know?"

"I have the power of *brachos* now and I'm certain my *brachah* will take effect."

They didn't even have to wait a month. Within a week, she was engaged.