

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Voeschanon



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Table of Contents

Torah Wellsprings - Voeschanon

Rejoice in Hashem's Promise.....	4
Hashem's Kindness Comes After Hardships.	4
Hashem is our G-d.....	5
Wiser than the Torah???	6
Hope.....	9
Your Students Are Your Children	13
Love Your Children	14
Teach Your Children When They Are Young	15

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Rejoice in Hashem's Promise

This week's *haftarah* begins with the words (Yeshayah 40:1): נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי יֹאמַר אֱלֹקֵיכֶם, "Comfort, comfort My people – says your G-d." Rashi writes that from this pasuk until the end of sefer Yeshayah, there are words of consolation to the Jewish people, promising them a good future.

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Yeshayah 445) states that the Yidden asked Yeshayahu whether his comforting words of prophecy are only to the Yidden of his generation who experienced the churban or do they also apply to the future generations. Yeshayahu replied, "I console all generations. It doesn't state אֱלֹקֵיכֶם, "Hashem said" [in the past tense]. Rather, the pasuk states יֹאמַר אֱלֹקֵיכֶם, "Says your G-d," now. Hashem comforts the Jewish nation in every generation and promises them a better future.

Therefore, *Minhag Tov* writes, "You should be happy and welcome Shabbos Nachamu with joy and a happy heart. You will be comforted with many condolences. Hashem will console us with the redemption of Yerushalayim."

Also, the Mahari'l states that on Shabbos Nachamu, יִשְׁמְחוּ כָּל הָעָם וַיְבִטְחוּ בְּנַחֲמַת הַגּוֹאֵל, "The entire nation shall be happy and trust in the condolences of the redeemer." This should be our attitude on Shabbos Nachamu. We should be happy because we believe that good days are arriving.

מצוה בן שוועיב (a student of the Rashba) writes, "It's a mitzvah to celebrate this Shabbos as though it were a *yom tov*."

The Ritva writes, וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה נִהְגוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת סְעוּדָה, "Therefore, there's a custom to make a seudah on the Shabbos after Tisha b'Av (Shabbos Nachamu)." (We don't know exactly what this means because we anyway have a seudah on this Shabbos. Perhaps it means we should have a larger meal on Shabbos Nachamu. But one thing is sure: it is a time for joy and to trust Hashem's salvation.)

On Shabbos Nachamu we are also consoled on a personal, individual level. Everyone has their own needs and hopes for their personal geulah. For some, it is parnassah; for others, they await salvation for health, and there are endless other examples. This Shabbos, Hashem consoles us and tells us to trust in the better days of the future.

Hashem's Kindness Comes After Hardships.

It states (Mishlei 3:12) כִּי אֵת אֲשֶׁר יֵאָדָב ה' יוֹכִיחַ וְכָאֵב, "For Hashem chastens the one He loves, as a father placates a son." Rabbeinu Yonah explains that כָּאֵב אֵת בֶּן יִרְצֶה means that after Hashem punishes, He shows His immense love, just as a father does after punishing his son.

The Avodas Yisrael (דברים ד"ה הנה) writes, "It is a mashal to a father who hits his son with a staff to discipline him, and afterwards, the father is kind to the son, comforts him, and tells him how much he loves him..."¹

1. On Tisha b'Av, we put on tefillin in the afternoon. The Avodas Yisrael explains that tefillin on the head represents wisdom, and on Tisha b'Av, in the afternoon, we acquire the knowledge and awareness that Hashem loves us. After we are smitten, we will experience Hashem's love and kindness.

This week's parashah has the Aseres HaDibros in it – another indication that Hashem's kindness follows hard times. Hashem gives us the Torah again and tells us that He wants to renew our relationship.

The rule is that after a difficult period, better times follow. For example, the Ramchal (קל"ח פתחי חכמה) teaches, "After a hunger year, Hashem brings a lot of rain to the world." Also, there is a saying: "After a fire [when someone's possession went up in flames], Hashem sends wealth." Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz zt'l says that this is true. Hashem shows us open kindness after suffering hardship.

The Baal HaTanya says (quoted in Tzemech Tzedek, Derech Mitzvoseicha, 228), "Many people say, 'After a fire, one becomes wealthy.' I heard from holy tzaddikim that this is because the order of the middos is *chesed*, *din*, and *rachamim*. It is known that *rachamim* is greater than *chesed*. One receives more of Hashem's kindness from the attribute of *rachamim* than from the attribute of *chesed*... Therefore, since there was *din* - the fire - *rachamim* (a greater manifestation of *chesed*) will follow."

Reb Tuvia Weiss zt'l was a Rav in Antwerp (before he became the Gaavad of Yerushalayim). Once, someone asked Reb Tuvia to be mesader kiddushin, and he accepted the honor. At the chuppah, someone embarrassed Reb Tuvia for being mesader kiddushin. (This was because the rabbanim of Antwerp arranged a rotation system for themselves, for receiving the honor of siddur kiddushin. Accidentally, Reb Tuvyah Weiss was mesader kiddushin on a day that another Rav had the right to be mesader kiddushin. This prompted someone to embarrass Reb Tuvyah during the chuppah.) It was very humiliating. Reb Tuvyah turned red and white from shame.

Later that evening, Reb Tuvia was learning with a chavrusa when the phone rang at 9:30. Reb Tuvyah told his chavrusa not to answer the phone. Every night, they learned until 10:00 p.m., and he didn't want to interrupt their studies until then.

At 10:00, the phone rang again. It was the Eidah Chareidis of Yerushalayim, inviting Reb Tuvyah to be the Gaavad of Yerushalayim. This is the pattern. After enduring humiliation or any difficult period, excellent times follow.

Hashem is our G-d

Hashem tells the Navi נחמו נחמו עמי that he should console the nation. How are we consoled? The answer is יאמר אלקיכם, that Hashem is our G-d. This awareness is in itself a condolence.

We can compare it to a child at an amusement park who is afraid to go on the roller coaster, the Ferris wheel, and the other tall rides. But when his father takes him on a ride, he feels secure and isn't afraid anymore.

Hashem is our G-d. That is our comfort. That is our guarantee that there is nothing to fear.

It states (Shir HaShirim 4:8), אתי מלבנון כלה אתי, מלבנון תבוא. Rashi explains that Hashem says, אתי מלבנון, "I will be with you when you go to galus. אתי מלבנון תבוא, and I will be with you when you return from galus." Also, throughout galus Hashem is with us, as Rashi writes, "From when you leave... until you return, I am with you, wherever you go and come." Hashem is with us, guarding and helping us every step of our lives.

The Midrash (Devarim Rabba 2) relates:

A ship stopped at an island. The captain asked the only Yid on board his boat to go to the island to buy provisions for the rest of the passengers.

The Yid replied, "Why are you sending me, specifically? I don't know anyone on this island. I am alone on this island, just like you."

The sailors told him, "You are not alone. Wherever you go, Hashem is with you. As it states (this week's parashah, 4:7) כי מי גוי גדול אשר לו אלקים קרובים אליו כה' אלקינו, 'Which great nation has a god close to them like Hashem our G-d.'" The Beis Avraham zt'l would often repeat this Midrash, emphasizing that even goyim know that Hashem is with the Jewish nation. We are never alone.

Reb Shmuel Munkes zt'l, a student of the Baal HaTanya zt'l, was a very happy

person.² Once, a fire destroyed Reb Shmuel's home, and Reb Shmuel was seen dancing. People feared that Reb Shmuel had lost his sanity due to his financial loss. Why was he dancing? He explained, "If I were a non-Jew, my god would be burned in the fire together with my home. But I'm a Yid, and my G-d still exists. That's why I'm so happy."³

Hashem says (Yeshayah 51:12) **אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא** מְנַחֵם, "I am He Who consoles you" (from the haftarah of parashas Shoftim). Why does it state **אֲנִי** twice?

It is explained that it alludes to two **אֲנִי** that are written in the Torah. The Torah writes by the Aseres HaDibros **אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ**, "I am Hashem, your G-d," and when discussing the troubles of galus, the Torah (Devarim 31:18) states, **אֲנִי הַסֵּתֶר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי בְּיוֹם הַהוּא**, "I will hide My face on that day." These two **אֲנִי** are

alluded to in the words **אֲנִי הוּא מְנַחֵם**. The Navi is saying that when one knows that even the **אֲנִי הַסֵּתֶר אֶסְתִּיר** is also **אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ**, this consoles us. When we know that even during *hester panim*, Hashem is with us, this consoles us.⁴

Wiser than the Torah???

The following remarkable story was heard from people who know the baalei hamaaseh. It occurred recently. We verified the details; it is a true story:

Reb Avraham Aboulafia is a respected Rav in Arizona. Recently, he was traveling to Toronto to arrange a *get*. (Through hashgachah pratis, the travel agent got him the last available seat on the plane.) The passenger sitting next to him was a dark man. Rabbi Aboulafia greeted him and asked him his name. The man replied,

2. It is known that the Baal HaTanya was once imprisoned, and after fifty-three days, with Hashem's kindness, he was released from jail on the 19th of Kislev. Some time afterward, people tried to convince the government to imprison the Baal HaTanya again. The Baal HaTanya heard about this and was very distressed. Reb Shmuel Munkes wanted to lighten the Baal HaTanya's mood, so he suspended himself from a rope outside the beis medresh. It was an unusual sight, and people came to watch. "Why is Reb Shmuel hanging outside the beis medresh?" The Baal HaTanya walked out of his beis medresh and said, "Reb Shmuel! What are you doing there?"

Reb Shmuel replied, "Craftsmen hang samples of their products outside their shop, so people should know what is being manufactured inside. A cobbler hangs a shoe outside his store, a tailor hangs out a suit, and so on. In this beis medresh, the Rebbe produces chasidim. I am hanging here as a sample, so people who pass by should know what is manufactured here."

The plan succeeded. The Baal HaTanya laughed and got back to himself. The Baal HaTanya's joy helped sweeten the dinim, and he was saved from the hands of those who attempted to harm him.

3. Reb Zalman Brizel *zt'l* had just returned from a fund-raising trip in chutz l'aretz, and the money he raised was wrapped up together, but he couldn't find the package. His family frantically searched the house for the money package while Reb Zalman Brizel danced and sang. His family asked him, "Why are you so happy? Did you find the money?"

"No," he replied. "I didn't find the money yet, but I decided that even if I lost my money, should I also lose my mind?"

4. The fourth brachah of birchas hamazon, **הַטּוֹב וְהַמְּשִׁיב**, was established to thank Hashem that the dead of Beitar were buried and that their bodies didn't rot. We wonder why we say this brachah every day of the year (whenever we bentch). The miracles of Chanukah are commemorated eight days a year, and Pesach for seven. Why is this miracle remembered every day?

The answer is that this miracle occurred when Hashem's wrath was dominant, and Hashem concealed Himself from the Jewish nation. Even then, the dead didn't rot, and they were buried. This reminds us that Hashem's kindness is with us even during the most challenging times. This is something we should remember every day.

"Shah!" Rabbi Aboulafia understood that he preferred not to engage in conversation, so he didn't ask any more questions. He took out a sefer and began to learn the miforshim on the parashah of the week, parashas Chukas. He began reading, וזאת חקת התורה...

Rabbi Aboulafia couldn't help but notice that his neighbor was staring at the words of the sefer. Finally, the goy pointed to the words חקת התורה and asked for the meaning of the words.

"This is a Jewish book, and these are Hebrew words." The goy was interested in the two words חקת התורה, wanting to know their translation. The Rav told him what it meant and taught him how to pronounce the words. While they were speaking, the goy rolled up his sleeve, revealing his tattooed arm. The tattoo was nothing other than the words "חקת התורה" written in *lashon hakodesh*. The Rav was shocked. Why did this goy have Torah words on his arm!? He asked for an explanation.

"When I was young," the goy replied, "my father had my arm tattooed with these words. He said it was a Chinese custom, an omen for the child's success. It is supposed to bring the child good luck for the rest of his life. He told me that wondrous secrets are hidden in these words."

The Rav told him his explanation didn't make sense and kept probing for a proper explanation. The goy admitted, "For forty years, I've been trying to figure out what these words mean. In fact, until now, I didn't realize they were letters. I thought they were just symbols or drawings. Only now did I discover that they are letters." The Rav realized that the goy was speaking the truth; he had no idea why those words landed on his arm.

Then the goy said, "My father is still alive. He is seventy years old. You can call him and ask him about it."

The Rav took down his father's phone number and, as soon as the plane landed, called the man. He began the conversation

by giving the father regards from his son. "I sat beside him on the plane; I enjoyed speaking to him. But I am wondering about something. I saw on your son's arm two words from our holy Torah: חקת התורה. Can you please tell me why these words were tattooed on his arm?"

The father replied, "I learned this from the Chinese. When these letters are engraved on a child, it brings goodness to the child for his entire life."

The Rav replied, "Please, tell me the truth."

The father tried giving various other explanations, but the Rav sensed that he was hiding something. R' Aboulafia, with wisdom and tact, succeeded in getting the secret out of the father.

The father broke down in bitter tears as he began his tragic story. "When I was a bachur, I studied in Ponevezh. I was very close with the great Rosh Yeshiva, the gaon Harav Shach zt'l. I studied with hasmadah, and after my chasunah, I learned in Kollel. As time passed, parnassah became very difficult. At that time, I was offered a nighttime job in an office. I would be able to continue learning Torah all day in Kollel and, at night, work in the office and earn parnassah. I asked my Rebbe, Rav Shach, whether I should accept the job. Rav Shach discussed it with me, considered all angles, and then advised me to take this job.

I learned by day, and I worked in an office at night. My parnassah problems were resolved. This went on for some time. But then, a non-Jewish, black woman was hired to clean the office at night, during the same hours I worked there. I immediately went to Rav Shach and informed him of this new development. Rav Shach ruled, "You cannot work there anymore under these conditions; it involves an issur of yichud!"

I began to plead with Rav Shach that I needed this job for my parnassah. I added that if I gave up this job, my shalom bayis would unravel, and my children would go

hungry. Rav Shach opened a Shulchan Aruch [Even HaEzer 22] and showed me that the prohibition of yichud also applies with a gentile. I replied, "But Rebbe! What connection do I have with a black woman? I have no interest in her!"

Rav Shach replied, "Don't make *chochmos*! זאת חקת התורה, this is the decree of the Torah. If the Torah doesn't permit, we can't transgress. We can't be smarter than the Torah." He explained that one isn't allowed to say the reason behind a prohibition doesn't apply to him. What the Torah forbids is forbidden, and there is no room for *chochmos* and *chesbonos*!

But I didn't pass the test. I was desperate to earn a living, so I continued working there. I will not elaborate, but the black woman and I became friendly with time. I divorced my wife, left my young children, and married this black woman r"l. We moved to her country of origin. Throughout this whole time, I have before my eyes the scene of my Rebbe, Rav Shach, declared, זאת חקת התורה! When the Torah says something is forbidden, it is prohibited! This scene never left me and haunts me day and night.

When my son was born, I called him Shach, after my Rebbe, Rav Shach zt'l. (This is why the son said "Shah" when the Rav Aboulafia asked him for his name. It is difficult for non-Jews to pronounce the sound of a chaf, so he called himself "Shah" instead of "Shach.") I also immediately had my son tattooed with the words חקת התורה as a reminder of my Rebbe's words. I wanted a constant reminder of what caused my destruction and downfall. I thought I was clever. I thought I could outsmart the Torah. And now, look what happened to me. From then until today, I have had no life. With

one foolish act, I buried myself alive. I'm shattered and heartbroken, flung to the world's far corners. (We hope that he will do teshuvah and the pasuk, Devarim 30:4, אם יהיה נדחק בקצה שמים משם יקבצך, "If your dispersed will be at the ends of the heaven, from there, Hashem, you G-d will gather you" should speedily apply to him.)

Let this story be a lesson that one shouldn't say, "What is so bad with this device?" Or "what is so terrible if I go to this questionable place? I am so far from and disgusted by all the garbage and temptations these devices offer. I only use them for constructive purposes, to find information, advice, etc". We must remember that one cannot be wiser than Hashem. There are, unfortunately, thousands of people who thought they were 'smart' and ended up falling to the lowest places. They fell there and are still stuck there. May Hashem have mercy on them and on their children.⁵

Think about what happened to the person in the above story. He thought he could be smarter than Chazal, and fell to the lowest places. He ruined his life. So, let us be truly wise and keep the obligations of the Torah before our eyes, and keep them as Hashem commanded us to.

Haman was born because of such an error. Hashem commanded Shaul HaMelech to eradicate Amalek. But Shaul made a kal v'chomer, "If for one person [killed], the Torah says to bring an *eglah arufah*, it is certainly terrible to kill all these people." Because of this false claim, Shaul didn't kill Agag, and Haman was Agag's descendant. (Although we have no clue as to the greatness of Shaul HaMelech, nevertheless, the Torah teaches us this story so that we should learn from it.)

5. The Yeshuos Moshe of Vizhnitz zt'l explained the pasuk (Bereishis 22:10) ויקח את המאכלת לשחוט את בנו, that a מאכלת is something that brings parnassah (see Rashi). The hint is that people do certain things for parnassah, but this can result in chalilah, with לשחוט את בנו because it can chalilah have a negative effect on their children.

It states (Bereishis 43:20) ירד ירדנו בתחילה לשבור אוכל, which can be translated that the beginning of falling from one's spiritual level is לשבור אוכל, with claims that it was needed for parnassah.

The rectification is to follow the Torah blindly, without trying to be smarter, without trying to come up with flimsy excuses. This is called accepting the yoke of heaven.

Shem MiShmuel (Shelach 5677) writes, "Temimus means... a person shouldn't follow his mind. He should be batel to Hashem's will. As the Jewish nation said by the Yam Suf, 'We have only the words of the son of Amram.'"⁶

Hope

The parashah begins with the words, ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא, And I davened to Hashem at that time."

The Baal HaTurim explains that Moshe was saying, חזקתי את ישראל אולי ירחם עלי, "I gave *chizuk* to Bnei Yisrael. Perhaps [in this merit] Hashem will have compassion on me [and answer my tefillos]." This refers to the pasukim that precede Parashas Va'eschanan. Moshe said (Devarim 3:21-22), עיניך הראת את כל אשר עשה ה' אלקיכם לשני המלכים האלה בן יעשה ה' לכל הממלכות אשר אתה עבר שמה, לא תיראום כי ה' אלקיכם הוא הנלחם לכם, "Your eyes have seen everything Hashem did to these two kings [Sichon and Og]; so will Hashem do to all the kings where you cross over [to Eretz Canaan]. Don't be afraid. Hashem shall wage war for you." Moshe encouraged and gave hope to the Jewish

nation, and in that merit, Moshe davened ואתחנן, that Hashem should have mercy on him and answer his tefillos.

Moshe Rabbeinu's merits are countless. He brought the Torah down to the Jewish nation, saved the nation many times with his tefillos, and led the nation out of Mitzrayim and through the desert for forty years. Who can compare to Moshe? Who can count his tefillos? Yet, he didn't ask Hashem to answer his prayers because of his merits. He requested that Hashem answer his tefillos in the merit of giving hope and *chizuk* to the Jewish nation.

Hope is inherent to mankind. No matter what people go through, they hope for a better future. Even during the darkest moments, there is always, at the very least, a flicker of hope in their hearts. This is undoubtedly Hashem's kindness because a person could have been created always expecting the worst.

Nevertheless, despite our tendency to think positively, we worry a lot. People are frightened, "What will happen if the future isn't better? What will happen if I don't find a *shidduch*/*parnassah*/health, etc.?" Therefore, it is a great mitzvah to encourage others and give them hope that the future will be good.⁷

6. Bnei Yissaschar (Derech Pikudeicha, Milah) teaches that it is difficult to understand the mitzvah of bris milah using common sense. As Turnusrufus asked Reb Akiva, "If the orlah is disgusting, why did Hashem create it?" But we keep the mitzvos with temimus, without asking questions, as it states about milah (Bereishis 17:1) וזהו תמים. We perform this mitzvah with temimus, despite that our minds don't understand it.

Bnei Yissaschar elaborates, "A person must perform Hashem's will without questioning Hashem. One should think, 'We are unable to perceive Hashem's wisdom... How can a simple mortal perceive Hashem's wisdom, which is so beyond us...? Avraham Avinu didn't have a teacher to teach him, so initially he followed the path of questions and answers, chakiros, until he came to the realization that there must be a Creator. Then Hashem revealed Himself to Avraham and said, 'I created the world. אני הוא בעל הבירה.' And then Hashem gave him the mitzvah of milah... to show that we can't understand the reasons for the mitzvos. A person's role is to keep the mitzvos... This approach will lead to the success of your neshamah... for Hashem knows what is good for our neshamos."

7. It states (Yeshayah 1:1) חזון ישעיהו בן אמוץ. The Rebbe of Zutchke zt'l said that חזון ישעיהו can be translated as "To see your salvation." The advice is בן אמוץ, be strong. Don't lose hope, and you will have your salvation. Therefore, it is a great mitzvah to help raise people's spirits and give them hope. In addition to the good feelings this generates, hope has the potential to lead them to their salvation.

One of the halachos of *arei miklat* is that there needs to be three *arei miklat* in עבר הירדן and three in Eretz Yisrael. The three in עבר הירדן only begin to function as *arei miklat* when the corresponding three in Eretz Yisrael are established (see Rashi, this week's parashah 4:41).

What is the reason for this halachah? Why can't the *arei miklat* in ever HaYarden function immediately? Why did they have to wait another fourteen years until the *arei miklat* were designated and arranged in Eretz Yisrael?

The Meshech Chachmah (*Masei*) explains that this is because we must always give people a glimmer of hope. If the three *arei miklat* in עבר הירדן functioned immediately, the people who lived there wouldn't have hope.

The explanation is as follows:

When someone kills by accident, he must go to *arei miklat*. These cities are like prisons; the killer goes there for atonement (and

protection). But he always has the hope to go free. He doesn't despair because he knows that when the *kohen gadol* dies, he will leave the *arei miklat* (see Bamidbar 35:25), and the *kohen gadol* can die any day.

The problem was that Elazar was the *kohen gadol*, and Hashem indicated that Elazar would live another fourteen years until the land of Eretz Yisrael was conquered and divided. (Hashem said that Elazar, the *kohen gadol*, will help divide the land [see Bamidbar 34:17]. This indicates that he will live at least until then.) So, if the three cities in Ever HaYarden were immediately active *arei miklat*, the murderers living there wouldn't have any hope for freedom for another fourteen years, and we can't allow people to live without hope of immediate freedom. Therefore, only after the land is conquered and divided, and three *arei miklat* are established in Eretz Yisrael, will the three in עבר הירדן begin to function.⁸

The Chofetz Chaim once said before a large crowd, "In our generation, anyone who has a mouth must use it to give *chizuk* to

8. Siforno (Bamidbar 35:25) writes, "There are several degrees of killing by accident. Sometimes, it was a complete accident, and there wasn't much that could have been done to prevent it. Other accidents involve an element of negligence. Therefore, the Torah didn't set an amount of time of exile for all murderers. Those who were only slightly guilty of the murder [will come to *arei miklat*] shortly before the *kohen gadol* dies, while others die in *arei miklat* before the *kohen gadol* dies. And this is just. Hashem knows the degree of punishment each individual deserves."

So, each person needs to spend a different amount of time in the *arei miklat* to attain his atonement, and through hashgachah pratis, each person gets exactly what he deserves. (See Meshech Chachmah, who elaborates on this idea.)

There were six primary *arei miklat* plus an additional forty-two cities that also served as cities of refuge.

The Ohev Yisrael writes, "This mitzvah also applies to our generation because the Torah is *nitzchis* (eternal) and therefore, on some level, must also apply to our times. It works as follows: If someone committed *aveiros* and has, in a sense, murdered his own soul, this is what he should do for his rectification: When he recites the first six words of Shema (שמע ישראל... אחד) he should accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven with love, *mesirus nefesh*, truth, and dedication. Those are his six cities of refuge (*arei miklat*). He should add another forty-two cities, which is the parashah of ואהבת, which contains forty-two words..."

Shema is the *arei miklat* of our generation, where one runs to for atonement.

This lesson is also alluded to in the following Gemara (*Brachos* 5): "One should always battle with the *yetzer hara*. If he succeeds, all is well. If not, he should learn Torah... If he succeeds, it is good. If he fails [and the *yetzer hara* is still overcoming him], he should read Shema. If this also doesn't work, he should remind himself of the day of death." For *kriyas Shema* is a place of refuge, where we can be protected from the *yetzer hara*.

others." In the Chofetz Chaim's generation, many people began being lenient with Shabbos observance, family purity, etc. The Chofetz Chaim encouraged everyone to give drashos and to rouse people to teshuvah.

Once, when the Chofetz Chaim finished teaching this point in his drashah, he stepped off the podium and heard people saying, "The Chofetz Chaim is a tzaddik. He can rouse people to *teshuvah* with his drashos, but what can we do?" The Chofetz Chaim overheard them and immediately returned to the podium to add this essential *mashal*:

There was a *poritz* who drank solely purified, filtered water. Once, someone brought him regular water to drink. After taking a sip, he immediately spit out the water. "Why did you bring me dirty water? When you bring me water, it must be purified first."

Sometime later, there was a fire in the *poritz*'s home. The *poritz* shouted for help, but it took a long time before people came with water to put out the fire.

"What took you so long?" the *poritz* complained. "By the time you came with buckets of water, half my home burned down!"

"You told us to purify the water first," the servants explained. "We purified the water and came as quickly as possible."

The *poritz* said, "When there is a fire, any water will do."

The Chofetz Chaim said, "The same is with delivering speeches in our generation. There were generations when one needed to be a tzaddik before speaking in public. But

now, a fire is raging. Whoever can speak must do so."

To a large extent, today, *chizuk* of a different nature is needed. In our generation, people need to hear a good word. It isn't rebuke that people need to hear. They need to hear that Hashem loves them, that they can succeed in *avodas* Hashem, that they are doing good, etc. One doesn't need to be a great tzaddik to do this. Every person must use the talents Hashem gave him to help their fellow man.⁹

There is a prohibition for a descendant of Amon and Moav to marry into Bnei Yisroel (see *Devarim* 23:4-7). The reason is *על דבר אשר לא קדמו* ...אתכם בלחם ובמים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים... It is because they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Mitzrayim..." The Chinuch explains that they have terrible character traits and no sense of basic decency and kindness. Such people shouldn't marry into the Jewish nation.

The Beis Yosef (דרישות מהריק"א), printed in *Or Tzaddikim*) teaches, "We can say that *על דבר* means 'for the words.' They are punished because they didn't share kind, encouraging words." He explains that the Yidden didn't need bread or water because the manna fell every morning, and they drank the water of Miriam's well. The main problem of Amon and Moav is *על דבר*; they didn't share kind, encouraging words with the Jewish nation.

Amon and Moav were goyim. Who needed their praise and admiration? Who needed their encouragement? Nevertheless, apparently, we needed it. Their kind words would have helped us. Amon and Moav were punished severely because they

9. Reb Mordechai Chaim Slonim *zt'l* once waited his turn to use a tiny *mikvah* in Teveria. The town's fool was present. He announced, "Rabboisai! The holy Rebbe is here! Make room so the Rebbe can *toivel*!"

Later that day, Reb Mordechai Chaim said, "Everyone knows that this man is the town's fool, and the *mikvah* isn't the ideal place for bestowing honor on others. Yet, when he honored me, it warmed my heart. Hakadosh Baruch Hu placed into the fabric of creation that people enjoy honor, regardless of who is bestowing the honor, and therefore, we should seek to honor others."

refrained from providing this benefit to Bnei Yisrael.

It states (*Yeshayah* 1:27), וְשִׁבְיָהּ בְּדַקָּהּ, the *galus* will be redeemed, and the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt in the merit of tzedakah. However, some people cannot give much tzedakah. How can they contribute towards

building the Beis HaMikdash? The Chofetz Chaim (*Shemiras HaLashon* vol.2 ch.7) answer that they should say kind, encouraging words to the poor and those who suffer. The Me'il Tzedakah calls it "A tzedakah that doesn't cost money." These kind words are also a form of tzedakah that builds the Beis HaMikdash.¹⁰

10. A wealthy person visiting Eretz Yisrael handed his relative a thick wad of one-hundred-dollar bills, instructing him to distribute the money to the tzedakah of his choice.

The relative wasn't sure where to give the money, so he discussed it with one of the *gedolei hador zt'l*. The *gadol* advised, "Hire *yungerleit* to give *chizuk* and smile at *bachurim*."

This isn't a joke. So many people wait for someone to show them respect, smile, and listen to them. Fortunate are those who occupy themselves with this great deed. It isn't hard to find opportunities to perform this mitzvah. In every beis medresh, school, and neighborhood, people are hungry to hear a kind word. They are waiting for someone to smile at them and spend a minute with them. Fortunate are those who fill this great need.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* said, "Every *bachur* needs a spoonful of *kavod* daily."

Educators say that one reason children fall away from Yiddishkeit is that they lack a kind word. You can literally save neshamos by being kind to people. There is no limit to how much we can accomplish, and it requires little effort.

There was a boy who drifted away from Yiddishkeit, and his father paid good money to therapists and mentors to help direct his son back to the right path. Baruch Hashem, he returned. The father later asked the son, "Which dollar brought you back?" He meant, "I paid many people to help you. Which investment paid off and got you back?"

The *bachur* replied, "It wasn't your dollars that brought me back. A certain rav greeted me warmly and told me that Hashem loves me despite all my *aveiros*. He is the one who brought me back to Yiddishkeit!"

A rav once accidentally dialed the wrong number. He immediately realized his error but decided to let the call go because the number he dialed was of a member of his beis medresh who hadn't come to shul for some time. He decided that it was *min hashamayim* that he should speak to him and hear how he was doing.

When the man answered the phone, the rav said, "I just wanted to hear how you are." The man replied that he was in Italy at the time. He said he was contemplating committing a serious *aveirah*, but this phone call stopped him. The rav showed him that he was interested in and cared about him, preventing him from transgressing a severe *aveirah*.

Some years ago, the thirteen-year-old son of a very special *yungerman* began drifting off the *derech*. The father thought, "Why is this happening to me? We sent him to the best schools, ensuring he was around good friends. How is this happening to him?"

He reviewed his past and present deeds and remembered that as a *bachur*, he once spoke against the Vilna Gaon *zt'l*. Disgracing *talmidei chachamim* is a terrible *aveirah*. (At the time, he thought he would be a bigger chassid by speaking against this great tzaddik *r"l*.) He feared he was being punished for that *aveirah*.

He contacted Reb Mordechai Gross *shlita*, who goes to the Vilna Gaon's *kever* every Elul and asked him to be his *shaliach* to ask forgiveness. Reb Mordechai replied, "I was already in Vilna this Elul and won't be going there again this year. But I know someone who is in Vilna right now. I will send him to the Gaon's *kever* to ask forgiveness on your behalf.

This *shaliach* went to the *kever* at 6:30 in the afternoon, precisely when the *bachur* began his return to

Your Students Are Your Children

It states in this week's parashah (6:7) וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבִנֶיךָ, "Teach Torah to your children."

Rashi writes that לְבִנֶיךָ refers to one's students. The obligation to teach Torah is to one's children and one's students. Tzaddikim say that the Torah calls students בְּנֵיךָ, "your children" to teach us that a Rebbe must consider his students like his own children. He should love his students like he loves his own children. He should desire their successes as he desires the successes of his own children.

Chazal (Sanhedrin 19:) say, "Whoever teaches Torah to his fellow man's son, the Torah gives him credit as if he gave birth to him." This is another source for considering his students as his own children. When educators consider this, they will invest in the success of all their students.

The Brisker Rav zt'l said that, generally, a Rebbe is interested in the good students, those who understand what he is teaching. He doesn't have much patience for the students who are less successful in their studies. Therefore, Chazal say וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבִנֶיךָ אֵלּוּ, התלמידים, that a person should consider each of his students as though they were his only child. This will make him interested in

advancing the growth of the weaker students and helping them so that they, too, should grow in Torah.

Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l, the Rav of Yerushalayim, said: When a person enters a shoemaker's store, he treads on the leather skins lying on the floor. (The shoemaker placed them there, so people would walk on it and work out the leather.) And when one enters a carpentry, he treads on the leftover scraps of wood lying on the floor. And when one enters a cheder, he might tread on holy neshamos! A Rebbe must be very cautious!¹¹

A Rebbe should consider the cheder to be a goldsmith's workplace. He wouldn't tread on gold. There are no scraps of gold on the floor. Similarly, he should consider his students holy neshamos, being extremely cautious not to tread on them.

The Riyatz (Igros Kodesh vol.3 p.309-310) writes, "When it was time for the Alter Rebbe, the Baal HaTanya, to bring his son (the 'Mittele Rebbe') to a melamed, he chose one of the students of the Magid of Mezritch to be the melamed. He told him... 'Before you begin teaching a student, think and realize that you are working with דֵּינֵי נַפְשוֹת, the lives of the students. The spiritual life of the student, which is so much more important than life

Yiddishkeit. At that time, the *bachur* was sitting on a bus, dressed in jeans, with long gelled hair. He appeared very distant from the yeshiva bachur he once was.

A friend of this *bachur* was also on the bus and was shocked by his appearance. He said, "I can understand that it is hard for you to study Torah all day, but why do you need long hair, and why do you need to dress this way? You won't gain anything from it. You are acting foolishly."

Generally, it is risky to rebuke this way, but this time, the sharp words entered the *bachur*'s heart. When he came home, he told his father he wanted to wear a *talis katan* again and asked for a haircut.

This story teaches us the power of words. Years ago, someone spoke against one of the greatest gedolim, and he was punished severely. Words of rebuke caused the *bachur* to do *teshuvah*.

An even safer approach would be using words of encouragement and caring. Such words accomplish so much!

11. Once, Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l had to remove a melamed from his position. The melamed asked, "What will I eat?" Reb Yosef Chaim replied, "Is it better to eat children?" In other words, he needed a job to support his family, but since he wasn't suitable for the job, keeping him would be an injustice to the children.

and death in this world, are in your hands. If you do your job correctly and truthfully, you will merit all the good deeds of these children and the children that will be born from them forever. And, the opposite is also true. Know, that everything is in man's hands. When a person puts his heart and soul into it, Hashem will help him establish good students. Your portion will be with those who are מזכה הרבים, and you will merit the good light."¹²

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil zt'l said, "All melamdim have to know that they are doing *mileches hakodesh*, holy work." He added that he isn't referring solely to the melamdim who teach Gemara to older children. Also the melamdim who teach young children, like the Rebbes in kindergarten, they are doing avodas hakodesh, a very sacred mission. The same applies to the teachers in girl schools. All educators, for younger and older girls, must know they are performing a great and holy mission. It is *mileches hakodesh*.

It states (Bamidbar 27:18) ויאמר ה' אל משה קח לך את יהושע בן נון איש אשר רוח בו Moshe, "Take to yourself Yehoshua bin Nun..." Yehoshua was taken and chosen to serve as the leader of Bnei Yisrael after Moshe's demise. He was taken with words. Rashi writes, "Take him with words. [Tell him] 'Ashrecha, you are fortunate that you have the merit to lead Hashem's children.'"

Rebbe Shlomke said that a bas kol says these words to every melamed-אשריך, you are fortunate, because you do the holy

service to guide and to teach Hashem's children. And there are some teachers who receive this message twice every day!¹³ The bas kol is heard in their hearts. They are encouraged, because they are performing this exalted service.¹⁴

Love Your Children

The word קשורה, bound, is written twice in Tanach (as the Baal HaTurim on Bereishis 44:30) points out to us. Once is when it says (Bereishis ibid.) ונפשו קשורה בנפשו, "His soul is so bound up with his soul," referring to Yaakov Avinu's love for Binyamin. And it states (Mishlei 22:15) אולת קשורה בלב נער, 'Foolishness is bound in the heat of youth.' There is a connection between these two pasukim. The Baal HaTurim writes, מפני שאולתו קשורה בו צריך שתהא נפשו קשורה, בנפשו של אביו לחנוכו, "Since foolishness is bound in the heart [of youths], it needs to be that the father love his son immensely so that he can educate him."

Chazal (Brachos 59:) say, "Thunder was created to straighten out the crookedness of the heart." Thunder is like rebuke that straightens out a person's heart. But before the rebuke, there needs to be love. The parent must show how much he loves the child. This is hinted at by the lightning's bright light before the thunder. The light of lightning represents the light of the parent's face, הארת פנים. You must first show your children that you love them, and then you can rebuke them.

¹². The same applies to the education of one's own children. It is דיני נפשות, dealing with neshamos, so one must be careful. And if one does his mission well, he will have the great merit of מזכי הרבים, of bringing spiritual good to others.

¹³. Who can say they understand the holy words of tzaddikim? But it could be that Rebbe Shlomke intended that a rebbe and educator who needs more encouragement receive the message from Above twice daily. In their hearts, they hear the bas kol saying to them, "You are fortunate to have been chosen to lead Hashem's children."

¹⁴. We add that this bas kol doesn't only go to the rebbes and educators. It goes to every father and mother. They hear in their minds and hearts a bas kol, telling them they are fortunate to be entrusted with the sacred mission of raising children.

A rebuke is found in parashas Shemini (Vayikra 10:17), when Moshe rebuked Aharon for not eating the korban chatas. He said, מדוע לא אכלתם את החטאת במקום הקדוש, "Why didn't you eat the chatas....?" Take the first letters of these words. They spell מלא אהבה, full of love. This is because you first need to show someone you love him, and only then can you effectively deliver rebuke.

The elderly Reb Dov Yaffe zt'l (mashgiach of yeshiva Kfar Chasidim) was once hospitalized. The doctor wanted to prescribe a particular medication, but first, he asked Reb Dov Yaffe for a list of all his medications and whether he has an allergy to a certain medicine. Reb Dov Yaffe asked the doctor, "Why is it important to know all my medications? If you want to give me another medication, just give me a prescription."

The doctor explained that there are medications that clash with one another. One medicine might weaken the power of another medicine, and they might even be very dangerous to take both at the same time. When the doctor left the room, Reb Dov Yaffe said, "Did you hear how careful one must be before prescribing medication? We can say that the same is true when one wants to give mussar to rebuke someone. First one must know the person's situation well, precisely what he is going through, both in his *ruchniyus* and in the physical and social realm. All this information is necessary so the mussar he delivers will help and not cause any harm, *chalilah*."

One certainly won't accomplish anything if he rebukes his children or students with anger. It states (Vayikra 21:1) ויאמר ה' אל משה אמור אל הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אליהם this pasuk is speaking to the adult kohanim,

telling them that they must teach the young kohanim to be cautious with the halachos of kehunah. Reb Moshe Feinstein zt'l (Darash Moshe) asks why it doesn't state וידבר ה', which is the more common expression used in the Torah (see Makos 11.). The answer is the pasuk is discussing chinuch, and a great rule in chinuch is that one accomplishes more when he speaks with soft words. וידבר represents harsh words, but chinuch has to be with אמירה רכה, soft words.¹⁵

Teach Your Children When They Are Young

It states (Yeshayah 27:6) הבאים ישרש יעקב יציץ ופרח, "Days are coming when Yaakov will take root, Yisrael will bud and blossom..."

The pasuk is hinting to a lesson in chinuch. הבאים, When a new child comes to the world, ישרש יעקב, he immediately has an association with his ancestor, Yaakov Avinu. He is a descendant of the Avos and part of the Jewish nation. ישרש יעקב, implant this emunah into your children. Let them know that they are descendants of the holy Avos and have the great privilege to serve Hashem. Teach it to them when they are young. If you do so, יציץ ופרח, your child will grow and reach high levels, ישראל, he will reach the high level of Yisrael. But if you don't teach this when the child is young, it is harder to implant these truths later in life.

It states (Tehillim 127:4) כחיצים ביד גבור כן בני הנעורים, "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of the youth."

When one wants to shoot an arrow, if the arrow is in his hand, he can direct it. But after the arrow has left his hand, he can't return it. The same is true with children. As

15. When there is only one supermarket in town, the owner isn't afraid to shout at his customers. He knows that his customers will return no matter how he treats them, as they have nowhere else to shop. But if a second supermarket opens, the storeowner will be very careful to speak kindly to his customers.

The lesson is about the importance of speaking kindly with children. We live in a world where there is competition. If a child feels unloved, he has other places to go, where he thinks he will feel loved (real or imaginary). Therefore, parents and educators must be cautious.

long as they are young, you can direct them, but after they become older, it is much harder.

We can also explain that the pasuk alludes to our previous lesson, that parents should love their children, and then it will be easier to lead them on the right path. When one shoots an arrow at a target, his success in hitting the target depends on how close he is to the target. Children are the same. If you want to direct children on the right path, your success depends on how close you are to the children. *בן בני הנעורים*, the same is with youth. If you are close to them and bestow your love and warmth onto them, it will be easier to direct them on the right path. But if you are distant from them, it is much harder.

There are six primary arei miklat. Three in Eretz Yisrael proper and three on the other side of the Yarden. In this week's parashah, Moshe Rabbeinu prepared the six in *עבר הירדן*, on the other side of the Yarden. As it states (4:41-42) *אז יבדיל משה שלש ערים בעבר הירדן מזרחה שמש לנוס שמה רוצח אשר ירצה את רעהו בבלי דעת*, "Then Moshe set aside three cities on the bank of the Yarden, toward the rising sun, for a killer to flee there, who will have killed his fellow without knowledge." Rashi

explains that they won't function until the three in Eretz Yisrael are established. Nevertheless, Moshe said, "A mitzvah that has come to my hands, I will perform it."

The Gemara asks that the division –three arei miklat in Eretz Yisrael and three in *עבר הירדן* – seems disproportionate. Most of Bnei Yisrael lived in Eretz Yisrael proper, whereas in *עבר הירדן*, there were just two-and-a-half tribes (Reuven, Gad, and half of Menasheh). Yet, they both had the same number of arei miklat!

The Gemara replies, "In Gilad (on the other side of the Yarden), there were many murderers." Therefore, three arei miklat were needed in *עבר הירדן*. Following the path of mussar, we can explain that there were more murderers from *עבר הירדן* because their fathers weren't home to educate them. For fourteen years, the fathers were in Eretz Yisrael proper to help conquer the land from the Canaanites and then help divide the portions. All this time, they weren't with their children. So, it shouldn't surprise us that the children didn't have the best chinuch. (Obviously, we aren't judging that generation, which we don't have the slightest understanding of their holiness and kedushah. Nevertheless, we learn from this that parents must pay attention to their children to know where they spend their time, who their friends are, and so on.)