

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Chukas - Balak



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Torah Wellsprings - Chukas - Balak

Temimus

The first Rashi of the parashah states, "The Satan and the nations of the world taunt the Jewish nation, saying, 'What is this commandment [of parah adumah]? What is its purpose?' Therefore, the Torah calls parah adumah a decree (חוק). I have decreed it; You have no right to question it."

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 19:8) elaborates on the goyim's mockery of parah adumah:

"A non-Jew told Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, 'The parah adumah process appears like witchcraft. You take a cow, burn it, crush it, and then take its ashes. If someone became tamei to a human corpse, you sprinkle two or three drops [of the ashes] on him and proclaim that he became pure.'"

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai rebuffed the goy that he shouldn't be so surprised by this procedure because goyim have similar methods for when one of their people suffers from an evil spirit.

When the goy left, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai's told his students the real answer.¹ He said, "I swear, death doesn't create tumah, and water doesn't purify. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, וזאת חקת התורה, this is My rule, which you must comply with."

In other words, parah adumah is a chok, a rule that we keep without understanding its reason, logic, or explanation.

The Midrash continues:

"All korbanos are male animals. Why is the parah adumah female? It is a mashal to an infant, the child of a maidservant, who dirtied the king's palace with excretion. The king commanded, 'Let his mother come and clean up her son's mess.' Similarly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, 'Let the parah adumah come and atone for the egel.'" An egel is a young calf. The parah adumah is like the mother who comes to clean up her calf's mess.

The end of this Midrash seems to contradict the beginning of the Midrash. The Midrash begins by teaching that parah adumah doesn't have an explanation and then says its purpose is to atone for the egel!²

Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorke zt'l answers that parah adumah is a chok. We don't know the reason for this mitzvah, and we keep it solely because we believe in Hashem.³ And now that we have displayed our emunah in Hashem, it is this emunah that atones for the egel. The egel was *avodah zarah*, a lack of *emunah*, which we rectify by demonstrating our Emunah in Hashem.⁴

1. It is forbidden to teach Torah to goyim, so Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai answered the goy just to silence his mockery and to satisfy his curiosity, but he didn't tell the goy the proper answer.

2. This apparent contradiction is also in Rashi because Rashi begins by saying that parah adumah is a chok, and we don't know its reason. Soon afterward, Rashi quotes the Midrash, that the purpose of the parah adumah was to atone for the sin of the egel.

3. When one doesn't steal or kill, it might be because he understands that engaging in such deeds is wrong, but when one does the parah adumah, it demonstrates his belief in Hashem because otherwise, he wouldn't do it.

4. The rules of parah adumah express our emunah that Hashem controls everything, and nothing is in our hands. The cow is burned, its ashes mixed with spring or river water, and this mixture is used to purify the person or the item that is tamei. The ashes signify *bitul*, non-existence, total negation, and it represents that we don't do anything - everything is in Hashem's hands.

Purity of Torah

When the Torah discusses the laws of parah adumah, it alludes to the mitzvah of studying Torah, as it states (19:14) זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל, and Chazal (*Brachos* 63:) explains that this means Torah is acquired with mesirus nefesh for Torah. This teaches us an important lesson. The Shlah (*Chukas*) writes, "Although we don't have the ashes of the *parah adumah* anymore, a person can purify himself...by studying, teaching, and keeping Torah." This is important to know. We still have a way to become pure, and that is by studying Torah.

Chazal (*Brachos* 63:) say, "Torah knowledge exists only among those who are *moser nefesh* to know Torah, as it states זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל, "Where do you find Torah? By those who die in the tents of Torah."

"Die" is a powerful word, and we will soon explain it in several ways. However, we understand that the pasuk is telling us to toil in Torah, which is how we acquire it. This is mentioned together with the laws of parah adumah to indicate that just as parah adumah purifies, toiling in Torah will cleanse us.

Why is toil needed to attain purity? Why isn't it enough to study Torah nonchalantly? We can explain that effort is required because one should be immersed in Torah study. When one goes to a mikvah, he will only

become tahor if he is entirely immersed in the water. The halachah is that not one hair can be outside the mikvah water. The ideal way to acquire the taharah of the Torah is to be entirely immersed in it.

It states (19:2) פרה אדמה תמימה, "A perfectly red cow." Rashi explains that תמימה tells us that "It shall be perfect in redness so that even two black hairs disqualify it." If it only has one black hair, the parah is kosher; it is still called תמימה, completely red. It only becomes pasul when it has two black hairs. In contrast, it states (*Devarim* 18:13) תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך, "Be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d." The Chidushei HaRim zt'l says that over here, תמים means that one should be one hundred percent wholehearted with Hashem, and not even one hair of his essence should be left out. When it comes to temimus and attachment with Hashem, one's entire being should be with Hashem, and no part of his being should be left out.

This level of devotion to the Torah is ideal and encouraged; one's essence should be immersed in Torah study. Torah should be his quest, discussion, and thoughts at every opportunity.

However, one must know that even just a drop of connection with the Torah purifies immensely. It isn't like a mikvah; either one is immersed in it, or it does nothing at all. Regarding Torah, each line one learns, each Mishnah, etc., purifies immensely.⁵

Another halachah of parah adumah is that if one does work as he fills up the container with water, or if one works while carrying the water, the water becomes pasul and can't be used to purify (see *Rambam Hilchos Parah Adumah* 7:1, and *Mishnayos Parah* ch.7). This is because we must remember that Hashem does everything. It is this emunah that purifies us.

5. Perhaps a hint that even a small connection to Torah can purify him is (*Yechezkel* 36:25) וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים, "I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you will be clean; from all your impurities and all your abominations will I cleanse you." Even if one isn't entirely immersed in Torah but has a sprinkle of the purifying waters on him, this will purify him immensely.

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 42:) mentions עמילן של טבחים, which is dough made from not fully grown wheat kernels. This dough was placed on top of a cooking pot to draw out the זיהמא, the impure particles found in the food.

A more common translation of עמילן is toil. Chazal are hinting that toiling in Torah draws out and removes a person's זיהמא and impurities. He becomes pure before Hashem.

The reward for Ameilus in Torah

We say in *Akdamos*, צבי וחמיד ורגיג דילאון, בלעותא, "Hashem loves and desires our toil in Torah study."

It states, לפום צערה אגרה, the reward will be according to the extent of the hardship. So, if one finds it hard to study Torah, he should know that the hardships are for his benefit, to increase his reward.

It states (*Avos* 5:5), עומדים צפופים ומשתחוים, רווחים, that there were many people in the Beis HaMikdash standing near each other. The Ra'v Bartanura *zt'l* explains, צפופים comes from the word צף על המים, to float. So many people were pressed together in the Beis HaMikdash until their feet were raised above the ground, and they stood in the air. Nevertheless, משתחוים רווחים, when they bowed down, a miracle occurred, they bowed with plenty of space, and each person was four *amos* away from his fellow man. This way, no one would hear his friend's *viduy* when he repents on his *aveiros*."

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (שו"ת יו"ד רל"ד ד"ה ופר"מ) asks that Hashem could have made a miracle that there should be enough place for everyone even when standing upright. What was the purpose and benefit of standing tightly together in the Beis HaMikdash?

He answers that this was to increase their reward, as Chazal (*Brachos* 6:) say, אגרה דכלה, דוחקא, the reward for attending a Torah *shiur* is for being squeezed by the many people present.

Similarly, the reward for Torah study is specifically when it is hard.

Sefer Chasidim (155) writes, "When a person must overcome his yetzer hara and nature to do Hashem's will, he will receive a hundred times more reward than when he performs a mitzvah without any challenge from the yetzer hara. Therefore, Chazal say there will be no reward for the mitzvos in the future (because there won't be a challenge). About this, it states... (Koheles 12:1) והגיעו שנים, 'Years are arriving

about which you will say, 'I have no desire in them.' This refers to the days of Moshiach because there will be no reward or punishment. Therefore, it is better for a person to do a mitzvah when the yetzer hara tries to stop him and to overcome the yetzer hara for Hashem's sake rather than to perform other mitzvos in which the yetzer hara isn't challenging him."

Chazal also tell us that when one studies Torah with toil, his mazal changes for the better (see *Zohar* vol.3 p.216:). For example, if his mazal was to be poor, with toil in Torah, he can receive a mazal to be wealthy.

The Taz wrote a kameia, and many miracles were told about this kameia. Until eighty years ago, this kameia was in Yerushalayim, and it was lent out to barren women to wear to be able to have children. It was given to the ill, and they were healed.

But then someone decided to open the kameia and copy it. He figured that if he could replicate the kameia, many people could use the segulah simultaneously. He made two mistakes. One is that it isn't solely what is written in the kameia that brings refuos, it is also about who wrote the kameia. A kameia written by the Taz cannot be duplicated. His second error was that by opening the kameia, it lost its segulah. People tried using it again for the barren and the ill, but the miracle ended.

What they found written in this kameia was very intriguing. Generally, names of malachim are written on a kameia, but this isn't what the Taz wrote on his kameia. He wrote, "I, Dovid ben Shmuel HaLevi, studied Tosfos Chulin 96a. In this merit, may Hashem help that all barren women have their salvation and all ill should be healed."

This is because toil in Torah brings blessings, and it is something that everyone can do.

A man told the Chazon Ish about some medical problem he was dealing with, and the Chazon Ish advised him to undergo an operation. (The Chazon Ish also advised him which

hospital to go to and which doctor should perform the procedure). Then this person asked the Chazon Ish if they could speak together in Torah, and the Chazon Ish agreed. They talked for a long time in learning. The discussion was a sugyah in Kodshim, and the Chazon Ish was very impressed with him. Then the Chazon Ish said, "Regarding the operation, don't worry about it. You don't need surgery."

The man asked, "But you just told me I should operate! Why did you change your mind?"

The Chazon Ish replied, "I said that before when I didn't know that you toil in Torah. When I discovered that you study and toil in Torah, I changed my mind because Hakadosh Baruch Hu has a special hanhagah (way of treating) those who study Torah. You don't need an operation" (Maaeh Ish, vol.1 p.77).

A few years ago, the Rosh Yeshiva of Lakewood, Reb Malkiel Kotler Shlita, repeated this story in public, and an older person in the audience got up and said that the story happened to him.

The Avnei Nezer said, "All poverty is because people study Gemara with laziness. If they would listen to me and study with *frishkeit*, and enthusiasm, I promise they won't lack parnassah.

Chidushei HaRim, "It could be that Mashiach didn't come yet because Hashem loves torah *m'toch hadchak* so much. Hashem knows that when Mashiach comes, this pleasure won't be anymore.

The Gemara (*Sotah* 49) praises someone who studies Torah *m'toch hadchak*, when it is difficult. One of the praises is *ein hapargud ninal bfanav*, the curtain in heaven doesn't close between him and Hashem. The Meil Tzedakah explains, "Hashem so much wants to look at him, therefore the curtain doesn't close, so Hashem's hashgachah on him can continue."

Reb Mechele Zlotchover had a kollel. He supported talmidei chachamim who learned in his beis medresh. But sometimes, he didn't

have enough money, and he would tell the *yungerleit* to borrow money, and he would cover the debts when more money came in. However, Rebbe Mechel knew this wasn't an ideal solution because the *yungerleit* often didn't find from whom to borrow the money.

It bothered Rebbe Mechel immensely that he couldn't help his kollel *yungerleit* more. At these times, Reb Mechel would go to the mikvah, and in the mikvah, he would say, "Ay Mechele. Why don't you understand that a drop of their hardship is more precious to Hashem than all their Torah and tefillos?"

The Magen Avraham (end of 580) writes, "Friday *parashas Chukas*, some people fast because, on this day, twenty wagons filled with *sefarim* were burned in France. The fast isn't established on the date of the month that this tragedy occurred; instead, the fast is on the Friday *erev Shabbos Chukas*, because a *shaalas chalom* (a prophetic dream) revealed that the tragedy was associated with the *parashah*. Because on the words וזאת חקת התורה, Onkelus writes, דא גזירת אורייתא, "This is the decree on the Torah."

"Another reason for this fast is that, on this day, two large communities were destroyed in the massacres of the years ת"ח ת"ט, as written in the *selichos* authored by the Shach."

Today, most people don't fast on this day. Nevertheless, since the Torah was burned, *r'l*, on this day, we should utilize this day to accept on our shoulders the yoke of the Torah, to love Torah, and to make its study our life's mission.

A chassid told the Chidushei HaRim that he finds *avodas Hashem* very difficult. The Chidushei HaRim replied, "It would be disgraceful if serving such a great King came easy to us." Toil in Torah isn't easy, at least initially. (After becoming accustomed to toil in Torah, nothing is sweeter.) But this shouldn't stop us because this is every person's obligation. He will only gain from it, in both worlds.

Balak

Everything is from Hashem

One of the main messages from this week's parashah is that we can't do anything without Hashem. We think that we earn parnassah on our own, heal ourselves with doctors and medicine, go places, and say things as we desire, and this week's parashah reveals to us a drop of just how much we are in Hashem's hands, and how everything is from Him.

The Ramban (22:29) writes, "Everything related to the donkey was a great miracle, like a new creation... The purpose of the miracle [of the talking donkey] was to teach Bilaam Who is the One Who places speech into man and Who causes him to be silent. It taught him that Hashem opens the mouths of the mute, and he can certainly cause those who speak to become mute. Hashem can place the ability to speak as He desires because everything is in His hands."

Bilaam tried to curse the nation, but he couldn't. He admitted to Balak (23:12), הלא את הלוא את, "Whatever Hashem puts in my mouth, that I shall speak."

It isn't solely speech that is in Hashem's hands. Also, our ability to travel is in Hashem's hands. The Lechovitzer says, "Without Hakadosh Baruch Hu, it is impossible to cross the doorway. With Hakadosh Baruch Hu, we can split the sea" (*Toras Avos, Emunah u'Bitachon* 7). We can't go anywhere without Hashem's help. This lesson is also taught to us in this week's parashah.

Balak sent messengers to Bilaam, inviting him to come. Bilaam said to the messengers (22:13), לכו אל ארצכם כי מאן ה' לתתי להלך עמכם, "Go

to your land because Hashem refuses to allow me to go with you." The Ramban explains that with these words, Bilaam admitted that he was in Hashem's hands. He can't go because Hashem doesn't permit it.

Later, Hashem permitted Bilaam to go, but several times the donkey stopped, and Bilaam beat his donkey in frustration. (22:27) ותרם האתון את מלאך ה' ותרבץ תחת בלעם ויחר אף בלעם ויך את האתון במקל, "The donkey saw Hashem's *malach* and crouched beneath Bilaam. Bilaam's anger flared, and he struck the donkey with his staff." Bilaam discovered that he was entirely in Hashem's hands. He is unable to do anything at all without Hashem's help.

This is a lesson for everyone.

Towards the end of his life, Rebbe Moshe Kobriner *zt'l* said, "I can swear that when a person moves his tiny finger or his eyeball, it is all from Hashem's strength. We cannot pick up a piece of straw without Hashem's strength" (*Toras Avos, Emunah u'Bitachon* 22).⁶

Balak said (22:5) הנה עם יצא ממצרים הנה כסה את עין הארץ והוא יושב ממלי, "A people has come out of Mitzrayim, and behold, they have covered the "eye" of the land, and they are stationed opposite me."

The Sfas Emes (5632) explains that עין הארץ is the gashmiyos way of looking at the world. Balak recognized that the Jewish nation כסה את עין הארץ, cover over the worldly way of seeing the world. They see the world differently.

The Sfas Emes writes, "כסה את עין הארץ," 'covered the eye of the land,' refers to the gashmiyos manner of perceiving the world.

6. The Divrei Yechezkel of Shinov *zt'l* said that when paying for a *chasunah*, people figure they can manage the smaller expenses but don't know how they will cover the bigger ones. But I see it the opposite way. I understand how he will get money for the larger expenses, because he knows he can't manage on his own, so he trusts in Hashem. But he doesn't rely on Hashem for the smaller expenses, so how will he get the money?"

Bnei Yisrael look at the pnimiyus of everything (the spirituality concealed in the world) and disregarded the external appearance of the world, which seems to be entirely gashmiyosdig. To the human eye, it seems that this world contradicts the concept of kedushah, but the truth is that this is because spirituality is concealed, and people don't see the truth."

To explain, consider the temptations of this world. People think that there is no spark of G-dliness here. But the Jewish nation knows that Hashem's presence fills the world, and there is a spark of good. Our mission is to use the world for Hashem's service. This attitude angered Balak. He said, הנה כסה את עין הארץ, they deny the appearance of the world. They say there is more to the world than what meets the eye.

Included in the Sfas Emes's commentary is a lesson in emunah. There is the עין הארץ, the way the world appears to run, which is through the force of nature. But the Jewish nation כסה את עין הארץ, deny that it is so. They believe everything is led by Hashem. This awareness angered and frightened Balak. Balak proclaimed, הנה עם יצא ממצרים, "Behold a nation has gone out of Mitzrayim." He thought that it happened on its own, but it wasn't so. Bilaam corrected him in his brachos. He said (23:22) א-ל מוציאם ממצרים, "Hashem took them out of Mitzrayim." Rashi writes that Bilaam was saying, הנה עם יצא ממצרים, that a nation came out of Mitzrayim.' They didn't come out on their own. Hashem took them out."

Balak said (22:5), והוא יושב ממלי, "They are stationed opposite me." ממולי can also be translated as destroying or cutting down. Rashi writes, קרוב הם להכריתני, "They are close by, ready to cut me down." This is because the Jewish nation has emunah, and emunah destroys all resha'im and all kelipos.

The parashah begins (22:3): וירא בלק... את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי, "Balak saw...all that Yisrael did to the Emori." He thought it was אשר עשה ישראל, that Yisrael won these great wars on their own, by their own strength. In contrast, Yisro acknowledged that miracles are from Hashem, as it states (Shemos 18:1), וישמע יתרו... את כל אשר עשה אלקים למשה ולישראל עמו, "Yisro heard...everything that Hashem did for Moshe and Yisrael His nation." He realized that the miracles were אשר עשה אלקים, performed by Hashem.

This is the reason they reacted so differently. Balak sought to destroy the Jewish nation, while Yisro converted to Yiddishkeit.

It states (23:23) כעת יאמר ליעקב ולישראל מה פעל א-ל, the Yismach Yisrael explains that יעקב represents Yidden at lower levels, and ישראל represents Yidden at higher levels. כעת יאמר ליעקב, the Yidden at a lower level of emunah say that the hardships of life are because of the כעת, the times. Parnassah is difficult because of the times, and so on. However, ישראל, the Yidden who on a higher level say, מה פעל א-ל, that it is all from Hashem.

In the zemiros of Shabbos we sing, שכרו הרבה מאוד על פי פעלו. The Divrei Yisrael zt'l explains that the song alludes to the reward for *emunah*. שכרו הרבה מאוד, he will receive a great reward because he believes על פי פעלו, that everything happens על פי, by Hashem's decree.

It states (113:5-6) ⁷ המגביהי לשבת המשפילי לראות. The Chida says that the roshei teivos spell הלל and implies that we should praise Hashem both when we are המגביהי לשבת when Hashem places us on a high pedestal, and also המשפילי, when Hashem lowers us. We should always praise Hashem because everything is for the good.

7. Literally, the pasuk says, "Who is like Hashem Who dwells on high, Who lowers [His eyes] to look in the heavens and the earth."

The Chida adds that הלל is gematria 65, the same as Hashem's name אדני, which represents Hashem's name of compassion, and הללוי is gematria 86, אלקים, the name of din. This tells us that no matter whether Hashem treats us with chesed or din, we should always praise Hashem because it is always for our benefit.

Furthermore, it states (147:3) הרופא לשבורי לב, "Who heals the brokenhearted," and the roshei teivos spell הלל.

הוא נותן לחם לכל is roshei teivos, "He gives bread to all" (from birkas hamazon). These are all reasons to praise Hashem because everything is from Him.⁸

8. A young child saw a large truck driving down a street. Since the driver's seat was very high, he couldn't see the driver. The child called out to his mother, "Look! The truck is moving on its own!" Next, the child noticed a car with black tinted windows. Once again, the boy shows his mother how the car is driving without a driver. The mother patiently explained to the child that both vehicles were, in fact, driven by drivers. Even when we can't see the driver, the driver is there. This is a mashal on emunah. Sometimes, it seems that the world is run on its own. We don't see the "Driver." But He is there - running the world is with hashgachah pratis.

Reb Aharon Kotler zt'l once saw a car with two steering wheels. He asked the car owner for an explanation. He replied, "My son enjoys pretending that he drives a car, so I installed a steering wheel on the right side of the car. My son moves his wheel when I drive, thinking he drives the car."

Reb Aharon used this episode as a mashal. We think that we run the world, but Hashem is the One Who drives and leads the world.

A *bachur* asked the Tzemech Tzedek zt'l of Lubavitz, "We don't see Hashem, so how do we know He's here?"

The Tzemech Tzedek zt'l wrapped his hand in a towel and waved his hand all around. Then, he asked the boy, "Who is moving the towel?"

"The Rebbe's hand."

"Do you see my hand? How do you know that my hand is moving the towel?"

"I don't see your hands, but a towel cannot move on its own. From the towel's movements, I see your hand moving it."

The Rebbe replied, "Similarly, we don't see Hashem, but we see an entire world functioning, the grass growing, animals living, people surviving, so we know Hashem is behind it all."

Reb Gad'l Eisner zt'l, the renowned *mashgiach* of Yeshivas Gur, suffered the horrors of Auschwitz and lost his only daughter in the war, but his *emunah* remained intact.

To describe to the students how hard it was to have *emunah* in that era, Reb Gad'l took a bottle cap from the table, hid it in his hands, and asked his student, "If someone would come into this room and search for the cap, would he find it?"

"No," the students replied. "He wouldn't think to look in your hand. He will look all over the room for it and not find it."

Reb Gad'l said that this is how it was during the Holocaust. People were searching for Hashem but couldn't find Him. This is the reason so many people fell away.

Reb Gad'l asked, "If someone knows that I am holding the cap in my hands, would he search for it?"

The student replied that he wouldn't search for the bottle cap because he knew where it was.

Reb Gad'l explained that his *emunah* remained firm throughout the Holocaust because he didn't search for

Yiras Shamayim

We say in Birkas HaChodesh: ותתן לנו... חיים של שלום, של שש בהם יראת שמים ויראת חטא "Grant us... a life of peace, a life of goodness... a life of wealth and honor," etc. Many of the phrases have the word של in them.

In contrast, it also states in this tefillah חיים שיש בהם יראת שמים ויראת חטא "a life that has in it fear of heaven and fear of sin." In this phrase it doesn't state של. Grammatically, it could have. It could have said חיים של יראת שמים, "A life of fear of heaven," but instead the words שיש בהם, "that has in it..." are used. This needs explanation. Why isn't this phrase the same as most of the others?

We will explain this with two stories. The first is imaginary, and the second is a true story:

Two wealthy brothers traveled by ship, which was shipwrecked in a storm, and they were forced to dock on an island. The rich brothers walked around and came across a large treasure. They were wealthy before, but now they were billionaires. They didn't want to take the treasure with them in case a thief attacked them and took it all away. So, they buried the treasure in the ground and made signs in the area, so they could find the treasure when they returned (with armed guards) to pick it up.

One day, one of the brothers hired a ship with guards and weapons and went to pick up the treasure. With the aid of the signs, he was able to find the location. He dug, but

the treasure wasn't there! Someone had found it and taken it!

When he returned home, he decided not to tell his brother what happened. He was very loyal to his brother and didn't want to take away the life of luxury and wealth that his wealthy brother was leading ever since they found the treasure. His brother was eating the best foods, enjoying many luxuries, thinking he was a billionaire, and the brother who now knew the truth didn't want to take away this joy. "Let him enjoy his life now," he told himself, "and when he wants to go to the island to pick up the treasure, I will tell him what occurred."

He never went to pick up the treasure, and he continued to live a luxurious life..

Eventually, they were both niftar. At the hesped, a speaker said, "There were two brothers. Who was the billionaire, and who wasn't? The one who didn't know that the money wasn't there was able to feel and live like a billionaire. The one who knew the truth wasn't a billionaire."

This is the translation of חיים של עושר, "a life of wealth." It doesn't state שיש בהם עושר, that has wealth; it says that he lives a life of wealth. This is because you don't need to actually have wealth to feel that you are wealthy. However, when it comes to yiras Shamayim, the tefillah emphasizes חיים שיש בהם יראת שמים. This has to be real. It isn't enough to live a life of yiras Shamayim; there must actually be yiras Shamayim in his life.

Hashem. He knew Hashem was there. Had he searched, he wouldn't find Him, but he had no doubts that Hashem was with him.

With this analogy, Reb Gad'l explained to his students how he retained his emunah during those difficult times.

The following is another approach Reb Gad'l shared with his students to describe how he found Hashem even during the Holocaust: "If someone lost a diamond worth millions of dollars in a dark room, would he stop searching for it because it is dark and difficult to find? Of course not! He would crawl on his hands and knees and feel the floor until he found it. Similarly, when darkness covered the earth during the Holocaust, and it was hard to find Hashem, I knew that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was there. So, I continued searching for Him, despite the difficulties."

We now tell another story, this time a true story, that will teach the difference between כבוד של... חיים, a life of honor, and when the honor is there.

Reb Moshe was the son-in-law of the Alter of Slobadka zt'l. Reb Moshe was a Rav in a beis medresh in Dvinsk, where the Rogachover Gaon zt'l lived. There were times that he spoke in learning with the Rogachover Gaon, which was a great honor because the Rogachover would only discuss Torah with those who were highly scholarly.

One day, someone said to Reb Moshe, "I was by the Rogachover recently, and I heard him say that it would be good for him if you were there."

Reb Moshe was flattered. Apparently, the Rogachover wanted to speak to him in learning. He thought over the conversations they had had in the past, trying to figure out which discussion impressed the Rogachover so much that he would call on him.

He felt like he was in heaven as he walked to the Rogachover Gaon's beis medresh. He was so happy. He found the Gaon studying with a chavrusah hilchos tzaraas, but the Rogachover didn't notice him.

Reb Moshe waited some time, moving about a bit, hoping to be noticed, but he wasn't. Finally, Reb Moshe spoke up and said, "I am here!"

The Rogachover rejoiced with this, and he said to his chavrusah, "Look at his beard! The red color of this man's beard is the שער צהוב, red hair, that the Mishnah is discussing!" (See Negaim 10:4-5).

Reb Moshe was devastated. When he heard that the Rogachover needed him, he thought his expertise in Torah was required. He discovered that he wanted to use his beard as an example to explain a Mishnah.

Reb Moshe repeated what occurred to his father-in-law, the Alter of Slabodka. The Alter replied, "It is often that way. When important men give honor to others, the people think that they are honoring them because of the Torah they know, when in reality, they are merely honoring their beards."

This story is an example of חיים של כבוד, "a life of honor." Sometimes the honor isn't real honor. It is merely because of something external. But then there is the concept of שיש בהם, when it is real, and the person truly deserves the honor.

For honor, the tefillah says חיים של... כבוד, because it is possible to have a life of honor even when it isn't real. Whereas, regarding yiras Shamayim, it must be חיים שיש בהם יראת שמים; the fear of heaven needs to be real and present.⁹

⁹ The Arugas HaBosem zt'l notes that it is called yiras shamayim, fear of heaven, because heaven (שמים) was created from fire and water (אש ומים), which are opposites and represents a fight. This is the way it is with fear of heaven. One must be ready to fight to do what's right.

Once, Reb Uri Zohar z'l, a renowned baal teshuvah in Eretz Yisrael, stood at a red light, and the person in the car next to his lowered his window and shouted to Reb Uri, "Before the light changes, turn me into a baal teshuvah."

Uri Zohar said, "Why did you stop? Drive on!"

"How can I drive?" the man asked. "There's a red light."

"So what?" Reb Uri said. "Why does that stop you?"

"To drive on red can danger someone's life."

"There's no one around. You can drive."

The Greatness of Bnei Yisrael

It states (23:10) *מי מנה עפר יעקב*, "Who counted the dust of Yaakov." Rashi explains,

אין חשבון במצות שהם מקיימין בעפר, "The number of *mitzvos* they fulfill with dust is innumerable: (Devarim 22:10) 'You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey [together]'; (Vayikra 19:19) 'You shall not sow your field with a mixture of seeds'; the ashes of the red cow; the dust used for a sotah, and others similar to these."

Reb Shaul Yediyah Taub of Modzitz zt'l explains Rashi's words *אין חשבון במצות שהם מקיימין בעפר*, that it is referring to people who are figuratively in the earth. This means that they have fallen to very low levels, or the expression of earth alludes to their need to be occupied in worldly matters, such as work, and they don't have much time for Torah and tefillah. Even so, they do the best they can under the circumstances, and they grasp as many *mitzvos* as they can. This is the meaning of *אין חשבון במצות שהם מקיימין בעפר*, there is no way to measure the greatness of their *mitzvos* that they perform when they are in *עפר* (earth).

The Be'er Mayim Chaim writes that *מי מנה עפר יעקב* means, "Who can express the greatness of even those Yidden who are on a low level and are compared to the earth?"

"I'm also afraid of the police."

"I know the area, Reb Uri said. "There are no police here."

"But I am also afraid of cameras."

Just then, the light turned green. Reb Uri shouted, "Know that there are cameras in heaven that see and record everything we do."

Years later, Reb Uri was greeted by a religious Jew with a beard. The person told him that he was the person at the red light and that Reb Uri had succeeded in making him a true baal teshuvah.

10. Rambam writes, "These were mentioned because they were very scholarly. One might think that due to their great wisdom and in the merit of the Torah they studied, they will have a portion in Olam HaBa. Therefore, we are told that the foundations of their emunah was spoiled, and some of them had doubts in emunah, and therefore, they were banished from Olam HaBa. Bilaam was mentioned, although he wasn't a Jew because the *חסידי אומות העולם*, the righteous gentiles have a portion in Olam HaBa. The Mishnah reveals to us that Bilaam was from the *רשעי אומות העולם*, the reshaim of the goyim, so he doesn't have a portion in Olam HaBa."

Reb Tzaddok HaKohen (Resisei Laylah 44) writes that the purpose of this week's parashah is to teach us the greatness of Klal Yisrael (and even the sinners of Bnei Yisrael) over the goyim. The Mishnah Sanhedrin (10:2) lists people who lost their portion in Olam HaBa. For example, it states there, "Four regular people [don't have a portion in Olam HaBa. They are] Bilaam, Doag, Achitofel, and Geichazi."¹⁰

The question is, why is Bilaam in this group? He wasn't even a Yid!

Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen zt'l (Pri Tzaddik, Yisro, Resisei Laylah 44) explains that Bilaam prayed that he be like a Jew. He said (23:10) *תמת נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי כמוהו*, "May my soul die the death of the upright and let my end be like his." He prayed to be with the Jewish people at the end of his life, and his tefillah was answered. Reb Tzaddok writes, "It is a great *zechiyah* (merit) for Bilaam to be counted among those who don't have a portion in *olam haba...*"

Reb Tzaddok explains that he couldn't perceive the holiness of the Yidden who merit Olam HaBa. That was a *madreigah* that he had no notion of. But he did perceive the *רשעי ישראל*, the sinners of Bnei Yisrael, those who don't even have a portion in Olam HaBa. Bilaam davened *תמות נפשי מות ישרים*, that

in his death, he should be together with them. His tefillos were answered, and this is the reason his name is mentioned together with the sinners of Bnei Yisrael.

One lesson we take from this is the power of tefillah. Even Bilaam's tefillah was answered. But there is another lesson here: to recognize the greatness of Bnei Yisrael. We will explain:

In one opinion in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 104:), all of the people mentioned (Doag, Achitofel, and Geichazi) received Olam HaBa in the end. Their aveiros turned around and became virtues, and they received Olam HaBa. But Bilaam isn't mentioned. He will never receive Olam HaBa. Reb Tzadok HaKohen (Resisei Laylah 44) explains, "This is the difference between Yisrael and the nations, and even the sinners of Yisrael who did aveiros, without an end because although he sinned, he remains a Yisrael.... In the depths of their heart, they are attached to Hashem... As the Gemara (brachos 17.) says, "It is revealed before You that we want to do Your will, and what prevents us, is the yetzer hara..." (also see Rambam end of ch.2 of Geirushin)... This is a concept that no creature can perceive and know other than Hashem, Who testifies it about Yisrael. But for the goyim, and even the chasidei umos ha'olam, the righteous goyim, who recognize the truth, but in their hearts, they aren't attached to Hashem."

Deep down, a Yid wants to serve Hashem. This is every Yid, including those who sin. No one can perceive this other than Hashem Himself, but Hashem revealed that it is so. Therefore, even the sinners have a tikkun at the end, however, Bilaam remained without a portion in Olam HaBa.

The Battle with the Yetzer Hara

On the pasuk *מי מנה עפר יעקב*, the Aruch writes that *עפר* is a *בחור אילים*, which is a kind of goat. The Midrash discusses the *עפר*, and the *בחור אילים*, and explains that this represents the *בחורים*, the youth of Bnei Yisrael, the young people, with hot blood, and they have

many battles with the yetzer hara. The Torah says *מי מנה עפר יעקב*, who can describe the immense pleasure Hashem has from them when they battle with their yetzer hara? Who can measure how precious they are to Hashem?

The Gemara (Kiddushin 40:) teaches, "Whoever had an opportunity to do an aveirah and avoids it and is saved from the aveirah, a miracle will happen to him." The Gemara praises him with the pasuk (Tehillim 103:20) *גבורי כח עשי דברו לשמוע בקול דברו*, "Those mighty in strength, who perform His word, to hearken to the voice of His word."

This pasuk is praising the mighty Yidden who pass difficult tests. The question is why it states *עושי דברו*, those who perform His word before *לשמוע בקול דברו*, those who hearken to His word. Listening comes before performing. One can't perform before he hears what he must do!

The Maharsha therefore explains that *לשמוע בקול דברו* "To hearken to His voice" refers to that Hakadosh Baruch Hu listens to his tefillos. For those who are *גבורי כח*, and they serve Hashem with all their strength, Hashem listens to their tefillos to save them.

The Maharsha writes, "When a Yid runs away from an aveirah and breaks the yetzer, Hashem says I have to listen to his tefillah and make a miracle for him, to save him from mazikim and all other tzaros."

In the Beis HaMikdash, the blood of the korban tamid was placed on the mizbeach between the preparation of the five and the two lamps of the menorah. The Apter Rav zt'l explains that the seven lamps of the menorah represent the seven sefiros (chesed, gevurah, tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod, malchus). The final two lamps represent yesod malchus. Blood is sprinkled before the last two, indicating that to attain perfection in yesod and malchus, one must be ready to let his blood spill (which means that he must work very hard to attain them). Yesod represents kedushah, and malchus is to accept the yoke of heaven.

These are not easy goals to attain. They require much effort on the person's part.¹¹

11. It states in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 85:2), "It is forbidden to think Torah thoughts in a bathroom or bathhouse... But for the sake of preventing someone from doing an aveirah, one may speak." This means that when someone is in a place where it is forbidden to speak Torah and sees that someone is doing an aveirah, he may tell him that it is prohibited. Although to say this halachah is also divrei Torah, it is permitted for the sake of preventing a person from doing an aveirah.

The Mishnah Berurah adds, "If someone has a thought of an aveirah in his heart, he may think words of Torah [which will help him banish the bad thought] because this is also להפרישו מאיסור, for the sake of separating oneself from an aveirah, because Torah protects from bad thoughts."

This is difficult to understand. Forbidden thoughts are forbidden, and thinking Torah in the bathhouse is also an aveirah. So, both thoughts are forbidden. Why do we prefer one forbidden thought over the other?

The answer is that there is a difference. If he thinks forbidden thoughts of taavos for arayos, he is turning himself into a bathroom. He is harming himself far more than when he thinks thoughts of Torah in the bathroom.

At the end of the parashah, we read about the tragic sin and plague that befell the Jewish nation, which was planned and instigated by Bilaam HaRasha. He told the Moabites, אלקיהם של אלו שונא זימה, "Their G-d hates adultery..." and he advised Moav to cause the Jewish people to sin with adultery.

The words, אלקיהם של אלו שונא זימה, can be translated, "Hashem is the G-d of the people who hate adultery."

Reb Chunah Hamdikiver and the Imrei Chaim of Viznitz zt'l were once walking in Tel Aviv, and the Imrei Chaim stopped in front of a house and asked, "Who lives here?"

Reb Chunah told him that my grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l lived there. The Imrei Chaim said the pasuk (24:5) מִה טוֹבוֹ אֹהֶלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל, "How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Yisrael." The Imrei Chaim said that אהל, tents, also means besamim. The tents and the dwelling place of good Jews have the scent of besamim. One can sense the kedushah that is there.