

# *Torah Wellsprings*

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Ki Sisa Parah*

Compiled by  
Rabbi Boruch Twersky  
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For subscription & comments  
Email: **Mail@torahwellsprings.com**

עימוד שווארץ: Schwartz16@bezeqint.net

## Parshas - Ki Sisa - Parah

The *Mishnah Berurah* (685:1) writes, "In the desert, the [first] *parah adumah* was [slaughtered and] burnt close to the month of Nisan....so they could be pure and bring the *korban Pesach* at the right time. This is the reason we read [*parashas Parah*], to pray to Hashem that very soon, we should also be purified."

Some *poskim* are of the opinion that reading *parashas Parah* is a Torah obligation. The *Avodas Yisrael* says that it is alluded to in the words וזאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר, "This is the rule of the Torah that Hashem commanded to say" (*Bamidbar* 19:1-2). There is an obligation to say this *parashah*.

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (658:7) derives the Torah obligation from the words חקת עולם, "an eternal law" (19:21). How is *parah adumah* eternal? How can we observe its laws

in our generation? By reading *parashas Parah*.

The *Yerushalmi* says, "*Parashas Parah* is טהרתן של ישראל, the purity of the Jewish people."

The *Beis Ahron* writes, "One must believe that just as the ashes of the *parah adumah* purified, today, everyone becomes purified when *Parshas Parah* is read — each person according to his level."

The *Sfas Emes* (*Parshas Parah* end 5641) explains, "The purity we are referring to is purity from sins."

Similarly, *Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen zt'l* teaches that when we read this *parashah*, we become pure from sin. He proves this from the *haftarah*. The *haftarah* is always based on the weekly Torah reading. This Shabbos, the *haftarah* says, וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם, מכל טמאתיכם, "I will throw (spritz) the purifying waters on

you and you will be cleansed from all your impurities" (*Yechezkel* 36:25) and it's referring to being pure from sin. This indicates that the Torah portion is also referring to purity from sin.

### Purity

In the *yotzros* (said on this Shabbos) we say, מי יתן טהור, מטמא לא אחד. <sup>1</sup> Tzaddikim explain מי יתן טהור מטמא, "How can someone impure and sullied with sin become pure?" לא אחד, "By saying once 'no.'" This means, with one firm decision to improve.

The journey of *teshuvah* is comprised of many ups and downs. One day he is careful and sticks to his resolves, the next day he forgets and is careless, and the third day he is careful again. It's a gradual process of growth, and he must continually remind

himself, *No! This is wrong! I must stop this!* He says *no* each time he catches himself returning to his past ways. The *yotzros* is teaching us to say *no* once — once and for all. Make one strong firm decision that you will never return to this sin again — and that should be sufficient. You shouldn't need to tell yourself 'no' again.

Reb Meir Chodosh *zt'l* was learning in the Chevron yeshiva when Arab marauders carried out what is known today as the Chevron Massacre. To protect himself, he lay down among the murdered bodies, so the Arabs would think he was dead. At that time, he promised Hashem a long list of *kabalos*, resolutions, he would do if he survives. When the murderers left, he forgot almost

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1. The literal intention of מי יתן טהור מטמא לא אחד is the paradox of the *parah adumah* that all persons involved in preparing the *parah adumah* become impure (טמא), and the one who is being sprinkled on becomes pure (טהור). "How can purity come from impurity? Only the One Hashem can do this!"

everything he promised, aside from a few things, which he faithfully kept. He told his students that from this episode he learned that one shouldn't take on too many *kabalos*. It's better to take on just one or two good resolutions, and stick to them. If one takes on too much, he will end up doing nothing at all.<sup>2</sup>

The Midrash (*Tanchumah* , *Bahaloscha* 10) says, "The Jewish people said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu: '*Ribono*

*shel Olam*, You know the immense power of the *yetzer hara*... [How can we conquer him?]' Hashem replied, 'Send the *yetzer hara* away little by little in this world, and I will remove him from you entirely in the future...'

One small step of improvement isn't noticeable at first but each good deed accumulates until the effect is complete. The Beis Avraham *zy'a* compared this to someone who drinks one cup of wine.

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2. The Torah says *כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה לגגך... כי יפל הנפל* "When you build a new house, build a gate on the roof... [so no one will fall off]" (*Devarim* 22:8). The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* says this *passuk* implies the concept of *kabalos*: *כי תבנה בית חדש*, when you make new resolutions and *kabalos* to improve your ways, *ועשית מעקה*, make a gate. Limit how much you take on, because if you take on too much, *יפל הנפל*, you will fall from it, and not do anything.

Someone once asked Reb Zundel Kroizer *zt'l* which *kabalah* he should take on. Reb Zundel advised him to add one minute of Torah study to his scheduled learning times. For example, if he finishes learning at 9:00, he should learn until 9:01 from now on. Because even a small *kabalah* is often sufficient, and he will be surprised how much he will change for the better because of it.

The *chachmei mussar* say that Zeresh wanted to jump to very high levels immediately, and therefore she said, "Prepare a gallows, fifty *amos* high" (*Esther* 5:14). This led to their downfall, and Haman was hung on that gallows.

He feels the same; he thinks nothing happened to him. But after he takes a few more cups of wine, he discovers that the first cup had also affected him. The same is regarding change. Each step of improvement adds up. At first, he appears the same, but he isn't the same anymore.

One of the reasons *kabalos*, and even small *kabalos*, accomplish so much, is because every time one improves his ways, he receives a large dose of *siyata dishmaya*, Divine assistance, which sanctifies him, and helps him attain his goals. As it states: *והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים*, (*Vayikra* 11:54) and the Gemara explains, "A person sanctifies himself just a bit, and Heaven will make him extremely holy. A person makes himself *kadosh* down below, and Hashem will make him *kadosh* from Above. He makes himself *kadosh* in this world, and Hashem will make him *kadosh* in Olam HaBa" (*Yoma* 39).

The Tanya discusses this phenomenon. His example is of someone who refrains somewhat from the pleasures of this world, in order to weaken the *yetzer hara*. (This is a form of *avodas Hashem*, derived from the words *קדושים* *תהיו*.) The rule however will hold true in all areas of *avodas Hashem*. When one sets out on the path of improvement, he is assisted from Above. One doesn't serve Hashem solely with his own might and abilities; He serves Hashem together with Hashem's unlimited strength, and when Hashem helps him, there is no limit how much he can accomplish.

The Tanya (27) writes, "When a person slaughters his *yetzer hara* even for a short while, and his intention is to weaken the *sitra achara* [*yetzer hara*]... For example, he is hungry, but he pushes off mealtime for an hour or less, and studies Torah at that time. As the Gemara says, 'The average person eats breakfast

at nine o'clock. Torah scholars eat breakfast at eleven.' They choose to go hungry for two hours, for this goal [to weaken the *yetzer hara*]. Although they learned Torah the entire day [and therefore, they didn't end up studying more Torah by eating later. But what they accomplished was that they weakened the *yetzer hara*]. Also, when one remains silent and refrains from idle talk when he strongly desires to say something, and the same is in regards to thoughts. Even if he only overcomes [the *yetzer hara*] a little tiny bit, he has subdued the *sitra achara* [the *yetzer hara*] down below, and Hashem's honor is increased immensely in heaven. And from that holiness [that increased in Heaven], an exalted holiness

descends onto the person down here below as well, to help him immensely (מיוע רב) to serve Hashem. As Chazal say, 'A person makes himself holy below, and he becomes extremely holy from above.' Another benefit is that he will be keeping the mitzvah of והתקדשתם, that a person should make himself holy with permitted matters... Although he isn't really holy... and the *yetzer hara* is still very strong... but he controlled his *yetzer hara* and sanctified himself, therefore קדושים והייתם, in the end, he will be holy and liberated from the [yetzer hara]. He will be sanctified immensely from Above, and [heaven] will help him banish the *yetzer hara* from his heart, little by little."<sup>3</sup>

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3. The Chasam Sofer explained the *passuk* והייתם קדושים in the following way: והתקדשתם, pretend that you're holy, and you will be holy. We are influenced by our deeds; therefore, one should act as a tzaddik would – with having good *middos* and doing mitzvos and deeds of kindness. By pretending at first, in the end it will become his reality.

### Tefillin

In the megillah, we read ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר, and the Gemara (*Megillah* 16) teaches: אורה is Torah, שמחה is *yom tov*, ששון is *milah*, and ויקר is tefillin. Rashi explains, "[Haman] decreed against all of these." Haman forbade Yidden from learning Torah, observing *yom tov*, circumcising their children, and wearing tefillin. When the miracle occurred, ליהודים היתה אורה... we got all this goodness back.

Therefore — a few days after Purim — we take this opportunity to discuss the wonderful mitzvah of tefillin.

We wear two boxes (בתים) of tefillin; one on the arm, the other on the head. The Chasam Sofer ז"ל teaches that they accomplish two different

things. The תפילין של יד, which is worn near the heart, banishes negative thoughts and improper intentions. The תפילין של ראש is worn to symbolize our acceptance of the yoke of heaven. After cleansing the heart, one is able to accept the yoke of heaven. To express this idea, the Chassam Sofer gave the following *mashal*:

People came before their benevolent king and pledged their loyalty to him. The king replied, "First help me arrest all the people who are rebellious to me, and then you can accept me as your king." Similarly, we first wear the תפילין של יד, placed near the heart, to overcome the *yetzer hara* and his evil inclinations. Afterwards, we put on the תפילין של ראש to accept the yoke of heaven.<sup>4</sup>

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4. The Sfas Emes ז"ל teaches a similar lesson in reference to tefillin, but unlike the Chasam Sofer who taught this lesson regarding תפילין של יד, ותפילין של ראש, the Sfas Emes teaches it from the four *parashiyos* placed inside the tefillin.

The Sfas Emes explains that before one can accept the yoke of heaven,



he must first be liberated from the *kelipos*, impurities. This is the reason Hashem gave us the Torah only after we left Mitzrayim. We had to first leave the *tumah* of Mitzrayim, and only then we could we receive the Torah and become His chosen nation. This pattern is seen daily when we put on tefillin. With the tefillin, we become freed from impurities and then we accept the yoke of heaven with *Shma* and *Shemonah Esrei*. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 4) says that טטפת (tefillin) means four. טט is 2 in the כתפי language, and פת is 2 in the אפריקי language,  $2 + 2 = 4$ . These are the four *parshiyos* that are inside the tefillin (שמע, והיה כי יביאך, שמע, והיה אם שמוע).

The Torah groups the four *parashiyos* into two categories, טט פת, because the four *parashiyos* accomplish two different purposes. קדש, והיה כי יביאך discuss leaving Mitzrayim. This implies leaving the *tumah*. And שמע, והיה אם שמוע which discusses the oneness of Hashem and our obligation to keep the Torah is discussing accepting the yoke of heaven.

The כתפי language indicates accepting on one's *shoulders* (כתפיים) the yoke of heaven. And the אפריקי language implies to פרוק, unload from all forms of impurities.

Hashem also wears tefillin with four *parashiyos*, as the Gemara (*Brachos* 6) says, "How do we know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wears tefillin... ?" Hashem's tefillin have the following four *parashiyos*: [1] מי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד "Who compares to Your nation, Yisrael. One nation in the world..." (*Divrei HaYamim* 17). [2] "Which great nation has a god near them, as Hashem our G-d is close to us" (*Devarim* 4). או הנסה אלקים לקחת לו גוי מקרב גוי במסת ובמופתים ומלחמה וביד חזקה ובזרוע [3]. "Or did any god ever take out a nation from the midst of another nation with wonders and miracles, with wars, and with a strong hand and outstretched arm.... as everything Hashem your G-d did for you in front of your eyes?" (*Devarim* 4:34). [4] "To elevate you above all nations... to be a holy nation for Hashem your G-d..." (*Devarim* 26:19). The Sfās Emes explains that these two themes also exist in Hashem's tefillin. The first two *parashiyos* discuss the greatness of the Jewish nation. [Just as we discuss the greatness of Hashem (as we accept the yoke of Heaven) Hashem discusses our greatness.] The third and fourth discuss Hashem elevating us from the impurities, from exile.

We wear tefillin on the weaker hand (the left hand) because it states, לאות

### The Joy of Tefillin

Someone said to the Avnei Nezer ז"ל (Rebbe Avraham of Sochotchov): "You learn Torah, and so do I. In our youth we studied in the same school. Why did you become one of the leaders of the Jewish nation, and not me?"

The Avnei Nezer asked him, "Do you remember a time when you were sincerely happy?"

"Yes! There was such a moment. That was when I won the lottery..."

The Avnei Nezer said, "I have that joy —and a thousand times more — each time I put tefillin on in the morning..."

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil ז"ל said, "I knew a Yid in Zvhil who was very happy putting on tefillin in the morning..."

The joy of a great *rasha* when

he commits a sin can't compare to the joy this man had when he put on tefillin." (It's known that whenever Rebbe Shlomke said, "I knew I Yid from Zvhil..." he was referring to himself.)

The Mishnah says הוּי רֵץ לַמִּצְוָה קְלָה וְבוֹרַח מִן הָעֲבִירָה שְׂמֻצָּה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה, "Run to do a simple mitzvah and run away from sin, because each mitzvah draws on the next one and each sin leads to more sins" (Avos 4:2). Rebbe Yitzchak of Radvil ז"l asks: We put tefillin on early in the morning. This should lead to more mitzvos, because מִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה. Everyone should be a tzaddik, as this one good deed should lead to more. Why don't we see this happening?

He answers; it depends on

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על ידכה, which alludes to יד כהה, the weaker hand. This is a reminder that we should bind ourselves with *emunah*, specifically during the times we feel weak and vulnerable.

The tefillin must be black. This also teaches us that when the situation is dark and black, and problems surround you on all sides, have *emunah*, and remember that everything is for the good.

how he performs the mitzvah. If he puts tefillin on with joy, then definitely מצוה גוררת מצוה and he will grow immensely. But if he wears tefillin with melancholy, and puts them on by rote, it won't have this ability.

The Yid HaKadosh of Pshischa ז"ל would study Torah with Eliyahu HaNavi. Once, the Yid HaKadosh said, "If I would know that it's good for simple people to see Eliyahu HaNavi, I would ask Eliyahu HaNavi to reveal himself to them."

The Chidushei HaRim added, "If it would be good for simple people to see Eliyahu HaNavi, the Yid HaKadosh wouldn't have to ask Eliyahu to reveal himself to them, since Eliyahu would do that on his own because of his love to Bnei Yisrael. Eliyahu HaNavi loved the Jewish nation, as is evident from his proclamation בית ישראל הריני כפרתכם 'Jewish nation, I am your atonement. [I agree to suffer afflictions for

your forgiveness and atonement' (*Tana d'Bei Eliyahu* 28). Nevertheless, Eliyahu HaNavi doesn't reveal himself to simple people, because he knows that it isn't necessary. The Jewish nation receives the very same goodness every day when they wear tefillin." We should learn from this the great good we receive every morning when we wear tefillin. It's comparable to *giluy Eliyahu*, meeting with Eliyahu HaNavi.

Yidden in all generations are *moser nefesh* for the mitzvah of tefillin. The following recent story is a demonstration:

There is a *mashgiach kashrus* who supervises — and also dorms — in a food factory in Canada. The factory is a forty-five minute ride from the nearest Jewish community, so every day, he awakens early and travels this distance to daven with a minyan. He would leave his tefillin in the

beis medresh, so he wouldn't have to bring it each day. One morning, he awoke to a blizzard. All vehicles were banned from the roads because of the high snow, and it was impossible to drive to the beis medresh to put on tefillin. The only way to get there was by hiring a jeep that cost ten thousand dollars. He called up his rav, and asked whether he must pay that amount of money to get to his tefillin.

The rav replied, "Halachah states that one must give away a fifth of one's money to do a mitzvah. If you have fifty thousand dollars in your bank, you are obligated."

He had more than fifty thousand dollars so he hired a jeep, and managed to say the *berachah* on his tefillin just moments before *shkiyah*. He told me that on the following day, when he put his tefillin on, it was with extra *simchah* because his *mesirus nefesh* (and the sum of money invested into the mitzvah) helped him acquire a deep

appreciation for the mitzvah of tefillin.

An eighty-year-old man from Teveria said to Rebbe Avraham Kalisker *zt'l*, "I wish I were dead. I don't see a purpose in living anymore." Reb Avraham Kalisker asked him, "Did you wear tefillin today?"

"Yes, but it was without *kavanah*," the man replied.

The Rebbe of Kalisk replied, "It's worth living eighty years, with *yesurim*, just to wear tefillin once in a lifetime, as you put them on today."

Chazal compare bringing a gift to *talmidei chachamim* to bringing the *bikurim*, and therefore it used to be the custom to bring gifts to chassidic Rebbes. Once, someone sent his servant to Rebbe Nachum Chernobler *zt'l* to deliver a barrel of wine — as a form of *bikurim*.

Rebbe Nachum of Chernobel asked the servant, "Did you wear tefillin today?"

The man replied, "I usually put on tefillin early in the morning. But I woke up late today, and I had many errands to do, and I didn't have time to put on tefillin. Later I did have some time, but it was so late, and I had already eaten, so I figured it was too late to put on tefillin."

The rebbe explained to this simple man that he was still obligated to wear tefillin.

Those who repeat this story add: "This man was obviously very simple and unlearned, and who knows what kind of tefillin he had? Probably they were only border-line kosher. And the joy he had when he wore his tefillin was probably negligible. Yet, Rebbe Nachum Chernobler was able to perceive that he hadn't worn tefillin that day. This teaches us the significance of the mitzvos of every single Yid, and it also teaches us the great light that shines on us from wearing tefillin.

In Warsaw, there lived a

hardworking baker, who would begin baking bread at 3:00 a.m. so people could have fresh bread for breakfast. He didn't have time to daven *Shacharis* until late in the morning. He would then rush to the beis medresh, quickly put on his tefillin and daven *Shacharis* close to noon.

The baker's son was becoming a bar-mitzvah, and asked his father, "How will you have time to help me put on tefillin for the first time, if you work until so late?"

The father said, "Wait for me at 7:10 in the beis medresh. I'll meet you there and I'll teach you how to put on tefillin." 7:10 passed, and also 7:30, and his father still didn't show up. The Imrei Emes *zt'l* found the boy crying. "What's the matter?"

"Today is the first day I'm wearing tefillin, and my father isn't here to help me."

"I will help you put them on," the Rebbe said. The Rebbe took him into his room, and

explained the concept of tefillin: "Hashem's holy name is stated several times in the tefillin. When you put the tefillin on, you draw this holiness onto yourself. How is this holiness drawn?" The Rebbe pointed to the light fixture hanging from the ceiling and said, "The light switch is on the wall. How

does the chandelier turn on? There are wires connecting the chandelier to the light switch. So too, the straps of the tefillin bring the holiness that are in the tefillin into the person."<sup>5</sup>

### *Emes*

Rebbe Simchah Bunim of Pershischa *zy'a* would say, "The only prohibition, that

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5. Chassidim customarily bring their thirteen-year-old sons to their Rebbe, to put tefillin on their son, for the first time. Once, a modern orthodox Yid brought his thirteen-year-old son to the Imrei Chaim of Viznitz *zt'l*, along with cakes and drinks, for the Rebbe and the chassidim to celebrate the boy's initiation to the mitzvah of tefillin. The Rebbe and chassidim were concerned about the kashrus level of the refreshments, and the Rebbe didn't want to insult this man, so after putting tefillin on the boy the Rebbe announced, "My custom is not to eat anything before wearing Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin. I'll take some cake and drink, and put them aside for later, after I wear Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin."

The chassidim, understanding the Rebbe's intentions, followed suit. They joyously wished *mazal tov* to the father and bar mitzvah *bachur*, took some cake and drink, and put it aside. In this manner, the Rebbe and his chassidim saved them from shame.

Some Chasidic Rebbes would tie the *retzuos* (straps) very tightly around the bar mitzvah *bachur's* arm, when they put tefillin on for the first time, to draw the holiness of the tefillin deep inside the child. My grandfather, Reb Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l* said that when his grandfather, Reb Dovid Biderman *zt'l*, put tefillin on him for the first time, his grandfather tied it so tightly, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai feared that his arm would fall off.

Reb Dovid Biderman *zt'l* said that a *segulah* for *parnassah* is not to remove the תפילין של יד until after *Aleinu*.

the Torah warns us to keep far away from is lying, שקר, as it states מדבר שקר תרחק "distance yourself from saying something false" (*Shemos* 23:7).<sup>6</sup>

Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz zy'a, who was very careful to always say the truth, said, "We should consider a lie to be like *arayos*, adultery. When Yidden will be careful about lying, Mashiach will come."

What is the connection between avoiding lies and Mashiach's coming? Reb Refael of Barshid zy'a (one of Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer's primary students) explained: The *Tana d'Bei Eliyahu* teaches, "When you tell a lie,

the *malachim*, angels, lie to you." What lies do the angels tell him? They tell him that an *aveirah* is a mitzvah, and that a mitzvah is an *aveirah*. Now people can't do *teshuvah*, because they don't know which of their deeds needs correction, and which mitzvos they lack, and without *teshuvah*, Moshiach can't come".

This isn't so difficult to understand, as people often confuse mitzvos with *aveiros*. For example, if a child isn't acting properly and a parent becomes angry with him in order to educate him, is that a mitzvah or an *aveirah*? It's important to educate children, but anger isn't a good trait. So

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6. The Beis Yisrael of Gur zy'a once asked one of his close chassidim to buy him a *lulav* for succos, and he specified exactly what to look for. That year, there was a shortage of *lulavim*, and the *shaliach* searched long and hard to find a *lulav* that met the Rebbe's criteria. In the end, he found such a *lulav* and paid a lot of money for it. The Rebbe was very happy with the *lulav* and asked, "How much did it cost?" Before the man could answer, the Rebbe said, "Better don't answer this question, because the only *aveirah* that the Torah specifies that one must distance himself from is telling a lie, מדבר שקר תרחק." The Rebbe understood that this man might lie and quote a lower price than it truly cost.

did the parent do a mitzvah or an *aveirah*? It's confusing, and many people don't know. Sometimes a person speaks *lashon hara* on an entire community, which isn't acting properly according to the Torah — in his opinion — and he wants to teach others to be aware and not join them. Did he do a mitzvah or an *aveirah*? It's not always clear. Someone who tells lies is certainly confused, as the angels lie to him. He doesn't know what a mitzvah is and what's an *aveirah*, what's Hashem's will and what isn't. In such a state it's impossible to repent, and this prevents Mashiaich from coming.

Being careful from falsehood begins with speech but it doesn't end there. When one is careful to speak truthfully, truth will permeate all his deeds. Everything he does will be sealed with truth. He will 'be himself' and not pretend to be someone he isn't. He is able to admit when he is wrong. He serves Hashem for Hashem's

sake, without ulterior motives. This explains why Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz, and several other tzaddikim, made being careful from lies their primary focus in life.

The Imrei Emes of Gur zy'a would say: "Everyone should choose one מצות עשה, one positive command, and one מצות לא תעשה, one prohibition, to be expert in their laws, and to keep them with *mesirus nefesh* [under all circumstances]."

The Rambam writes, "When one keeps one of the mitzvos of the Torah perfectly, without any ulterior motives, and with love, he will earn Olam HaBa with it" (*Pirush HaMishnayos*, end of *Makos*). Accordingly, it's a good idea to choose one *mitzvas aseh* and one *mitzvas lo saaseh*, to become an expert in them and to keep them under all circumstances. These mitzvos will be his keys to Olam HaBa.

The Imrei Emes said that he chose *kibud av v'eim*,



honoring parents, for his *mitzvas aseh*, and keeping away from lies, for the *lo saaseh*. He said that he chose specifically those two, because they are the hardest to keep.

The Shlah Hakadosh (*Shaar HaOsiyos* 4) writes, “Here, in Yerushalayim – may it speedily be rebuilt – there lived a very great chassid from the Sephardic community who would often come to me. For all the money in the world, he would never say anything that wasn’t one hundred percent true, *chas veshalom*. He told me how his father trained him in this trait. When he and his brother were young and would come complaining to their father [that the other did something wrong to him], his father would say, ‘I will forgive the one who tells the truth and admits that he’s at fault — with the condition that he doesn’t do it again. But I will severely punish the one who denies, and after this, I discover that he lied.’ His

father gave some coins to the child who admitted he did something wrong, to reward him for his honesty. And he punished the one who lied. In this manner, he raised his children with the trait of *emes*. He trained his children to tell the truth with money and gifts, until truth became their nature, as it states אמת קנה, ‘purchase truth’ (*Mishlei* 23:23). All wise people should devise similar strategies to raise their children with good *middos* and to do good deeds.”

### **It's *Bashert***

Reb Avraham Yitzchak Rothstein ז'ל and his business partner bought a large plot of land and hired a construction company to build an industrial park on it. Their plan was to rent out several sections of the complex to other industries, and they would use one section for their own curtain factory. They would earn on the rent from the other industries, plus the income from their curtain factory.

When they made the investment, they didn't realize just how much everything would cost. As construction continued, they had to take high loans to cover the expenses. The debts were very high, and they regretted that they ever became involved in this enterprise. But they couldn't back out at that point (because then they wouldn't be able to repay their debts). They had to pull through until the end.

When construction was finally completed, they couldn't find any businesses willing to rent. Months passed and the complex remained empty. Their creditors began to pressure them, and they didn't know what to do. They feared they may go bankrupt. Finally, a large firm contacted them. They wanted to rent out the entire complex, but they were *mechalelei Shabbos* (not Shabbos observant). Reb Avraham Yitzchak Rothstein, who always took counsel from the Chazon Ish *zt'l*, asked the

Chazon Ish whether they can agree to the offer. The Chazon Ish ruled indisputably, they shouldn't rent to them.

Three more months passed, and they didn't have another offer. Reb Avraham Yitzchak's business partner said, "Maybe we should go back to the previous offer?"

Reb Avraham Yitzchak wouldn't have approached the Chazon Ish again, because he had already asked and received a decisive answer. That was sufficient for him. But he felt that for his partner's sake, he should ask again.

He explained to the Chazon Ish their predicament, and asked whether under these circumstances, they could make an exception and rent the space to the firm that showed interest.

The Chazon Ish repeated his *psak*; that they shouldn't rent it to them, and told him the following *hashal*:

Someone had to travel through

the desert where there was no water or food. Before he started out on his trip, he took along enough supplies, but he lost his way and was in the desert longer than he had originally planned. The water supply ran out and he feared that he may die from thirst. At last, he hears a trickle of water from the distance. He goes there, and finds water... but it was contaminated water. He knew that if he drinks from them he will be sick. But he felt he had no other choice, and he drank from the contaminated waters.

He continued on his way, thinking that as soon as he gets out of the desert, he will have to go to the hospital because of the poisonous water he drank. As he was thinking these thoughts, and feeling sick and nauseous, he came across a fresh water fountain. He didn't drink from its water, because he had already quenched his thirst with the sewer water. He was upset with himself: *If I would*

*have waited a little longer, I would have this good water to drink, and I wouldn't need to drink the contaminated water.* The Chazon Ish told Reb Avraham Yitzchak, "Those people's money is comparable to contaminated water, because they earn their money by desecrating the Shabbos. Why should you rent to them? If you will wait just a little longer, you will find *shomer Shabbos* renters..."

Shortly afterwards, they rented out some space to one company, and another section was rented to another factory — both of them *shomer Shabbos*. Reb Avraham Yitzchak and his partner turned the third section into a curtain factory, like their original plan. They were able to pay back their loans, and earn a nice living.

The Chazon Ish's blessing, that they would soon find clients to rent it out, wasn't necessarily *ruach hakadosh*. Because when it's *bashert* for someone

to earn money, he will certainly earn it, and if the money doesn't come from one venue, then it will come from another venue. It's foolish to seek *parnassah* via forbidden means, because he can earn the exact same income, by pursuing kosher venues.

The *gabai* of Rebbe Yitzchok Vorker *zt'l* was extremely poor. He didn't even own a pair of boots. He wore ripped shoes, even in the snow. The Rebbe had *rachmanus* on him, spoke to his wealthy chassidim, and raised money for the *gabai* so he could buy new boots. The money was kept in a bag, in the Rebbe's room. The *gabai* was in the Rebbe's room by himself, and saw the packet of money. He didn't know that it was destined for him. He couldn't control his *yetzer hara*, and stole it. The Rebbe said to

him, "If you would have waited just a little bit longer, the money would have come to you in a permitted way. Why did you rush and take it with theft?"<sup>7</sup>

Reb Chaim Kosov *zy'a*, in *Amud HaAvodah* (*drush bitachon* 9-13) elaborates on this theme:

"The rule is, from the day the world was created, no one ever lost anything and no one ever gained anything," because everything is *bashert*. Losses and profits are part of Hashem's plan. The *Amud HaAvodah* bases his lesson on the *Gemara* that says כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובין לו מראש, "All sustenance for man is fixed and planned from Rosh Hashanah" (*Beitzah* 16). He writes, "[People believe in the oral Torah] so why don't they believe in the word קצובין, *fixed*

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7. Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* would often discuss the importance of being honest in business. He would say, when one has *emunah*, he knows he will receive whatever is destined for him — never more and never less. So why cheat? You can earn the same amount in permitted ways.

and planned, as stated in the Gemara?" He explains that if people would believe in קצובין, no one would steal and no one would cheat, because they would know they cannot earn more than the amount destined for them. And if they do earn, they will only lose it somewhere else, because they can't get anything beyond the quota that Hashem destined for them."

The prohibitions of the Torah are written in the future tense. For example, לא תגנוב doesn't mean 'don't steal,' it means, 'you will not steal.' Why? The Rema MiPano answers that the Torah is saying with certainty, לא תגנוב, "Yidden will not steal." The Torah is stating its trust in the Jewish people that they will not steal. The Amud HaAvodah however isn't satisfied with this explanation, because he says that people do steal, unfortunately. Instead, he answers that the Torah is saying, "You will not steal," because in a way, it is impossible to steal. When

Reuven steals a thousand dollars from Shimon, it seems that Reuven gained a thousand dollars and Shimon lost a thousand dollars. But the truth is, Reuven didn't gain and Shimon didn't lose, because if Reuven wouldn't have stolen, he would have received a thousand dollars from a permitted venue. Now that he stole a thousand dollars from Shimon, Heaven will not give him the thousand that was destined for him. The thousand dollars will go to Shimon, who just endured a loss. Shimon's loss needs to be replenished, because Shimon can't have less than the amount that was destined for him. In conclusion, when Reuven steals, he's only stealing from himself. This is the meaning of the passuk לא תגנוב, "you will not steal," because ultimately it's impossible to steal.

The Amud HaAvodah writes that these ideas also apply to giving *tzedakah*. The donor doesn't lose money when

giving *tzedakah* and the pauper doesn't profit extra from accepting the donation. Each one receives the amount that was destined for him on Rosh Hashanah. The money given to charity was not meant to be the donor's. Heaven gave it to him to distribute it to the poor. If he won't give it to *tzedakah*, he'll lose it some other way. And the poor person didn't gain more from the *tzedakah*, because that was the portion that Hashem designated for him.

The Sefer Chasidim (415) writes, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives wealth to somebody, but he doesn't give it to *tzedakah*... the paupers come and shout to Hashem, 'You gave him extra money, so he could support a thousand

paupers, but he didn't give us anything.' Hakadosh Baruch Hu punishes the wealthy person, as though he stole from the poor... Because I gave you wealth so you would distribute it to the poor. Why did you keep the wealth for yourself?"<sup>8</sup>

A story is told about a student from the Novardok yeshiva that lived with his wife in great poverty. Despite their poverty they had bread and some butter every day. They kept the butter in two containers, one was his butter, and one was hers. One morning, a cat came into their home, and ate up his butter. When the husband came home for breakfast, his wife told him what happened.

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8. The Chida (in his commentary *Bris Olam* on *Sefer Chasidim*) adds that the letters before ה - ס - כ spell עני (the letter before ה is ע and so on). This teaches us that money is given to the wealthy, so they can distribute it to the poor.

The Chida writes another lesson that we can learn from the word עני that is stated in the letters before כסף. It teaches us that when one supports the poor, he will merit כסף, wealth. Heaven will bestow on him a blessing of *parnassah* and wealth, in the merit of *tzedakah*.

"The cat didn't eat my butter," he replied. The husband, well versed in the ways of *mussar* and *emunah* that was taught in Novardok, explained, "I said, 'the cat didn't eat *my* butter,' because if the cat ate it, it means it was never meant to see, the cat ate your butter." be mine in the first place."<sup>9</sup>

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9. A successful businessman once came in to the *beis din* of Reb Chaim Brisker *zt'l*, and boasted how clever he is with money. "Once, a fire broke out on the street where my factory stands. The fire was spreading, and my factory was in danger of being burned. An investor, who makes money in situations like these, came over to me and said, 'The fire may soon burn your factory down. I'll buy it from you for half price.' But do you think that I'm a fool and agreed to this low price? I didn't sell it. In the meanwhile, the fire came closer to my factory. This time he offered me a fifth of its price, but I wasn't a fool. I refused. The fire caught onto one of the walls of my factory, and he offered me one tenth of the value, but I didn't go for it. The fire was stopped just then, and I remained with my wealth. Don't you see how wise I am, with my money?"

Reb Chaim Brisker replied, "I don't think you acted wisely at all. I think you should have accepted all of his offers, because you may have ended off without anything at all. When there was a fire on the block, and you were offered half the value, you should have agreed to the deal. Also when you were offered a fifth of the value and even a tenth, I think you should have agreed to it. You didn't act wisely at all. But what we can learn from this story is that when it's *bashert* for someone to be wealthy, even if he acts unwisely, he will be wealthy. Nothing can prevent Hashem's plan from transpiring."

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* was against buying insurance. He said that one should trust fully in Hashem. (Other *gedolim* promoted buying insurance. We will not elaborate on this disagreement here.) In the year 5663, there was a fire in the town of Radin, and most houses burned down. Insurance agencies took advantage of the tragedy, and salespeople went from door

to door, selling fire insurance. The Chofetz Chaim wasn't home when the salesman came to his door, and his *rebbetzin* bought a policy. When the Chofetz Chaim came home and heard about it, he was disappointed. That year, there was another fire in Radin. The Chofetz Chaim's home burned down, together with the houses of his married children. The family said, "It's a good thing we bought insurance. Otherwise, we would have a great loss."

The Chofetz Chaim disagreed. "If you wouldn't have bought an insurance policy, the houses wouldn't burn down in the first place. The proof is last year. We didn't own insurance, and our houses didn't burn down."

In the city where the Noda b'Yehudah lived, there were two wealthy neighbors, who were always jealous of one another. Once, a musician played beautiful music in the courtyard between their two houses. After the musician left, one of the wealthy neighbors said, "Did you see how respected I am? The musician came to honor me with his music."

"He didn't come for you," the other neighbor countered. "He came to honor me."

Each of them brought evidence to prove that the musician came for him. Since they couldn't reach an agreement, they went to the Noda b'Yehudah *zt'l* and asked for his opinion. The *gaon* heard them out and said that they must pay him one hundred gold coins, if they want him to arbitrate the case. They gave him the money. He said that he would answer them the following morning.

The next morning he told them, "In my opinion, the musician didn't come for either of you. He came for me, so I could earn two hundred gold coins."