

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARASHAT BEHAALOTCHA

When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah, shall the seven lamps cast light. (8:2)

Horav Yehudah Tzedakah, zl, applies this pasuk homiletically as a lesson for parents, exhorting them to provide a genuine and proper Torah education for their children. Children are the neiros, candles, of the parents. If parents want to ensure that the "lamps" are kindled properly, that the flame will "rise up" and not flicker, then they should light them "towards the face of the Menorah." They should send their children to schools and yeshivos in which they will receive a proper Jewish education. Only then will their flame burn brightly in order to illuminate the spiritual and moral darkness that prevails around them. Indeed, the purpose of every Jewish parent is to see to it that the Torah of our People is transmitted to the next generation. As David Hamelech says in Tehillim 78:1-6, "Listen, my people, to my teaching. Incline your ear to the words of my mouth... That which we have heard and know and our fathers have told us, we shall not withhold from the sons, recounting unto the final generation the praises of Hashem. He established testimony in Yaakov and set down a Torah in Yisrael which He commanded our fathers make known to their sons, so that the final generation may know; children yet to be born will arise and tell their own children."

These pesukim define the Jew's obligation in this world: "So that the final generation may know." Jewish education is our responsibility. We must see to it that the chain that began at Har Sinai is not severed, and that every ensuing generation forges another link in that glorious chain until the "last generation." Every father must execute his responsibility to educate his children according to the derech Yisrael saba, accepted manner that has been approved throughout the generations, going back to Yaakov Avinu. The pasuk reiterates the words, dor ha'acharon, final generation. Why? Is there a special obligation to study Torah during the final generation? Is this the only generation during which there is an obligation to study Torah?

Apparently, through Divine Inspiration, the Navi perceived that this phenomenon would occur only in the End of Days, in the dor acharon. Parents will forcibly deny their children the opportunity to study Torah properly, in an environment which is conducive to spiritual ascension. Yes, we have been plagued with reshaim, wicked people. For the most part, these are errant Jews who have become distant from Torah, primarily due to their own lack of erudition and the many insecurities that result from living under anti-Semitic regimes. This distance, however, seems only to exist vis-?-vis their personal relationship with Hashem. They have no qualms about according their children a Torah education. Furthermore, they would be pleased for their sons to grow up to be Torah scholars and leaders.

It is this dor acharon that have been confronted with a totally new hashkafah, philosophical perspective, in which parents select an educational facility for their children that is not rated for its Torah educational process, but rather for its state-of-the-art adaptation to contemporary society's moral and academic code. Jewish education is no longer a mandatory option. Children are growing up devoid

of Yiddishkeit, bereft of Torah, and completely lacking in the ethical and moral standards that set the Torah Jew apart from the rest of the world. These are the products of the dor acharon mentality. This is what the Navi foreshadowed in his penetrating message of caution. We who are living in this dor acharon should respond to his plea.

Nor shall they break a bone of it. (9:12)

The Korban Pesach must be eaten in a manner that bespeaks royalty. Only those people who are literally on a lower echelon, who lack sophistication and breeding, eat ravenously, thus breaking the bones of the meat. One who feels and sees himself as a ben-melech, prince, demonstrates refinement in the way he eats. Klal Yisrael are to act on Pesach exactly the way they should feel: as free men, as princes who have all the time in the world to eat the food placed before them with enjoyment. Does this attitude apply only to Pesach? What about the rest of the year?

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates that he once had occasion to be in Yeshivas Ponevez shortly after Pesach, and he heard the following from the Rosh Hayeshivah, Horav Dovid Povarsky, zl: "The Festival of Pesach has passed. Nonetheless, there is something that we can, and should, take with us into the summer months and beyond, into the rest of the year. The mitzvah, 'Nor shall they break a bone of it,' is a mitzvah that should be part of our lives during the entire year. We should learn to live with dignity and refinement - not like dogs that break bones when they eat."

The Sefer Hachinuch explains that Klal Yisrael is a nation of monarchs. It is, therefore, wrong for them to act in an undignified manner, appropriate for people of a lesser status. The Rosh Hayeshivah reiterated that whereas the actual mitzvah applied solely to the Korban Pesach and only during the period in which the Bais Hamikdash functioned as a part of our lives, the reason behind it applies constantly. Accordingly, we are mandated to act in a manner becoming royalty - because that is exactly what we are.

The essence of this mitzvah is that a person should not degrade his sense of royalty. This concept is timeless and particularly noteworthy in our day and age when society venerates those acting without dignity and without refinement, when being uncivilized and acting uncouthly are considered to be marks of distinction and serve as a badge of honor, especially among the younger generation. Civility and class are considered traits for the senior citizen crowd, traits which are not consistent with a contemporary lifestyle.

We are different. We must act like royalty, because as Klal Yisrael, we are the "kingdom of Priests and a holy nation." The way we speak, walk, act, and eat - in fact, every aspect of our daily endeavor- should reflect our exalted position. If we are to be respected, particularly in a world which has no concept of respect, we must first manifest self-respect. This can occur only when we act in a manner becoming our princely status. In this way, we give respect not only to ourselves, but simultaneously to Hashem.

Reflecting upon his position vis-?-vis the world community is critical, but possible only after the individual personally recognizes who and what he is. One must be cognizant of his unlimited potential and acknowledge it. There is a fine line, however, between kavod haTorah, the honor one gives the Torah, and elitism. One who has studied Torah and achieved erudition is transformed into a Sefer Torah. The respect must be reciprocal: we must respect the ben Torah; and he must maintain himself respectably commensurate with his position.

In his book, "A Touch of Warmth," Rabbi Yechiel Spero writes about a trip Horav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, zl, the venerable Rosh Hayeshivah of Ner Israel, took to Eretz Yisrael and his reaction to it. Upon his return to the States, he was asked to identify the pinnacle of his trip. What was his most inspiring experience? He responded, "I was zocheh, privileged, to purchase a mantel for a Sefer Torah." When his students heard this, they were a bit taken aback. Certainly, this is a wonderful accomplishment, but one does not have to travel to Eretz Yisrael to make such a purchase.

The Rosh Hayeshivah then explained that he had met a young Torah scholar who exemplified gadlus baTorah, greatness in Torah, in a manner unlike anything he had ever witnessed. This young man's encyclopedic knowledge of all aspects of Torah literature was unparalleled. During their conversation, Rav Ruderman noticed that the young man's kapota, long frock, was worn out and tattered. When Rav Ruderman offered to buy him a new one, he just shrugged and responded that he could live without it. The Rosh Hayeshivah persisted until the young scholar relented: "Finally he agreed, and I had the z'chus to purchase a kapota for him. This is what I meant when I said that I purchased a mantel for a Sefer Torah - for a lebedike, live, Sefer Torah."

As great as Rav Ruderman was, he recognized the importance of kavod haTorah. Thus, he set the standard for others to emulate. There is no difference between the Sefer Torah in the Aron Hakodesh and the thousands of walking Sifrei Torah. Furthermore, every child has this potential to become a Sefer Torah. Incidentally, the young talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who was the beneficiary of a new kapota was none other than Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita!

While the above mentioned episode demonstrates the attitude of a distinguished rosh yeshivah towards a ben Torah, as well as his depth of understanding concerning the parameter of kavod haTorah, it also conveys an important message to anyone who is studying Torah. You are a Sefer Torah in the making! As such, you have a moral responsibility to conduct yourself with rectitude consistent with your exalted status. One who studies Torah becomes integrated with the Torah, thereby changing his own status. The demand of taking the mitzvah, "Nor shall they break a bone of it," extends further beyond the "princely" to the Sefer Torah status. When we realize who we are, we will act in a manner becoming that position.

Moshe said to Chovav son of Reuel, the Midyanite, the father-in-law of Moshe. (10:29)

Rashi teaches us that Yisro had many names. He was called Chovav, which means "lover," because he loved the Torah. The word commonly used to describe love for the Torah is ahavah, as in ahavas Torah. What is its connection to chibah, which also means "to love"? Additionally, if they are one and the same, why do we not refer to love for Torah as chibas Torah? After perusing the various definitions and explanations of these two synonyms, the following definition surfaces. Chibah is to love and hold in great esteem, indicative of a reciprocal relationship. Thus, chibah is the precursor to ahavah, whereby one loves Torah with utter devotion since he has developed an understanding of it and now holds it in great esteem. In any case, loving the Torah is an integral part of learning Torah.

In our morning tefillah, we entreat Hashem that we achieve success in Torah study. We preface the prayer with an acknowledgement of Hashem's great love (Ahavah rabbah), His exceptional mercy (chemlah gedolah), and His boundless compassion (Av HaRachaman). We add to this a supplication for grain (kein techaneinu). Indeed, in the Shemoneh Esrei for Torah knowledge, we recognize once again that it is a matnas chinam, gift from Hashem (Atah chonein). Why is it necessary to be the beneficiary

of such great compassion, mercy and grace in order to acquire Torah?

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains that we first must understand the nature of Torah in order to appreciate it and only then can we develop a deep love for it. First, Torah is not a possession which one can acquire with money, nor can one acquire it through his deeds or actions. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that even though Moshe Rabbeinu spent forty days and nights on Har Sinai, he forgot every bit of Torah that he learned from Hashem! Only after Hashem granted him the Torah as a gift was he able to retain its knowledge. Indeed, concerning Torah, Hashem says, "When one acquires it (the Torah) he acquires Me with it." Hashem is included in the acquisition. Torah is not a simple compendium of knowledge. It is Divine - Divinely authored and Divinely granted to us. Therefore, in order to acquire such a unique gift, one must develop an awesome sense of love between the Giver and the beneficiary. It must be a boundless love, unconstrained by embellishment or conditions. Otherwise, we could never receive the Torah, for Hashem's love for us would be predicated on a middah k'neged middah, measure for measure, basis and we would never be worthy of it.

Rav Pincus explains this with an analogy. If we were to notice an individual writing with an exquisite pen, we would first question where he had bought it. Likewise, when we see someone with a new car, or any new item for that matter, we question where it had been purchased. Not so, if we see someone sporting a ten-carat diamond ring. In that case, we query, "Who gave it to you?" because one does not purchase jewelry of that size and expense for oneself. He receives it as a gift. The Torah is much the same. It is not something that one can purchase, because there is no way he would be able to pay for it. It must be a gift to us from Hashem.

Now that we have established that Torah is a gift from a loving Father to His son, it goes without saying that such a gift is granted only to someone whom He loves. This can be compared to a child who jumps up to kiss his father. This spontaneous expression of love stimulates a reciprocal feeling of love which the father concretizes with a special gift for his child. Clearly, this gift is not in exchange for the kiss. The kiss catalyzes the father to shower his son with a love that already exists within him. The act of giving is not an exchange. It is an expression of love which has been present and had only to be aroused. On the other hand, if there had not been an instigation on the part of the son, the father would not have given the gift. There would still be the love - just no free gift.

Rav Shimshon adds that there is no such thing as one-sided love. In its natural state, love is a relationship, a bond that exists between two people. This love is expressed when one side nurtures it through his own expression of love. Therefore, if we wish to see Hashem's overt expression of love for us, we must initiate it through our own act of love. When we study Torah with enthusiasm, we stimulate the process through which Hashem will reciprocate His love, granting us His most prized possession: the Torah. The actual gift is a matnas chinam, free gift, which is a product of his demonstration of love for Hashem, through the study of His Torah.

We now return to our original definition of ahavah: love and devotion. True love for Hashem, ahavah rabbah, means that one is wholly devoted to Him - 24/7. His entire life revolves around Hashem, nothing else matters, but Hashem. Rav Shimshon relates that, as a young boy, he saw a fire in one of the apartment buildings near his home in New York. He watched as the firefighters came flying down the street, rushing to extinguish the blaze. He stood there, enthralled as the hook and ladder truck pulled up and raised the ladder, and the firemen began running up its steps. As he stood there watching the scene that was unfolding before his eyes, his uncle, Horav Noach Weinberg, Shlita, walked by and said, "Shimshi, they say you are a masmid, very diligent in your studies. What could interest you here?" One who loves Hashem has nothing else on his mind.

This type of relationship with Hashem and His Torah signifies a gadol, Torah leader. Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl, was well-known for his outstanding ahavas Torah. Among his notebooks in which he kept a diary of his daily endeavors, he records that he would review seventy blatt, pages, of Talmud every week. His brilliance, coupled with his assiduity, allowed him to gain an encyclopedic knowledge of all areas of Torah in order to become the gaon that he was. While he maintained an ongoing relationship with many Torah luminaries, his stellar relationship with his brother-in-law, Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl, the gaon in halachah, was truly extraordinary. Living next door to each other, these two Torah giants would spend hours daily engrossed in Torah dialectic.

One night, snow was falling in Yerushalyim, and the damp cold coursed through one's bones. As the last of the masmidim left the bais medrash, one noticed that two individuals were outside in the street - at 2:00 a.m. - and, they were dancing! Rav Shalom and Rav Shlomo Zalman were dancing together in the cold night as the snow kept falling on them. They were impervious to the cold, to the late hour, to the falling snow. They were expressing their love for the Torah!

It had all begun a short while earlier, when Rav Shalom came knocking on Rav Shlomo Zalman's door. At first, the members of the family thought the noise must be coming from the falling snow pelting the roof. When they looked through the frozen window, they saw that it was none other than Rav Shalom. "Shlomo Zalman, open the door!" they heard.

Rav Shlomo Zalman, who had already retired for the evening, quickly rose from his bed to respond to his brother-in-law. Rav Shalom stood there with fiery enthusiasm, bursting to speak. "I have just formulated an incredible svara, logical application, concerning the sugya, topic, that we were studying, and you must hear it!" he blurted out. Rather than speak in the house where it would certainly keep whoever was trying to sleep from doing so, they went outside in the cold, damp and snowy night to speak in learning. After discussing the entire application for over one hour, Rav Shalom said, "Nu! Now it is time to dance in honor of the svara!" The two began to dance - and dance, as the snow fell on them. They did not have a care in the world, for they were inextricably bound with the Torah. This is truly ahavas Torah!

When the Ark would journey, Moshe said, "Arise Hashem, and let Your foes be scattered, let those who hate You flee from before You. (10:35)

The pasuk above, and the one following, it are separated from the rest of the Torah by means of inverted letter nuns before and after them, which separate them from the rest of the narrative. The reason for this is that these pesukim really belong in Parashas Bamidbar, which relates the tribal formations and the Degalim, Banners, of each tribe. The passage was placed here, so that the Torah would not record these sins successively.

The second sin occurred when the Jews began complaining soon after they left Har Sinai. Defining the first sin seems to be an area of dispute between Rashi and Tosfos in their interpretation of a statement of Chazal in the Talmud Shabbos 116a. According to Rashi, the first sin occurred when they asked for meat. Tosfos disagrees, contending that the first sin happened when they left Har Sinai seemingly in a rush, "like a child running from school." Tosfos feels that the quest for meat was part of the sin of the misonenim, complainers. It was not an independent sin in its own right. Why does Rashi stipulate that the sin of asking for meat was exclusive of the sin of the complainer? It seems to have

been one more aspect of their complaining.

Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, explains that when Klal Yisrael left Har Sinai, their attitude changed. They left from a spiritually elevating atmosphere in which they had experienced Revelation only to enter into the great desolate wilderness. The sudden deterioration led to their quest for meat. This was a clear indication of their rapid downswing into the world of materialism. They no longer had an aspiration for the spiritual; their quest was not for the elevated and hallow, but for the material and shallow. Their sheifah, striving, had changed. They no longer yearned for spiritual excellence; rather, they pursued the mundane. This descent was in itself a sin. Digression is a sin, because it demonstrates a change in direction, a deviation from a forward, upward movement, to a backward, downward spiral.

A Jew should have a sheifah, ambition, an aspiration and a striving for a lofty goal, not a focus on when he will have his next portion of meat. A weakening of a Jew's sheifah is an indiscretion that is in itself sinful. This decrease in their level of ambition led them to find complaints. The word misonenim is defined by Rashi to be synonymous with the word alilah, libel. In other words, they needed nothing. They conjured a reason to complain. It was the result of a deviation from their original goals. When one loses sight of his goal; when his ambition begins to waiver, when his aspirations start faltering, he seeks an excuse to justify his behavior. He creates a libel, a scurrilous attempt to validate his indiscretion, to cover up his deviation. Rather than be on the defensive, he begins to complain, to project blame for his behavior. The best defense is a strong offensive. This is why they complained.

The Rosh Yeshivah explains that there are two stages in a person's decline: first, he interrupts his upward climb, his sheifah, aspiration, for spiritual growth; second, he begins to complain, to find fault, to lay blame, to create a libel in order to justify his desires.

Rashi feels that Klal Yisrael's level of learning at Har Sinai was exemplary. Their problem is attributed to a sudden interruption in their striving for excellence, their ambition to achieve gadlus, greatness. The two accompany one another. With Torah study, one needs to have a desire and an aspiration to know more, delve deeper, analyze further, to ascend the ladder of eminence in Torah. Tosfos, however, offers the opinion that their actual learning was deficient. Something was missing in the depth of their recognition of Hashem. Had they really been "into it," had their hakarah, recognition, of Hashem been on a more profound level, they could not have journeyed away from Har Sinai, like "a child running from school." Such behavior reflects a flawed attitude toward Torah study. It shows that they considered it a heavy yoke - not something that they valued and held dear to their hearts. When one cares about something, he savors it. He does not try to avoid it.

We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. (11:5)

Klal Yisrael had been liberated after hundreds of years of bitter enslavement to their Egyptian oppressors. It was not simply back-breaking work. The Egyptians played mind games with the Jews, attempting to break them both physically and mentally. Chazal explain that after each Jew had put in a full day's work in the field, he would go home and then the Egyptian taskmaster would have him serve him by making him carry out simple, menial chores around the house. The Jew was not allowed a moment's rest. Women were forced to perform labor that was traditionally considered "men's work," and men were forced to do "women's work." The labor was only one aspect of their misery. They had to contend with the Egyptian decrees against their families. First, their midwives were instructed to kill

their sons. Then, all male babies were to be cast in the river. This, coupled with other decrees, certainly made Jewish life in Egypt disheartening.

The Jews called out to Hashem, and He listened. He heard their pain and misery and liberated them from the Egyptian bondage. They came to the wilderness amidst a multitude of spectacular miracles. They were protected by the Pillars of Cloud, which protected them from any danger that they might confront. Finally, they had it made - or so one might think. Everything seemed perfect - or so it seemed. Yet, the Jewish People found reason to complain. First it was the eirev ray, mixed multitude, who instigated the complaint about a lack of meat. If this were not bad enough, they had the insolence to declare, "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge." The Ramban notes that Jewish People, not just the mixed multitude, articulated the complaint about the "free fish" that they had in Egypt. They wanted what they had in Egypt. This is absolutely ludicrous! We know what they had in Egypt. It was misery, pain and slave labor. Why would they want to return to that type of life? This is in addition to the fact that they had the manna through which they experienced every form of food. Their complaints made absolutely no sense.

Horav Chaim Vital, zl, expresses this question in stronger terms. How can a nation which is called the dor deiah, generation of knowledge, for their profound perception and understanding of the workings of Hashem ask for the "fish in Egypt"? This is a request that one would expect of fools. Why would a nation that already has access to everything degrade themselves for some "fish"?

In the Talmud Yoma 75b, Chazal say that the people sought to revoke the prohibition of forbidden relationships. They felt it was too much for them. The Sifri explains that it was not merely the Egyptian food that they missed. Their idea of "free of charge" was an allusion to freedom from mitzvos, freedom from obligations, freedom from responsibility. It was not the free fish that they sought. Food was aplenty in the desert, but it had a catch: mitzvos. That, they could do without. As the Maharal m'Prague writes, "We remember the fish that we had free of charge. This means free of mitzvos. We want fish without any strings attached. They sought chinam m'mitzvos. Why? It is not as if the Jews who had left Egypt had no idea what obligation and servitude meant. Compared to the travail and bondage that they suffered in Egypt, the yoke of mitzvos with its Divine obligations was light. After years of misery, why would a few mitzvos disturb them?

Man's nature is to be free, to seek freedom at every opportunity. Constriction and restraint of any kind stifle a human being and often cause him to rebel against his constraints. Acquiescing to another's domination over him is a challenging and often antagonistic experience. Horav Chananyah Malkah, Shlita, explains this further. A person's character, his essence, is comprised of two components. One is intrinsic, while the other is external. His physical being is his extrinsic component, while his nefesh, spirit, represents his inner being. The spirit is also subdivided into various components: the thought process; emotions; inner struggles, etc. One can subjugate another person's body, make him a slave, and dominate over him. He cannot, however, enslave his mind. The most powerful dictator can prevail over another's body, but he cannot control his mind. No one has the power to suppress another person's thoughts and feelings - unless the individual willingly grants that power to his subjugation.

Thus, when the Jewish People were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, only their bodies belonged to Pharaoh. He controlled their physical movements, but he could not get into their minds, unless they allowed him to enter. The mind of the Jew, his ability to think what he wanted to think, to feel how he wanted to feel, to love, to hate, to experience any form of emotion, was all his. The Egyptians could not take that freedom away from him. Indeed, we see it all of the time. People who are incarcerated for years only become prisoners when they relinquish their inner ability to think as free men. As long as

they retain their pride and self-esteem, they are not prisoners. Their bodies are incarcerated, but their spirit is free.

That is all acceptable in the secular world. In the world of Judaism, Hashem demands complete dominance over every aspect of the Jewish psyche: physical, spiritual, and emotional. The Jew is obligated to serve Hashem with all of his faculties- his body, as well as his mind. The Torah's mitzvos penetrate to the inner essence of a Jew, instructing him to love his fellow man and not to hate, not to covet, to think proper thoughts. In other words, our thoughts and emotions also belong to Hashem. That is what being Jewish is all about. One cannot just be a part time Jew, observing what he chooses and thinking what he wants. If one's thoughts are inappropriate, then his actions will eventually follow in iniquity.

We note in Parashas Mishpatim the case of an eved Ivri who expresses his desire to continue serving his master past the original six years of servitude. Why would one want to remain a slave? Chazal explain that the lifestyle of slaves is one of great abandon and dissoluteness. They are prone to licentious behavior because they are exposed to greater freedom. Physically he is a slave, but in matters of the spirit, his mind is free to wander.

Not so in the area of religion. The Torah addresses every area of man's physical and spiritual endeavor. We now understand why the Jews would rather have returned to the Egyptian slavery than live with the "freedom" of the wilderness. In Egypt, every day was free - free of mitzvos. True, their bodies belonged to the Egyptians, but their spirit belonged to them. Now, if they wanted to eat, they had to begin the process of first confirming its kashrus, then reciting a blessing. There were restrictions on how to eat, what to eat, when to eat, and where to eat. Too many restrictions! They wanted freedom - even if it meant being a slave!

Being observant is more than an obligation - it is a mindset. Regrettably, people often focus on the "do nots," the prohibitive commandments, without taking the time to realize that all of these prohibited mitzvos add up to a very positive and meaningful lifestyle. We must accentuate the positive. When we emphasize the positive way of life that Torah observance engenders, we will see that there are really no prohibitive mitzvos. Indeed, the "do nots" help us to "do." A mind that is "clean" and pure can think lofty thoughts. Yes, the Torah controls what we are to think about, but why put a clean beverage into a dirty cup? It is all part of positive reinforcement. Obedience to the Almighty is the harmony and integration of body and spirit towards one common positive objective: performing the will of Hashem. This is what it means to be a Jew.

Moshe heard the people crying in their family groups, each one at the entrance of his tent. (11:10)

A person should train himself to tolerate what Hashem sends him, regardless of its nature. Acceptance, justification and tolerance are all part of being Jewish. As the Chasam Sofer notes, however, this is only concerning the individual's personal life, his own problems and issues. When it comes to someone else's problems, one may not be tolerant. He must pray, help, and do everything within his power to assist another Jew in need. This is what troubled Moshe Rabbeinu when the Jews complained about their lack of meat. Had they complained about the "other" Jew's problems, his lack of meat, it might have been acceptable, even laudable, but these were people who were concerned with their own petty stomachs. It was their own hunger which they were trying to satisfy, not their friends'. This way is not the Jewish way. "Moshe heard the people crying." What were they crying about? Why

were they crying? "In their family groups." They were crying about themselves, their families, not for others. "Each one at the entrance of his tent." They cared only about their individual tent, their individual family. Such selfish weeping was not to be tolerated. It is not the Jewish way.

In the Talmud Kesubos 17a, Chazal teach that a person must do his utmost to understand the needs of others. Yet, for himself, a person should have as few needs as possible. He should shy away from honor, but see to it that others are honored. One should forego personal pleasure, trust that Hashem will provide for his material needs and not worry. One should try not to borrow, but should lend money freely. One should try never to accept charity, but should generously give as much charity as possible. In short, one should seek ways to improve the lot of others and not worry about himself.

We might think that the great acts of charity are performed by those who have an abundant supply of money, or that in order to "do something" one needs a large organization. We have only to study the background of every major chesed organization to note that they all began with an idea: someone noticed a need; someone had a plan; someone wanted to "do something." In other situations, it was a person who felt a personal sensitivity to a particular need and either in the course of helping himself, he helped countless others, or, he simply felt the responsibility to go beyond "weeping in front of their own tents" and decided to "do" something about it.

Stories abound about individuals in the Jewish -- as well as secular -- world who took the initiative and went beyond the "weeping" to the "doing." One that is very near to my heart is about a man who, because of his outstanding humility, will permit me to mention neither his name nor the city in which he lives, but those in the "know" are certainly aware of his wonderful acts of chesed, which I take the liberty of sharing with the reading audience. I do confess that I have an ulterior motive: I envy what he does. I feel that perhaps by inspiring others, I might share in this wonderful mitzvah.

Almost sixteen years ago, a New Yorker with an eye for chesed and a heart of gold was prompted to single-handedly establish a chesed organization which today goes by the name of Sheeris Ha'plate or Edible Leftovers, Inc. Attending a wedding, he noticed the caterers packing up the food after the chupah. Being inquisitive by nature, he asked, "What are you doing with all of that food?" The caterer replied, "Why? Do you want it?" Five words, that was all. It was those five words, however, that motivated our friend to establish a unique food g'mach, sometimes known as a free-loan association. He took the food home, where he repackaged it and discreetly dropped it off at the homes of people whom he knew were in dire need.

Soon he had set up an entire network of volunteers. They accumulated the food from simchah halls throughout the New York area, distinctively, often elegantly, repackaging the food to give to those whose families could use it. Alternatively, they delivered it to those who were making a simchah, but could not afford all of the food. Indeed, the leftovers from a simchah could supply about thirty families with a perfectly nourishing meal - a phenomenon that with today's poverty levels is unfortunately not an anomaly.

Our friend recently shared a letter that the organization received from a chassan, an orphan, who was the beneficiary of a sumptuous, lavish kiddush, benefit of this wonderful g'mach: "I did not have to feel like an orphan at my own aufruf (Shabbos before a young man marries). I was able to have a kiddush, reception, fit for a prince, just like my friends' parents make for them."

A few months ago, a distraught mother called the g'mach. She had a large family, consisting of seventy-five members, and the upcoming Shabbos was to be her son's Bar- Mitzvah. Her problem? She had no way to provide the food for the Bar mitzvah, because she simply had no money. Should her child be deprived? Could the g'mach help? The g'mach provided the woman with delicious meals, as

well as flower arrangements collected from a wedding hall the previous night.

Edible Leftovers Inc. collects food and flowers from approximately three hundred simchos each year. In addition, they collect the food after Pesach from New York area hotels and five hotels in Florida. The inspiration of one man, coupled with the dedication of many volunteers, ensures that some unfortunate parents will not have to tell their children, "Sorry, tonight this is all we have to eat," or, "I am sorry, but I cannot make a Bar-Mitzvah celebration for you." All of this occurs as a result of a few people going beyond "weeping by the door of their tents."

This message has been written as a public service for those people all over who just do not have. Perhaps we can help.

For they are given; they are given to Me from among Bnei Yisrael; instead of all that open the womb, the first-born of all Bnei Yisrael. (8:16)

Rashi notes from the repetition of the word nesunim, they are given, that Shevet Levi was to serve two functions: they had the task of carrying the Mishkan during the nations's travels; and they sang in the Sanctuary. Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, notes the distinctions between these two areas of service. One demanded physical exertion to lift and carry the heavy weight of the Mishkan along with its various appurtenances. It was not what we would consider to be a pleasant task. The other function, to sing and accompany the service in the Sanctuary, was truly an enjoyable task. Yet, these functions are paralleled by the Torah to indicate that they were both carried out in a similar manner. We must step back to analyze this. On the one hand, the Leviim performed a physically demanding task for the sole purpose of fulfilling a mitzvah. On the other hand, they also carried out a pleasant task for the sole purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah. This really sets a standard of performance that is both sublime and unique. It is one thing to focus in order to maintain a clear and simple perspective of a mitzvah while performing a difficult physical endeavor. It is entirely something else - and quite demanding - to maintain this same focus when personal benefit and pleasure are involved.

Rav Rogov cites the pasuk in Parashas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 12:4), which states that Avraham Avinu traveled to the land of Canaan, "just as Hashem commanded him." The Kesav Sofer notes that although the mission to go to Eretz Yisrael was l'tovascha u'luanaascha, "for your personal benefit and welfare," as stated by Rashi (12:1), nonetheless, the manner in which Avraham carried out the command was selfless, with total dedication and without any personal gain. Our Patriarch acted without any ulterior motive. He was committed to fulfilling the Divine Will - not to seeking personal gratification.

A mitzvah which contains a side benefit that includes personal pleasure or benefit is difficult to perform with pure motivation, solely for the sake of Heaven. We are human beings and, as such, we have desire, that, when satisfied, give us pleasure. It takes incredible devotion and commitment to be able to transcend these emotions in order to concentrate completely on the mitzvah. Indeed, Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, was wont to say, "It is a greater challenge to perform the mitzvah of eating on Erev Yom Kippur for the sole purpose of carrying out the mitzvah, than it is to actually fast on Yom Kippur." The reason for this is simple. Upon eating, one derives physical pleasure, an unintended benefit one must transcend in order to focus on the mitzvah itself. Fasting, however, has no side benefits.

When Avraham Avinu returned from the battle of the four kings against the five kings, he met

the king of Sodom, who offered him the spoils of the war. Avraham refused, declaring, (Bereishis 14:2) "I have lifted my hand in an oath to the G-d most high, Possessor of the Heaven and earth! Not a thread nor a shoelace! I will not take anything that is yours!" The Midrash comments that Avraham's expression, "not a thread," alludes to sacrificial offerings. As we learn in the Mishnah Meseches Middos 3:1, a thread of scarlet girded it (the Altar) around the middle. (This line separated between the upper and lower areas where the sprinkling of the blood would be placed for various offerings.) "Nor a shoelace," alludes to the feet of the (Festival) pilgrims, as it says in Shir HaShirim 7:2, "How beautiful are your steps in sandals."

Rav Rogov explains this Midrash along the same lines. When Avraham Avinu raised his hand in declaration to Hashem, he was asserting that he would sanctify his efforts to acquire within his soul the strength and fortitude to carry out his endeavors only for the sake of Heaven. His goal was to prevent any aspect of personal benefit from becoming a motivating factor of his efforts. The Midrash points this out with regard to his intent in two specific areas. Our Patriarch was acutely aware that there would be times in his descendants' history in which action would have to be taken in order to accomplish a mitzvah. He knew that this action would, at times, involve self-sacrifice. He realized that the blood of his children would be sacrificed on various altars throughout their tumultuous history, as torture and even death would be the consequences of defending our beliefs. These decisions would most certainly be made purely l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven.

Yet, Avraham also dedicated the annual pilgrimages that his descendants took to Yerushalayim for the Three Festivals. These festive times were accompanied by celebration, joy and camaraderie. Singing, dancing and all other forms of physical enhancements constitutes an important aspect of the travels to Yerushalayim. This set the stage for personal enjoyment, whereby people would benefit from the food, drink and good cheer. Nonetheless, Avraham proclaimed that even these experiences would be l'shem Shomayim. The nation would focus their intentions on the holy mission of rejoicing with Hashem. They would concentrate their efforts on Hashem alone - not on themselves.

*Aharon said to Moshe... "Do not cast a sin upon us, for we have been foolish and we have sinned."
(12:11)*

The parsha concludes with the incident of Miriam haNeviah speaking lashon hora about Moshe Rabbeinu. Upon discovering that Moshe had separated from Tziporah, his wife, Miriam told Aharon, and together they criticized their younger brother: "Was it only to Moshe that Hashem spoke? Did He not speak to us as well?" (12:2) They were unaware that Moshe's action was the result of Hashem's command, since Moshe had to be prepared to receive a Nevuah, prophecy, at any time. This possibility demands that a person be in a constant state of ritual purity, a status which is incompatible with normal family life. As Horav Avraham Pam, zl, suggests in the anthology of his ethical discourses on Chumash, Aharon and Miriam failed to realize that Moshe was different than they, that his relationship with Hashem superseded even their own. They thought they were like him. That was their first mistake.

Rav Pam cites the Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 7:6, who distinguishes between the level of Nevuah attained by Moshe and that attained by the other prophets. Moshe was wide-awake and standing when Hashem communicated with him. His prophecy emanated directly from Hashem, as a man speaks with his friend. Other prophets had a vision, fell into a trance, or were visited by an angel

who revealed the prophecy in the form of a mashal, analogy, or riddle, which the Navi was to interpret. All prophets had to prepare themselves spiritually for the moment of Nevuah, and, when it would occur, they were in a state of terror or dread. Moshe received his Nevuah at any time he wished, because he was always in a state of preparedness. This status compelled him to separate from his wife.

Realizing their error, Aharon cried out to Moshe, "Do not cast a sin upon us, for we have been foolish, and we have sinned." What was the gist of this sin? The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Aharon was acknowledging that their sin consisted of two errors. First, they erred by speaking lashon hora about Moshe. Second, they were guilty of imprudently comparing their level of prophecy to that of Moshe. Indeed, as Rav Pam points out, the infraction of lashon hora paled in comparison with their act of indiscretion in comparing themselves to Moshe.

It happens all of the time. We compare ourselves to rabbanim, roshei yeshivah, Torah scholars of note, all individuals who have spent their lives totally immersed in the sea of Torah. They are people who have perfected middos, character traits, and have devoted themselves selflessly to Hashem's Torah and the way of life it demands. Yet, we do not seem to distinguish between them and us. How often does someone who once studied in a yeshivah - and even received a certificate of rabbinical ordination - think that he has the right to paskin, render a halachic decision, as well as the rav who has spent his life absorbed in halachah?

If Aharon and Miriam, who were kedoshei elyon, holy people of a level above any average mortal, who were themselves Neviim, could err, what should we say? In addition, their minds and perspective were not clouded by arrogance.

Rav Pam cites two episodes that emphasize this idea. The Shaagas Arye was one of the towering spiritual giants of the 18th century. He was a brilliant scholar, whose book of responsa was a Torah classic. While he held a number of rabbinical positions, he is best known in his role as the rav of the city of Metz. While today's rabbis take a sabbatical, in those days a sabbatical was called "praven galus," whereby the rav would leave his position for a short time to endure a period of self-imposed exile. This was a method for perfecting their character traits, especially that of humility. Being with the common people, not being subject to accolades and honor, gave them the opportunity to get in touch with themselves. Their rabbinic garb was exchanged for peasant clothing, as they traveled to distant villages and towns where they were unknown. They would mingle with the poor and homeless, often sleeping on the floor in the back of a shul and sustaining themselves from the community soup kitchen, like the itinerant beggars. This was their way of divesting themselves of the prestige and honor that often accompanied their esteemed rabbinic position.

During one of his "galus trips," the Shaagas Arye had occasion to spend a few nights together with a melamed, Torah teacher, in a hayloft in the barn of a farmer. The melamed worked on the farm on two levels: he taught Torah to the farmer's children; and he helped the farmer with his chores. One morning shortly before dawn, the Shaagas Arye was awakened by the loud, resounding voice of the farmer, "Rebbe, get up and take the cows out to the pasture!" The young melamed jumped out of "bed" and ran to do the farmer's bidding. About an hour later, the farmer's voice once again broke the prevailing silence, "Rebbe, go feed the chickens!" Immediately, the melamed ran to carry out his master's command.

When the young man returned to the barn after completing his daily chores, he turned to the Shaagas Arye who was bent over engrossed in a Talmudic analysis, saying, "Du zest vi mir rabbanim darfen zich mutchen?" "Do you see how we rabbanim have to struggle?" He compared himself to the Shaagas Arye when he said, "we rabbanim," as if they were on a parallel plane. According to the Ohr

HaChaim, this was the error of Aharon and Miriam - comparing themselves and their level of prophecy to that of Moshe Rabbeinu. No one is denying their sublime spiritual stature. They were not, however, on the same level as Moshe.

In a second vignette, it is related that Rav Pam once attended the annual dinner of a major Jewish organization. Sitting on the dais next to the venerable gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, was a young American rabbi. The rabbi was talking animatedly with Rav Aharon and even patting the rosh yeshivah on the hand, as he repeatedly said, ""No, Rabbi Kotler, that is not the way..." As Rav Pam took in this scenario, the gadol hador with a young rabbi engaged in discussion as if they were equals, he thought of Aharon HaKohen's words, "We have been foolish, and we have sinned."

During the 1950's, the gedolei hador, the Brisker Rav, zl, and the Chazon Ish, zl, issued a strong ruling with regard to the religious issues facing the Torah community in Eretz Yisrael and their involvement vis-?-vis the government. There were those, of course, who had the temerity to challenge the rulings of the gedolei hador. These were rabbis who unquestionably had strong followings and prestigious credentials, but they were a far cry from these two Torah luminaries. They had the nerve to defend their actions by saying, "We are also rabbis."

If there is one lesson that should be derived from the incident of Aharon and Miriam, it is to be able to step back and reflect upon the preeminence of gedolei Yisrael. Regardless of how we view ourselves, we are a far cry from them. Too often do we hear the utter foolishness of those who have accomplished "somewhat" when they say, "We are also daas Torah! We are expositors of Torah wisdom. We can render halachic arbitration on the same level as any gadol." These mindless statements only validate the obvious: "We have been foolish, and we have sinned."

Miriam was quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in. (12:15)

Miriam was punished for speaking against her brother, Moshe Rabbeinu. For seven days she was quarantined, as per the law applying to one who is afflicted with tzaraas, spiritual leprosy. She was left alone to contemplate her error for seven days, during which time the entire nation waited for her release from quarantine before they continued their journey. Miriam's episode teaches us a powerful lesson concerning reward and punishment: Hashem does not ignore the good that one accomplishes. The good is not erased as a result of the bad. Furthermore, when Hashem judges a person's infraction, He takes into account the entire person - not just the sin that he has committed.

We are instructed to "remember what Hashem did to Miriam on the road traveling from Egypt." We are to derive from this incident a lesson regarding the evils of lashon hora, evil speech. Miriam, the most righteous woman, the person who saved Moshe Rabbeinu's life, made a grave error, and she was punished. What can we say? There is more, however, to the lesson that Miriam's episode teaches us. Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, asserts that Miriam's incident goes beyond teaching us the effects of lashon hora. It teaches us a powerful lesson concerning our interrelationships with people. Miriam was punished, but she simultaneously received tremendous honor, as the entire nation waited for her recuperation. We derive from here that we are to take the entire individual into consideration before judging a situation. Because of the lashon hora that she spoke, Miriam was punished. On the other hand, because she waited by the river to watch over her baby brother, Moshe, she was rewarded. We

are to take everything into account.

Hashem judges the person - not simply his actions. I recently read about an individual who had inflicted an immeasurable amount of emotional damage on a number of people. This was a man that people had trusted, that people had looked to for guidance and inspiration, and he violated their trust. While he certainly deserved to be censured for the evil that he wrought, people quickly seemed to forget many of the wonderful things that he had done. They forget how many lives he saved, how many families he inspired, how many lost youth he helped. That is how human beings function, however. We see only the action before us at the moment. We do not view the action in the context of the entire individual and his positive contributions to society. While one's positive actions certainly do not negate his evil deeds, they should not be ignored as if they had not occurred. One should be recognized for the good that he has accomplished and censured for the evil that he has caused.

To be able to include both reward and punishment in one retribution, to recognize one's positive contribution as well as to punish one's malevolence, is Divine. We are taught in Pirkei Avos, Hevei dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus, "Judge every man favorably." This seems difficult at times, especially when the iniquity is glaring at us and seems unpardonable. How do you judge corruption favorably? The answer is that you do not find anything positive about the corruption. The favorable verdict is to be focused on kol ha'adam, the entire person. Do not judge the action; judge the person. You might see him and his compelling circumstances in a different light.

Speak to Aharon... When you kindle the lamps. (8:2)

Rashi explains the juxtaposition of the passage concerning the Menorah upon the previous parsha, which details the offerings of the Nesiim. Aharon was chagrined that every other tribe, represented by its leader, was involved in some way in the dedication of the Mishkan. His tribe, however, Shevet Levi, of which he was the leader, was excluded from this important task. Hashem responded to Aharon with the notion that his service, the lighting of the Menorah, exceeded their role in the dedication. The Ramban wonders why Hashem did not comfort Aharon with the more auspicious rituals that he performed, such as burning the Ketores, Incense. He explains that the passage regarding the Menorah alludes to a later Menorah, namely, the miracle of Chanukah. Hashem was alluding to the role Aharon's descendants would play when the avodas Bais Hamikdash, Temple service, would be discontinued as a result of a decree by the Greek oppressors. Specifically at a time when all seemed to be lost, when Klal Yisrael would be on the verge of forgetting the Torah, the emunah, faith, and mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, of the Chashmoneans, descendants of Aharon would miraculously triumph over the Greeks, and they would reinstate the kindling of the Menorah in the Bais Hamikdash once again. The offerings of the Nesiim were truly distinctive, but they were temporary. Aharon's contribution, in contrast, would be eternal.

The Ramban's statement begs elucidation. Are the neiros Chanukah the personal domain of only Aharon and his priestly family? Does not every Jew light the Chanukah candles? How was "Aharon" to be comforted? The text of Chazal cited by Rashi is, Shelcha gedolah mi'shelahem, "Yours is greater than theirs." Is this accurate?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Eizrachi, Shlita, explains that the actual neis, miracle, that Hashem wrought with the pach shemen, flask of oil, underscores the distinction of the kindling of the lamps. In

what other context do we find a circumstance in which Hashem performs a miracle for the sole reason of preserving a mitzvah? For what other reason did this miracle occur, if not to guarantee the future of the kindling of the Menorah? This, in itself, is the greatest indicator of the Menorah's unique place in the avodas Bais Hamikdash. Aharon's contribution exceeded that of the Nesiim, because Hashem was willing to transform nature to ensure the continuity of the Menorah.

We can go one step further. Hashem told Aharon that "his" mitzvah, the kindling of the Menorah, would endure forever. Is this realistic? The hadlakas neiros Chanukah is a different mitzvah than the lighting of the Menorah in the Bais Hamikdash - or are the two mitzvos one and the same? It could be suggested that hadlakas neiros Chanukah is actually a "reincarnation" of the kindling of the Menorah in the Bais Hamikdash. To paraphrase Rav Ezrachi, "Whoever has eyes can discern in the neiros Chanukah that they are the neiros of the Bais Hamikdash." Veritably, logic dictates this concept. The fact that Hashem wanted the neiros of the Bais Hamikdash to endure through the miracle of the flask of oil indicates their uniqueness and special significance. It is as if, when Hashem gave the mitzvah of kindling the Menorah, there was a hidden clause stating if the Bais Hamikdash were to be destroyed, the Menorah would continue to be lit in the home of each and every Jew! The mitzvah of Hadlokas haMenorah lasts forever! Shelcha gedolah mi'shelahem. "Your mitzvah is greater than theirs, because yours endures forever."

Make for yourself two silver trumpets. (10:2)

These trumpets provided the same fanfare for Moshe Rabbeinu as for a king. Rashi adds that the funds used for making these trumpets were to be provided personally by Moshe. This halachah seems inconsistent with Moshe's position as king. A king does not generally have to pay for the trumpets used to glorify him. Should the funds not have come from the treasury?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, distinguishes between Moshe as king and other kings. The Torah states in Devarim 17:15, "You shall surely place upon yourself a king." Once appointed, the king has royal status. He now has the power to legislate laws and enforce his position over the nation. Moshe, however, was never appointed by the people to be king. He achieved this status because he was Hashem's agent for the redemption from Egypt and the individual who served as the medium for receiving and teaching the Torah to Klal Yisrael. Hashem provided for all of Klal Yisrael's needs through Moshe. The status of royalty that Moshe achieved was a G-d-given position based upon one primary role: he was every Jew's teacher. While it was appropriate that trumpets be blown before him to assemble the people when necessary, his royalty was an expression of the fact that he was the quintessential teacher of Torah. As such, he was not permitted to take anything from the people. This would be considered undue remuneration. As it is, Chazal teach us in the Talmud Chagigah 7a that a Torah scholar may not be reimbursed for his efforts, because Hashem says, "Just as I teach you without compensation, you, too, must teach and not receive payment."

To supplement this idea, Horav Michel Barenbaum, zl, pointed out that this explains why the trumpets had to be hammered into shape, rather than cast. The Menorah was also hammered, not cast. The process of hammering symbolizes the manner in which Torah is studied. Diligence, labor, toil, these are the terms used to describe Torah study. It is not simply studied as literature; it demands toil. It demands mikshah, hammering. We now understand what Chazal mean when they say, Mon malki? - Rabbanan. "Who are kings? The Rabbanim." Our Torah scholars are our kings, because each one is a teacher/king to his students.

Now, the man Moshe was exceedingly humble. (12:3)

Moshe Rabbeinu epitomized the character trait of humility. He did not shy away from accepting responsibility, taking a stand when needed, confronting challenge after challenge with resolution. Yet, he always felt that he was merely doing what had been asked of him. While he understood his great ability, he felt humble in that he had not yet achieved his great potential. The Shalah Hakadosh, zl, observes that, of all of Moshe's virtues, the one that the Torah chose to emphasize most emphatically was his humility. Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, writes that humility is the key to acquiring all other positive character traits, and, indeed, to all success in general. He adds that if an individual had been living in his generation whose humility was of the calibre of Moshe's, he would have been worthy of acquiring the knowledge of the entire Torah. The Chida, zl, writes that the Bais Yosef merited to be the codifier of Jewish law due to his extreme humility. The Steipler Rav, zl, related that in the generation of the Pri Megadim, another gaon with the equivalent ability lived, who produced a similar volume of halachah. It was because of the incredible humility of the Pri Megadim, however, that Hashem granted him the privilege of having his sefer accepted as the last word in halachah. The Pri Megadim would conclude every halachic exposition with the words, *tzarich iyun*, "it needs contemplation," making it sound as if the author felt personally unworthy of halachic rendering. The other author, however, writes in his preface that he had thoroughly researched and elucidated the halachah. The individual who viewed himself as less than competent achieved total acceptance by the Torah world.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, did not perceive himself to be any different than the common Jew. He would say, "A person eats and drinks. Is that a reason for him to be haughty? Is spiritual sustenance any different? Does one who studies Torah, and performs mitzvos as part of his spiritual regimen, deserve any special credit for this?" Indeed, the Chafetz Chaim dressed as a common Jew, wearing a simple suit and the hat of that of a plain Polish Jew. He would not allow those rabbanim who gave approbations on his Seforim to praise him personally or to confer any titles upon him. He asked only that the literary and halachic value of the sefer be emphasized. He shied away from any honor, because he truly felt that he did not warrant it.

Kelm, the famous mussar, ethics, center, was a yeshivah where great emphasis was placed on extirpating selfishness at its source. The Alter, zl, m'Kelm, mentor of some of the greatest mussar giants, attacked the consequences of self-love, one of which was the pursuit of honor. In fact, Kelm anathematized kavod, honor. Humility and discreetness were the badges of the true Kelm product. Anything that called attention to oneself, by its very nature reflected the intrusion of some value other than the rigorous pursuit of emes, truth.

In Kelm, no one stood in the place of honor in the first row of the *bais ha'medrash*. No one had honorific titles, and students did not even rise out of respect for the rebbeim, much less one another.

The Alter was uncomfortable when anyone stood for him, and he did not allow anyone to address him with any distinguishing titles. He would say, "Honor destroys both the body and the soul. It is disgraceful for me to be addressed as, 'Our master and teacher,' since I am neither. I wish to be addressed only as, 'The one who loves us and seeks our good.' I think that might be the truth."

The Alter considered any display of honor tantamount to administering poison to the one so honored. Men were called up to the Torah only by their names, with no titles of any kind. The Alter was called up without any title. Even Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, was called up as Elchanan ben Naftali. There was one exception to this rule: the Chafetz Chaim, whom the Alter instructed the gabbai

to call up as, "Moreinu, Our teacher."

One of the legendary features that described the life of Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, was his humility. In his later years, he wrote up an announcement and had it placed on the door of the bais ha'medrash in the Yeshivah Kfar Chassidim. It read: "I earnestly request of the public and of the yeshivah students that they not stand up for me when I enter the bais ha'medrash, as this causes me much grief. David Hamelech said in Tehillim 51:5, 'I acknowledge my transgressions.' Since he used the first-person grammatical form of the verb, the word ani, which means 'I,' is superfluous in the pasuk. Obviously he was speaking of himself. Yet, his intention was to make it clear that when someone has sinned, often he alone knows of the sin, while the rest of the world is unaware of his failing. For this reason, he is embarrassed before everyone, for, were they to be aware of his shortcomings, they would not think of him in a positive light.

"For myself, I can only repeat the words of David Hamelech: 'I acknowledge my transgressions.' Although I agree to bless others, it is not because I feel that I hold any advantage, but solely because 'a layman's blessing should not be taken lightly in your eyes.'"

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, embodied the greatness of one who walks with Hashem. Yet, his self-effacing character was one of his hallmarks. Indeed, as his stature grew, his estimation of himself diminished. When the Mashgiach of Baranowitz would exhort the students with his fiery discourses prior to Rosh Hashanah, Rav Elchanan would stand in the back and weep, as if the words were being directed to him. He always sought to be "one of the crowd," looking to remain inconspicuous, never seeking to call attention to himself. He would not permit the chazzan to wait for him for the public recital of Shemoneh Esrai. People from all over would approach him seeking his blessing, which he avoided giving. Once, when someone persisted in asking for a blessing, Rav Elchanan replied with candor, "Believe me, if you knew me as well as I know myself, you would not seek my blessing."

Last, we cite from the life of a contemporary Rosh Yeshivah. Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, who exemplified the trait of anavah, humility. Each year when a new group of students arrived in his shiur, he would deliberately explain the Talmud incorrectly for the first few days. Then, as he observed the students taking notes of everything he said, he would remark, "Oy, I made a mistake! What, you are writing down everything I say? Why must you write down my mistakes?" He would thus teach his students two lessons: First, he could err. Second, they should think independently about everything that he said.

Rav Kaplan once explained why he peppered his shiur with much of his own chidushim, novellae. I like the things that I say myself more so than what I see in other sefarim. It is not that I think that I am better or that what I say is better. It is just that what I say is clearer to me, so I understand it better."

Now, the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth. (12:3)

Rashi adds a new dimension to Moshe Rabbeinu's humility when he defines anav as shafal v'savlan, lowly and forbearing. Humility bespeaks more than just self-effacement; it goes a step further. The humble person is tolerant and accepting. He does not respond to the taunts and disparagement of

others. The commentators wonder why the Torah emphasizes Moshe's humility at this point. The Ramban explains that Hashem intervened on behalf of Moshe, because He knew that Moshe would never involve himself in any form of discord. If someone spoke ill of him, he would take it in stride and ignore the comment. That was Moshe; that was his unique humility.

Chazal refer to this character trait as, Ne'elavim v'einam olvim, "They are humiliated, but do not rebut with the same." They accept their humiliation. The Shevet Sofer writes that at the moment that David Hamelech did not respond to Shimi ben Geira's curses and his continued disparagement, he was chosen to become one of the four images on the Holy Chariot.

In the Talmud Bava Basra 23b, Chazal relate that Rabbi Yirmiyah peppered his shiurim with a multitude of halachic questions. It became increasingly difficult for the rabbis to learn because they were always responding to his many questions. It reached the point at which they felt they had to ask him to leave. Horav Chaim Vital, zl, writes that Rabbi Yirmiyah had lofty reasons for asking his many questions. His intentions were noble, as he sought to increase the Torah learning in the bais ha'medrash. He was willing to undergo the embarrassment of being asked to leave. He accepted this with forbearance and resolve. He was rewarded posthumously in that in the Yeshivah Shel Maalah, Heavenly Yeshivah, every question that is raised may be articulated only through him.

The following episode concerning Horav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zl, the Bais Halevi, demonstrates the extent to which our Torah leaders have acquiesced to disparagement. One hot summer day, the Bais Halevi was studying together with his son Rav Chaim. Rav Yosef Dov removed his hat and frock due to the heat. Suddenly, one of the city's butchers stormed into the bais ha'medrash and began to rant and rave at Rav Yosef Dov. Among the many insults that he heaped upon him was the claim that the rav was crooked. It seems that the previous day this butcher had come before Rav Yosef Dov in a dispute with another butcher. Although this butcher was justified and the halachah would have been rendered in his favor, he made a foolish mistake: he offered Rav Yosef Dov a large bribe. In response, the rav found him guilty.

When Rav Yosef Dov heard the claims against him, he immediately donned his rabbanic frock and hat and stood there, mute, with his head lowered. When the butcher saw how lowly the rav acted, he took it as a sign of weakness and proceeded to heap even more scorn on him. Yet, this was not enough. He extended his vicious tirade to include all the rabbanim, calling Rav Yosef Dov a crook and leader of a band of crooks. During this entire time, Rav Yosef Dov remained silent, accepting his humiliation without reply. As the butcher was leaving, Rav Yosef Dov followed, saying, "Machul lach, machul lach. I forgive you completely. I do not want anyone to suffer as a result of my pain." The next day, as the butcher was leading a herd of bulls to the slaughter, one of the bulls broke away and killed the butcher. Upon hearing the news, Rav Yosef Dov was terribly shaken up. He said, "I am afraid that I might have been a bit upset, causing his sudden death." His son, Rav Chaim, countered, "But, father, did you not forgive him?" "How do you know this?" queried Rav Yosef Dov. "I, myself, heard the words," Rav Chaim replied. "Are you absolutely sure that I said those words, that I forgave him b'mechillah gemurah, with total forgiveness?" asked Rav Yosef Dov. The rav, although finally convinced, would not relent. He followed the bier to its final resting place at the cemetery and cried bitterly at the funeral. He took it upon himself to recite Kaddish for the soul of the butcher for the duration of the eleven months of Kaddish. Every year on the Yahrtzeit, anniversary of his death, Rav Yosef Dov would fast, say Kaddish and study Mishnayos in memory of the butcher. Furthermore, he maintained every chumrah, stringency, as if his own father had passed away. This is gadlus, greatness, at its zenith!

When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light. (8:1)

Rashi cites Chazal who explain the use of the word Behaaloscha, which really means "when you bring up," as opposed to behaadlikcha, when you kindle. It is necessary for the Kohen to keep the flame in place until shalheves oleh m'eilehah, the flame rises on its own, from the oil in the wick and not from the Kohen's flame. This explanation is seemingly superfluous, since it is obvious that the flame should be burning on its own. Otherwise, as soon as the Kohen takes away his light, the lamp on the Menorah will extinguish. Do we really need a specific word to convey a halachah that is obvious?

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, offers a homiletic approach. The three Klei Kodesh, holy appurtenances, that stand in the Heichal - the Menorah, Mizbayach Haketores, and Shulchan - signify the three pillars upon which the world rests. The Menorah denotes the Pillar of Torah, since the Menorah is closely related with wisdom. The Altar of Incense signifies the Pillar of Avodah, prayer/service and devotion to the Almighty. The Table, closely connected with food and sustenance, connotes gemillus chasadim, acts of loving-kindness. The shoshonim, source, for these three Keilim which were outside in the Heichal was the Aron Hakodesh, Holy Ark, which alludes to emunah, faith, in the Almighty. This teaches us that the three pillars of the world, Torah, Avodah and Gemillus Chasadim, must have their source in emunah. If they are not the outgrowth of pure faith and conviction, they are missing the most essential component of their existence.

When the Torah teaches us the laws that apply to the lighting of the Menorah, its intention is to convey to us the manner in which we should transmit Torah to our students. The rebbe should involve himself in the teaching process until the student grasps the material on his own. When one seeks to transfer the flame of Torah to his student, he must see to it that the flame burns brightly within the student - on its own. One who teaches and communicates Torah wisdom to his student is not assured of success until the student is able to understand the material to the point that he can be mechadesh, say/write original thoughts and novellae. One who simply repeats by rote, but cannot innovate his own original deduction based upon the derech, approach to Torah thought, taught him by his rebbe, has not really grasped the flame. It is not "rising on its own."

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, was wont to say, "One who can simply 'say over' what his rebbe said on a specific topic is not considered a true disciple. He must be able to 'say over' on his own what his rebbe would have said." This indicates that he has absorbed his rebbe's approach to understanding the profundity of Torah. Every Rosh Hayeshivah had his own unique methodology and approach to the nituach ha'sugya, analysis and dialectic, of the subject matter. A true student should be able to distinguish between the approach of Rav Shimon Shkop and that of Rav Chaim Brisker. There was also the derech of the Chasam Sofer that was used primarily in the Hungarian yeshivos. To be able to perceive what one's rebbe would say indicates one's depth of understanding.

Rav Nebentzhal continues with the responsibilities imposed upon the yeshivah toward its students in transmitting the Torah lesson. He cites the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, who posits that when one teaches, he should not complete his thesis, leaving over one point for the student to delve into and cogitate himself. This is applicable only if the student is capable of deducing the concept on his own. If he is, however, incapable, then the rebbe should teach it over and over, as the famous Rav Preida taught his student four hundred times until he understood each lesson.

Once, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, the Michtav M'Eliyahu, was giving a shmuess, ethical discourse, during which he explained two of Chazal's teachings that seemed to contradict one another. When the lecture was over, the students realized that he had not answered the original question. He wanted to see who would come over and ask him for the answer. This is the meaning of the flame rising on its own: the student is inspired to think on his own, to question, respond, compare and expound on the analysis presented to him.

Rav Nebentzhal suggests that the yeshivah has another function: to imbue the student with a love of Torah. Only a student who loves the Torah, who senses the "v'haarev na," sweetness of Torah, will be driven to plumb its profundities with enthusiasm and fervor. He must realize that the Torah is not merely another wisdom - it is his lifeline. The bren, fire/passion, that one invests into Torah study should burn fiercely. To study Torah with a kaltkeit, cold, distant feeling is to invite trouble. The flame surely cannot rise on its own if it had not originally been present. The initial break with Orthodoxy came about in this manner. Interestingly, the original founders of the Haskalah movement, which undermined and attempted to totally destroy the Torah, were themselves observant Jews. Their approach was to "cool off" one's yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. They considered mitzvos to be nothing more than Jewish tradition and custom, relegating observance to a matter of culture. The result was that their own children became apostates and converted out of the faith. When the fire is extinguished, nothing remains but a cold heart.

The Chazon Ish related that a father once came to him complaining that his son was extreme in his observance. The Chazon Ish commented, "This father thinks that middle of the road refers to one who observes fifty percent of the mitzvos. He does not understand that the absolute minimum that a Jew must observe is all 613 mitzvos. One who refrains from performing thirty-eight of the thirty-nine types of labor on Shabbos is still a mechallel Shabbos, desecrator of the Shabbos." When we do not transmit the flame to the next generation in such a manner that it burns brightly on its own, the result is a Jew who is distant, cold and dispassionate in his observance. His observance is - at best - sterile and will not produce a second generation of Torah-observant Jews.

Those men said to him, "We are contaminated through a human corpse; why should we be diminished by not offering Hashem's offering?" (9:7)

The Sifri derives from the Torah's use of the word anashim, a term reserved for distinguished men, that these individuals were kesheirim v'charaidim l'mitzvos, proper men who were eager and meticulous in mitzvah observance. There are people who observe whatever they are told to observe. Yet, they will look for loopholes and heteirim, halachic dispensations, to get around an obligation. Then there are those who seek every opportunity to observe mitzvos, to carry out Hashem's will. One who loves Hashem does not look for a way out. On the contrary, he will seize every opportunity that brings him closer to Hashem. These men had been deprived of a mitzvah. While it is true that they were involved in another mitzvah, they did not look at it that way. They did not want to miss an opportunity to offer the Korban Pesach.

Our gedolei Yisrael, Torah luminaries, of each generation were characterized by this unique attitude toward mitzvos. The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna was imprisoned during the Festival of Succos. He did everything within his ability to stay awake, to the point of holding his eyes open, so that he should not fall asleep outside of the Succah.

A Russian Jew who was a student in Radin related that he once stayed up all Thursday, Mishmor night, studying Torah. As he left in the wee hours of the morning, the snow was beginning to descend and the wind was picking up its fury, as the temperature plummeted to below zero. He rushed through the quiet streets to get home and catch a few hours of rest before the sun rose. Suddenly, he noticed something moving surreptitiously through the streets. Back and forth the figure moved, stopping every once in a while, then continuing on. The student was nervous. Who could this be in the middle of the night? Filled with fear, he decided to go on to his home. As he came closer, he was filled with surprise to see that it was none other than the saintly Chafetz Chaim. "Why are you outside in the middle of the night?" the Chafetz Chaim asked, clearly agitated, but concerned. "Go right home to sleep."

The next day, the student discovered that this was the third night that the Chafetz Chaim had been circling the city, amidst the bitter cold and raging snow, waiting for the levanah, moon, to appear, so that he could fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush Levanah.

A bit closer to our own time, we can learn what devotion to mitzvos is from the Klausenberger Rebbe, zl. The Rebbe survived the Holocaust with his faith intact, making sure to observe whatever mitzvos he could, risking his life not to transgress any negative commandments. His dedication and commitment are legendary. Probably the most difficult time was during the eight days of Pesach when his body, already wracked with pain from the cruel labor to which he was subjected, had to be sustained without eating the smallest crumb of chametz. Together with a small group of fellow prisoners, he was able to gather a small store of potatoes, hiding them in the cracks of the barracks walls and between the bunks. One day, a Nazi guard found the treasure and confiscated them. The Rebbe's reaction was typical, "We have done our part; Hashem will do what is good in His eyes."

The Rebbe's words became a reality, as the day before Pesach the Nazis suddenly - and for no apparent reason - assigned an entire group of Jews to help the farmers whose fields bordered the camp. Their job: to open up the stores of potatoes which had been underground all winter. This work assignment provided them with the means to smuggle a large quantity of potatoes back to the camp.

By an overt miracle, they were able to procure some grain, which they crushed with their fingers and some rocks until it was fine enough to be flour. They baked tiny little matzos in secret and prepared for the Seder. Fifteen men gathered around the Rebbe, as he recited the entire Hagaddah from memory. His bitter weeping shook the entire assemblage, who listened with tears streaming down their faces. While they certainly did not have four cups of wine, and marmor, bitter herbs, was a part of their daily routine, they did have matzoh. The Rebbe spoke words of encouragement to the men who sat enraptured by his words. They were amazed how he spoke of a future filled with hope. When others were filled with depression and devastation, the Rebbe's mind was replete with spiritual matters that transcended the realm of the average person's understanding. The experience may be summed up with the words of a non-observant Jew who had been invited to the Seder. He sat silently, watching, listening, absorbing everything that was taking place. He did not utter a sound, until he could no longer contain himself and he exclaimed, "Jewish brothers! If I did not personally experience this beautiful scene I would never have believed that such a thing was possible...that Jews should observe the commandment of eating matzoh right under the noses of the Nazi murderers, with death staring them in the face. I would never have believed it."

Surviving the week of Pesach took superhuman strength - both physically and emotionally. The Rebbe hardly ate anything. He refused to eat chametz of any sort. He left his daily portion of bread unclaimed for anyone who wanted it. He would eat nothing more than unpeeled potatoes that were

occasionally obtained for him, baking them in an empty can that he koshed in boiling water before Pesach. On the last day of Pesach, the Rebbe was on a work detail outside of the campgrounds. He refused to eat a baked potato that someone had managed to obtain for him, because it was not prepared in a utensil that had been koshed for Pesach. As he was working, he came upon the head of a sugar beet. He felt this was his reward for not eating the potato. As he ate the beet, he remarked, "I have never eaten anything as sweet as this." This is commitment to mitzvos.

Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble. (12:3)

The Daas Zekeinim notes that the word anav, humble, is written without a yud. This implies that Moshe Rabbeinu's humility extended to every organ in his body. The word anav without a yud, spelled ayin - ayin, yud, nun - 130; nun - nun, vav, non - 106; vav - vav, vav - 12, total 248, which is the number of organs in the body. What is the meaning of humility throughout the entire body? Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, renders the following explanation based on an episode that occurred with the Baal HaTanya. The Baal HaTanya decided to leave Mezritch to return home. He felt that remaining in Mezritch in close proximity to the famous Maggid was harmful to his character. He saw himself becoming haughty about his spiritual ascendancy. It was better that he should return home and become a baal agalah, wagon driver, than become a baal gaavah, an arrogant and pompous man. He was traveling home just before Pesach when the roads affected by the coming spring were flooded and filled with deep potholes. It took a very experienced wagon driver to guide the coach along the way, making sure not to fall into any of the holes in the road. The wagon driver turned to his passengers and asked, "Have you ever seen such a fine driver as I? No other driver could have guided you so brilliantly as I have!"

When the Baal HaTanya heard this, he realized that one who is arrogant will be so regardless of his position. The baal agalah who thinks highly of himself will be the same baal gaavah as the talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who allows his erudition to go to his head. A baal gaavah is a baal gaavah, regardless of his position. This is what is meant by referring to Moshe as humble in every one of his organs. Regardless of what he would do, with whichever part of his body, he viewed himself as insignificant and unworthy.

So Miriam was quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in. (12:15)

Rashi says that the distinction of having the entire nation wait for her was accorded to Miriam as a reward for her waiting and watching the infant Moshe when he was left in a basket in the river. Miriam waited for Moshe as a natural instinct, an expression of love for her baby brother. The child was born and tragedy struck. Of course, she would remain in the background to see what would take place. It was the natural, right thing to do. Indeed, if she would have to pay a great amount of money for the opportunity to guard her little brother, she would have certainly done so. Her reward is incredible. For waiting a few short moments just to see what would happen to her brother, all of Klal Yisrael waited for her for seven days. This teaches us how crucial it is to empathize with another person. A few minutes were valued by Hashem as being so significant that an entire nation waited - for a considerable length of time for her to heal.

A son was born to Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, during the Israeli War of Independence. The Bris Millah took place in the hospital as the shells and bombs were exploding outside. As the walls of the building shook, everyone in attendance appreciated the emotional and spiritual respite from the devastation that was going on in the streets of the city. Returning to their home, the family had to run, dodging exploding shells and seeking refuge in any place that provided cover from the ravages of war. Running between houses, Rav Chaim sensed a presence in the doorway of one of the houses. It was a young wounded boy, his arms and legs bound in bandages. Rav Chaim stopped and began to cry. He was so emotionally overcome with the plight of the young child that he ignored the exploding shells, as well as the immediate danger to his own life. He just had to stop and cry - empathize with the young boy's pain.

Rav Chaim explained, "People think that empathy means to help another in need. What can you do for someone who is wounded, wrapped in bandages, and has been helped as much as possible? What more can be done for him? The answer is that while assistance may be ruled out, empathy is not! One can share in his pain, feel his anguish. When an individual carries a heavy load, everyone understands that we should help. What do you do, however, for the one that is carrying a load of 'pain'? We are obligated to try to 'feel' his pain and share his anguish."

We are journeying to the place about which Hashem had said, "I shall give it to you. Go with us, and we shall treat you well." (10:29)

As Klal Yisrael "packed up" in preparation of their long journey through the wilderness, a journey that was to last forty years, Moshe Rabbeinu had a conversation with his father-in-law, Yisro. "Please join us on our journey," Moshe implored Yisro. The wise father-in-law responded in the negative. "I am going home to my land and the place of my birth." Moshe did not give up, "Please do not forsake us, inasmuch as you know our encampment in the wilderness, and you have been as eyes for us. We need your assistance, your perspective, your advice." The Yalkut Shimoni interprets Moshe's words: Whatever is concealed from our eyes, you will be able to reveal for us.

This is an incredible dialogue. Does Moshe Rabbeinu need Yisro's vision, his advice, his counsel? This all took place at a time when the Shechinah was resting among Klal Yisrael. What could Yisro have added that was so significant? What could his eyes have seen that was so unique? In his Ben Ish Chai, Horav Yosef Chaim, zl, m'Baghdad provides a compelling answer to this question. Yisro had a powerful characteristic that was essential for Klal Yisrael as they entered into the challenges confronting them in their travels. It was a characteristic that was not to be found among the members of the nascent Jewish nation. Even nevuah, prophecy, would have been of no avail at this critical juncture. They needed a person who had the ability, the unwavering resolution, to swim against the current, to stand tall and erect as the winds of indifference and assimilation blew with a fierceness. Yisro had been there and prevailed. He was able to give Klal Yisrael the insight they needed as they confronted the obstacles and challenges that stood in their way. Yisro's affirmation of the truth was his ammunition. It gave him the strength to prevail. His perspective was invaluable to Klal Yisrael.

The people would spread out and gather (the manna). (11:8)

Pursuit of a livelihood is often an experience that consumes a person. One dedicates his energies to chasing that pot of gold which is nothing more than a dream turned nightmare for many. While one should be mishtadel, endeavor, and take the necessary steps to see to it that his material needs are provided for, he must realize and believe unequivocally that Hashem is the Provider Who will provide him with whatever he really needs. We derive this concept from the manna of which the Torah in Sefer Shemos 16:17-18 writes, "Bnei Yisrael gathered (the manna), those who took more and those who took less. And they measured it in an omer and found that those who took more had nothing extra, and those who took less were not lacking; each person had gathered according to his eating needs."

In his commentary on our parsha, the Zohar Hakadosh focuses on the word shatu, spread out, which can also be derived from the word shoteh, fool. The Zohar says, "Those people of whom it says shatu, were truly shatia, fools - for sufficient manna was supplied to each person, without the need to stroll around and search for it - which was in any event a futile endeavor. Hashem had provided what was needed for each.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, would decry those who would devote their lives and energies towards earning a livelihood. He would often cite a mashal, parable, of the Chafetz Chaim in this regard: a customer in a wine maker's shop once came up with this "powerful" suggestion to the shopkeeper: "Why do you not put two spigots on each barrel instead of one? That way you could make twice as much money!" While we understand the foolishness of this idea, there are still people who do not realize that no matter how hard a person tries, the total amount of sustenance he is destined to receive does not increase one iota as a result of his efforts.

Nonetheless, one must not sit back and relax, relying on the reality that Hashem will provide for him anyway, so he need not bother. Rav Yosef Chaim applies the pasuk in Devarim 15:18, "So that G-d will bless you in all that you do." It is only when a person does something that he opens up the possibility for Hashem to bless his work and provide for him. There are individuals whose trust in the Almighty is so intense and true that what they must do is truly very little. It is only because they possess such spiritual integrity that they are so blessed. When one toils for a living - whether through commerce, Torah education, Kollel or any endeavor in which Hashem finds a kli machazik berachah, vessel to accept and hold blessing - he develops a relationship with Hashem as the Provider, through which he becomes acutely aware that success or failure is dependent totally upon His grace.

Moshe heard the people weeping in their family groups, each one at the entrance of his tent. (11:10)

Entire families vented their resentment publicly by gathering outside of their tents and weeping. Chazal say that the word "families" underscores the reason for their animus, frustration regarding the family laws that had been imposed upon them. To some of the people, the Torah's restrictions regarding marriage were an unbearable burden. It seems strange that they would complain now. The laws were given at Sinai. Why did they not weep then? Why did they wait until now to express their acrimony?

Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, derives from here the incredible impact that a holy place can have on a person. Being at Har Sinai and having the Aron HaKodesh in their midst compelled them to maintain an elevated level of sanctity and purity. When a person is surrounded by kedushah, holiness, he feels within himself a need to maintain purity. As they traveled away from Har Sinai, with the Aron HaKodesh traveling in front of them at a distance of three days - suddenly the overwhelming desire to eat meat, to gorge themselves in a manner not thought of before, became a reality. The temptations of

the flesh engulfed them, and they began to weep for what had been imposed upon them earlier. Previously, they had appreciated the imposition because it had enhanced their kedushah. Now, they just wanted fun. Some things never change.

What have you done evil to your servant...that you place the burden of this entire people...Did I conceive this entire people...that you say to me, carry them in your bosom. (11:12)

Moshe Rabbeinu despairs from the responsibility of leadership imposed upon him. Sforno explains Moshe's complaint in the following manner: Parents often have children with whom they are in dispute. Yet, despite the existing conflict, a basic feeling of trust exists deep within the children, asserting that their parents truly love them and will do them no harm. This nation, however, had not demonstrated such trust in Moshe, and they were constantly testing to see how he would react to them. Moshe's grievance still needs to be understood. Imagine if a great rav or rosh hayeshiva would lament, "Why do I not find favor in your eyes that you place such a difficult leadership upon my shoulders?" The answer would be simple. "It is specifically because you are a great and talented leader that you were chosen for this position. Whom else should we take - a weak leader?"

Moshe should have understood that it was because he found favor in the eyes of Hashem that he was selected for this most difficult mission. Fractious communities need strong leadership.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, explains that Moshe decried the fact that Hashem did not find him worthy of being elevated to a position where he would be as sensitive to Klal Yisrael as a mother is sensitive to her children. For a mother, nothing is too difficult. There is no time that is bad when it comes to her children. A mother never tires, never wanes from her commitment to her children. It is a labor of love - a love that prevails over whatever obstacle may be in the way. This is what Moshe means when he says, "Did I conceive this entire people?" Do I then feel for them as a mother feels for her child? If I felt that way, nothing would be burdensome. I ask of Hashem that I be able to carry their burden as a mother carries her child - with love, patience and equanimity.

Moshe is teaching us a compelling lesson in education and leadership. A teacher/leader must love his charges as a mother loves her child. He must be sensitive to their every need and enjoy helping them grow. No problem is too demanding; no situation is too troublesome. After all, one's student is like one's child. This is the key to success in teaching. Unless a rebbe feels like a parent, he is missing a critical factor in the success quotient for Torah chinuch. Moshe Rabbeinu recognized that if he could be upset with Klal Yisrael, then he was missing the ingredient. Do we recognize this, or are we quick to fault the student?

Indeed, a true leader should want to see only the positive in his flock. The Skverer Rebbe, zl, always looked for the positive in each Jew, disregarding even the most blatant shortcomings. He had this mindset even at a tender age, as the following narrative indicates. With age, this attitude intensified until it became the hallmark of his very essence. As a young child, he had a discussion with one of his cousins, also a scion of the famous Chernobyl dynasty. The question: Is it more advantageous to be a rav/rabbi or a rebbe, chassidic leader? (Interesting discussion - what is especially noteworthy is the topic of discussion among these young children. Apparently, there were no sports teams in those days.)

In the course of their debate, the other child posited that being a rebbe was more desirable, and he could prove it. "Compare the spelling of rebbe - raish, bais, yud - with that of rav - raish, bais," he said, "and you will note that rebbe contains the letter yud, while the word rav is devoid of a yud." The letter yud, which in their local dialect was pronounced yid - which in Yiddish means Jew - is present in the term rebbe. It would, therefore, indicate that rebbe had superiority over rav.

It was an insightful response, one that marveled those who had assembled to hear the discussion between the two young prodigies. They now waited for the future Skverer Rebbe's response. What could he say that would succeed in refuting his cousin's logic?

He responded that, in principle, he agreed with his cousin that, indeed, being a leader of a chassidic sect was superior to being a halachic arbiter in a community, but for a different reason. He explained that Chazal say in Pirkei Avos, 1:8, "When the litigants stand before (the judge), he considers them to be reshaim, wicked. Only at the culmination of the trial when the verdict has been rendered, and they accept it can they be viewed as tzaddikim, righteous.

"It is for this reason that I prefer becoming a rebbe as opposed to a rav," said the Skverer Rebbe. "I do not ever want to be placed in a position where I will be relegated to view a fellow Jew as being anything less than righteous. I do not want to be aware of their shortcomings, only their positive traits." Is it any wonder that this young boy's sensitivity to every Jew was the cornerstone of a life of dedicated to all of Klal Yisrael?

He named that place Kivros-Hataavah, the graves of lust, because there they buried the people who had been craving. (11:34)

Immediately after the people were punished for their needless complaining, they started right up again with a new set of accusations. This time they slandered the manna, which they received daily from Hashem. They claimed they wanted meat - although there was no shortage of meat. They talked about how wonderful Egypt was - in comparison to their misery in the desert. After all was said and done, it all amounted to nothing more than an uncontrolled craving. They were overpowered by their yetzer hora, evil inclination. The middah of taavah, craving/lusting for something, can overwhelm a person, so that he loses control over himself. This place stands in infamy as Kivros Hataavah, the burial place of lust. As Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, remarks, it was not the burial place of those who lusted. Rather, it was the burial place of lust. This demonstrates and emphasizes the iniquity of lust and the downfall of those who succumb to temptation.

We frequently see people who fall prey to addiction, be it food, drugs or alcohol. The religious world also has its share of those who cannot control their cravings, who are overwhelmed by temptation, who fall prey to unbridled desire. Chazal teach us that Hashem gave us an antidote to triumph over the wiles of the evil-inclination - the Torah. Torah study will keep us anchored to our timeless values and remind us of Hashem's constant presence.

Temptation is strong, and people give in to it all the time. One wonders why or how someone who has basic intelligence would of his own free will opt to wallow in filth and drugs, rather than live a life of health, success and pride to himself and his family. Why do people make terrible - and sometimes tragic - choices that ultimately destroy their lives and wreak havoc on the lives of their families? What possesses a person to throw everything away in search of money and self-gratification?

The power of the evil-inclination is awesome. It has the ability to blind a person temporarily and deprive him of his ability to think rationally. It grabs his heart and demands instant gratification. The individual who is ensnared by its wiles no longer cares about morals, self-respect, or the effect on his family. He wants it now. He does not consider consequences. Yosef Hatzaddik almost fell prey to the blandishments of the yetzer hora. Yet, he won due to a single reason - his father. Chazal teach us that Yosef was able to summon the inner strength to resist Potiphar's wife, because he saw an image of his elderly father and everything that he represented. The image of Yaakov Avinu, the elderly Patriarch, prompted Yosef to ask himself if it was all worth it. Was it worth throwing away his heritage, his covenant, his self-respect for a fleeting moment of lust?

Once one asks that question, the yetzer hora has lost. This holds true for all temptation. When people stop to think of the consequences, when they query, "Is it worth it?" the contest is over. When they factor in the shame, the scandal, the potential ruin of their careers, the trauma and suffering of their families, the destroyed future of their children, they would never succumb to the yetzer hora. Regrettably, some realize the consequences of their escapades too late for themselves and too late for their children.

When you kindle the lamps. (8:2)

Rashi explains why the passage regarding the Menorah and the participation of Aharon HaKohen in its lighting follows immediately after the dedication of the Mizbayach, Altar, and the contributions of the individual Nesiim, Princes, for this event. When Aharon noted that every tribe had been included in this ceremony except his own Shevet Levi, he became chagrined. Hashem responded to Aharon, saying, "Shelcha gedolah mi'shelahem," "Yours is greater than theirs. For you will kindle the Menorah." What is the meaning of "Yours is greater than theirs?"

The commentators offer various reasons for the distinction accorded to the lighting of the Menorah. In the Ethical Discourses of Yeshivas Bais Sholom Mordechai they focus on the word "gedolah," greater than, as if Hashem was emphasizing that Aharon HaKohen's virtue was greater than theirs. The mere fact that Aharon was concerned about being deprived of a mitzvah distinguished him from the others. Specifically, as a result of his devotion to the mitzvah, he merits to kindle the Menorah.

Elsewhere in this parsha we find a similar idea. A number of people could not participate in the slaughtering of the Korban Pesach. They were the individuals charged with carrying Yosef HaTzaddik's aron, coffin. Consequently, they became tamei, ritually contaminated. They came to Moshe Rabbeinu and stated, "We are contaminated... Why should we be diminished by not offering Hashem's offering in its appointed time?" The Sifri adds, "The Torah tells us that there were people, who were kesheirim v'chareidim al ha'mitzvos, proper and anxious/fearful concerning mitzvos. This means that if a person discovers that for some reason he is exempt from performing a mitzvah, yet he is concerned about the "loss" of a mitzvah, he is a kasher v'chareid. This is the true meaning of the term chareidi Jew, a person who is fearful of the loss of a mitzvah. They were pained; and hurt. Why should they be deprived of joining with everyone else? We may add that herein lies the deeper meaning of communal involvement. These people asked, "Why should we be diminished?" What does it mean to be diminished? I think that what they were implying was: by not being included in the communal sacrifice they felt themselves to

be diminished, of a lesser stature. They felt that their non-inclusion created a void. They were not concerned as much about themselves as they were about the void their lack of involvement created in Klal Yisrael. They were concerned that by their "diminishment" Klal Yisrael would also be diminished. When a person's approach to the community is so selfless that he feels his non-participation will cause a vacuum, then he is worthy of having a new festival added by virtue of his thoughtfulness.

So shall you separate the Leviim from among Bnei Yisrael...for presented, presented are they to Me...in place of the first issue of every womb. (8:14,16)

The Leviim replaced the bechorim, first-born sons, as those who would serve in the Sanctuary. The Jewish first borns became holy in Egypt when they were saved from death, when Hashem slew every Egyptian firstborn. When the Mishkan was erected, however, the first borns' privilege to serve was revoked as a consequence of their participation in the tragic sin of the Golden Calf. Every Jewish firstborn was "redeemed" by a Levi - as the Levi took the place of the firstborn, the state of kedushah, holiness, that had previously been imbued in the bechor was now transferred to the Levi. There was one problem: there were 273 more firstborns than there were Leviim. How were they to transform from their state of holiness, so that they could now lead ordinary lives? Hashem instructed Moshe that for these 273 bechorim, he should take five shekalim per head/individual, and the money should be given to Aharon and his sons as the redemption of those in excess of the number of Leviim.

It seems simple enough. There is one question, however, to address: Why specifically five shekalim? It is indeed true that a thirty-day-old firstborn is redeemed for five silver shekalim, but that is because he is only a baby. Certainly, the price increases with age. This is indicated by the increase in price for an adult over a child in regard to the laws of arachim, evaluations. Rashi gives us an interesting response to this question. He explains that this was the price for the sale of Yosef, the firstborn son of Rachel: twenty pieces of silver, which is the equivalent of five silver shekalim. Now that we have considered Rashi's response, we must begin to understand the relationship between the sale of Yosef and the exchange of the firstborn for the Leviim. Reb Yitzchak Bunim, zl, gives a practical but penetrating response to this question. Let us for a moment think about the identities of those firstborn, - the original bechorim who were intended by Hashem to serve in the Sanctuary. They certainly were not ordinary people. They were to be Klal Yisrael's emissaries, Hashem's ministers, who were to offer up the holy korbanos. The Torah is teaching us a valuable lesson. When you are redeeming Hashem's servant do not minimize his value. Do not let him be worth less to you than what those Midyanite or Yishmaelite traders, who bought Yosef, were willing to spend for a young Jewish servant. "Pay for My servant," says Hashem, "at least what the heathen paid for a Jewish boy - not one penny less!" The emphasis, in other words, is not on how much the redemption money was, but, rather, on how little it cannot be.

The purpose of this thesis is to express the value of a Jewish child and to explore how we demonstrate this value. Let us estimate the cost of educating a child in today's public school system. Add to that the cost of high school and city college. I am not sure of the cost, but it certainly runs at least into the tens of thousands. In other words, if a Jewish boy were to go through the public school system, elementary, high school, and college, the city, state and federal governments are prepared to spend a small fortune in the attempt to educate him. If this is what the secular, non-Jewish world is willing to spend, then how much is it worth for us to develop a Jewish boy into a grown, intelligent, G-d fearing Torah scholar? If this was a criticism of our ancestors, how much more so will we have to

give a reckoning for our lack of values when it comes to appreciating a contemporary Torah education?

Perhaps the next time we are approached to contribute to a Yeshivah, a Bais Yaakov, a Day School, let us take the above into account. It is not enough to give a token amount, because the American culture will have no problem giving more. What message are we conveying if the non-Jewish world puts a greater premium on a Jewish child's education than we do? Reb Yitzchak Bunim writes that he recently (forty years ago) read about a conference of missionaries held in Oakland, California. After a comprehensive report of their activities, careful calculation indicated that it cost them nearly \$50,000 to convert one Jew to their faith. This was the price they were willing to pay to "save" one Jewish soul. By the way, the price has certainly risen many-fold over the last four decades. What is our response to this? One thing is for certain - leaving the shul prior to the appeal for the local school is surely not the way to counteract this. We should remember Hashem's admonishment to us: "Do not devalue My children! Do not give less for a Jewish child than others would give for him!"

Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Yisrael...And I will increase some of the spirit that is upon you and place it upon them, and they shall bear the burden of the People with you. (11:16,17)

Moshe Rabbeinu was instructed to select seventy elders to replace those who had died. The Mishnah in Sanhedrin 2a regards these elders as constituting the Sanhedrin, High Court. They were to assist Moshe in leading the nation. This was apparently a very distinguished position. Thus, the men chosen to fill the role must have been the most eminent members of the nation. They must have behaved nobly and achieved a lofty level of scholarship in order to have been singled out for this honor. The Midrash tells us that actually they had been the foremen, the Jewish taskmasters in Egypt. When Pharaoh ordered them to punish their brethren, these unique individuals accepted the punishment and allowed themselves to be beaten in place of their Jewish brothers. They would not inflict punishment upon their brethren. For their willingness to protect their brothers and accept their pain, they warranted the distinction of being elevated to the Sanhedrin.

When a person demonstrates sensitivity to his fellow man, by feeling his pain, Hashem remembers this empathy, and He reimburses the person. When the time came to select the elders who would share in Moshe's burden of leadership, they were the ones who were singled out. Interestingly, the criteria for leadership was not piety or scholarship. It was empathy - because that is a quality that a leader must manifest if he is to succeed.

Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe? (12:8)

The use of the term "fear" in regard to speaking "about" Moshe Rabbeinu - or any Torah leader for that matter - is noteworthy. One must demonstrate such reverence for our gedolim that to speak about them should evoke within us a sense of fear and trepidation. We are so distant from the spiritual plateau and perspective of our Torah leaders that we cannot begin to fathom their penetrating insight into everything - even those areas which we feel is not in their domain of expertise.

Horav Baruch zl, m'Kasov offers an excellent analogy to explain this further. There was a king who wanted to have his palace bedecked with beautiful paintings. He commissioned the finest and most talented artists to paint breathtaking scenarios, beautiful landscapes and splendid portraits to enhance his palace. When the decorating was completed, he invited his citizens from throughout the country to view the stunning palace.

Artist and layman alike came to feast their eyes on the unsurpassed beauty of the palace. Among those who came to view the palace was a simple farmer. He looked at many of the paintings. After awhile, he called one of the master artists over to him and criticized a painting. "In this drawing, you have stalks of wheat blowing in the wind and a bird perched on top of a stalk. How is this possible? A bird cannot balance itself on a stalk that is blowing in the wind." "You are correct," responded the artist, "I guess I was not thinking."

"But that is not all," continued the farmer. "Here you have a group of farmers following the plowshare. A farmer stands on the right side of the plow, while you have him standing on the left side."

The artist was slightly embarrassed for his error, and he quickly apologized. A few moments later, the farmer found another painting to criticize. In this portrait, the king's private servant was placing a vase in the king's study. "Stop right there!" the artist exclaimed. "I listened to your critique concerning the field and the plow, because it is an area with which you are acquainted, but what do you know about the king's private study? This is probably the first time you have been off the farm!"

The same idea applies regarding our attitude towards our Torah leaders. Do we have any idea of their penetrating insight? What does a simple farmer know about the occurrences in the king's private chamber? We must recognize our place and realize how distant we are from where they stand. Perhaps a dose of humility is in order. Interestingly, it is always the one who is most obtuse who expresses himself the loudest.

And Miriam and Aharon spoke about Moshe. (12:1)

Much has been written about the tragic effect of lashon hora, evil, disparaging speech. Perhaps, if we would focus on lashon tov, the far-reaching effect of positive speech, we would react more "positively" when we are admonished in regard to lashon hora. I recently read an inspiring story which communicates this message. The story takes us to South America to a kosher slaughterhouse managed by a certain Mr. Samo.

Every night, prior to closing, he would check to make sure everything was in order. One night, as he was about to lock up, Alex, the night watchman, approached him and implored him not to leave. "Mr. Samo, you cannot close up because there is still one slaughterer left in the building!" "Alex," Mr. Samo responded, "I have been checking this building for years. Trust me, there is no one left inside."

"Please, Mr. Samo," entreated Alex, "I am certain that he is still in here." Mr. Samo relented and thoroughly checked the building. Upon returning, he told Alex, "The building is clear. There is no one left inside. I am closing up."

"No, you cannot do this," Alex emphatically declared. "I have no doubt whatsoever that the slaughterer is somewhere in the building. You must check again!"

"Okay, Alex, but this is the last time. I will check the entire building." Indeed, Mr. Samo was

moved by his watchman's overwhelming concern for the slaughterer. If he could care so much, the least he could do was look one more time. Mr. Samo returned and searched every nook and cranny in the building and found no one. As he walked by the large meat freezer, he thought to himself, "This freezer is huge enough to hold a person. What if the slaughterer entered the freezer and the door closed on him? Let me take a look and see. Who knows?"

One can only imagine the shock that overcame Mr. Samo when he opened the door to discover not one, but three shochtim, ritual slaughterers, nearly frozen to death. He quickly called an ambulance and rushed the three to the hospital. Apparently, earlier that day, the shochtim had entered the freezer to check the meat and the door slammed shut on them. They banged and yelled for hours, to no avail. They finally gave up and resigned themselves to a certain frozen death. It was just then that Mr. Samo came and discovered them.

A few days later, after the slaughterers were released from the hospital, Mr. Samo approached Alex and asked him, "How did you know for sure that something was amiss, that the slaughterer had not left the building? Furthermore, if you knew about one slaughterer, surely you also knew about the other two."

Alex responded with a deep sense of pride. "Ever since those men arrived from Israel a few months ago, one of them has gone out of his way to greet me in the morning and bid me goodnight at the end of the day. His sincerity and good cheer have been the hallmark of my day. Never has a day gone by that he would not greet me in the morning and say good evening when he left. That day, I remembered that he had greeted me in the morning but had not wished me good night. That is how I knew that he had not yet left the premises. I had no idea that the others were also inside."

What a powerful story! A simple greeting, made with sincerity, not only saved the shochet's own life, it also saved the lives of his two colleagues. This is but one of the far-reaching effects of positive speech.

Speak to Aharon and say to him; When you kindle the lamps. (8:2)

Aharon HaKohen was chagrined that every Nasi participated in the Chanukas HaMishkan, dedicating the Sanctuary, while he and the tribe of Levi had been excluded. Hashem reassured him that his service was greater than theirs, because he was to prepare and kindle the Menorah. We must endeavor to understand how the kindling of the Menorah represents a greater spiritual service than participating in the dedication of the Mishkan. Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, explains that every mitzvah that one performs is generally accompanied by a certain amount of physical benefit or pleasure. This physical dimension detracts from the spiritual dimension of the mitzvah. Indeed, the very fact that a human being is fashioned from earth, catalyzes a partnership of the physical and the spiritual in carrying out every mitzvah or spiritual endeavor. It is almost impossible to perform a mitzvah that does not involve an element of physical gratification. To the extent that one diminishes the physical component, one is thereby able to elevate the spiritual aspect of the mitzvah.

This is the underlying meaning of Hashem's message to Aharon. In the simple act of preparing and kindling the lamps of the Menorah, limited physical benefit is involved. Consequently, this mitzvah has greater spiritual value for the individual who executes it. It is a simple act, unlike that of offering animals for sacrifice.

In his Mesillas Yesharim, the Ramchal elaborates on this theme. He explains that each one of us has the capacity to make our physical body simply a temporary repository for the neshamah, soul. The body should not have more intrinsic significance than a vehicle for the soul to execute its function of fulfilling the Divine wish. The body is not here to be satisfied, but rather, to be maintained, so that it can function at its maximum as an agent for the soul.

In addressing the virtue of taharah, purity, Ramchal explains that purity refers to the perfection of one's heart and thoughts. This means that one should not anticipate the gratification of physical desires in his actions. One's deeds should be performed with intelligence and with reverence for the Almighty. The chassid, pious devotee, about whom the Ramchal speaks, the one whom he considers to be at the zenith of devotion to Hashem, is an individual who partakes of no luxuries or excesses. His food is simple; his clothes are modest. Indeed, his whole way of life bespeaks austerity and unpretentiousness.

Eating the most simple food can be enjoyable, and, indeed, it should be. Food that is tasteless is inedible. Hence, taking pleasure in discerning between the savory and the insipid is a requisite for proper nutrition. There seems to be no escape from enjoying food. This does not preclude the chassid's spiritual ascendancy. When partaking of anything physical, however pleasurable, he must do so with the correct intention - only to fulfill the Divine will. Self-gratification should not be a goal.

This is all part of Adam HaRishon's sin. The Midrash relates that when Adam ate the forbidden fruit for which he was cursed, "The land shall produce thorns and weeds, and you shall eat the vegetation of the land," (Bereishis, 3:18), he began to cry, "I and my animal shall be eating from the same trough," he said. Once Adam had succumbed to temptation and eaten the forbidden fruit, he realized the abyss to which he had fallen, for now his consumption of food was no different than that of the common beast. In attempting to rectify Adam's sin, ideally one should elevate his "achilah," consumption of food, to a level at which even those actions that are essential to survival are not carried out for physical enjoyment, but only to fulfill the Divine wish.

The true chassid views all physical behavior as a concession to existence, which should be carried out grudgingly. One might think that the concept is something unusual, which applies to a previous generation. This is not true. The true tzaddikim of every generation attain this zenith of service. Indeed, everyone is capable of acting in this manner, commensurate with his own level. We do not have to immerse ourselves in total self-gratification! Every morsel that we give up for Hashem elevates our spiritual plateau. This alone should more than compensate for the loss of some enjoyment.

*Miriam and Aharon spoke about Moshe regarding the Cushite woman he had taken...Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble...Why did you not fear to speak about My servant, about Moshe?
(12:1,3,8)*

In Hilchos De'os the Rambam defines a "holech rochil" talebearer, a baal lashon hora, slanderer, as one who maliciously spreads disparaging information about an individual. This applies even if the tale he bears is true. He adds that one who speaks lashon hora as a joke, to poke fun innocuously without malice, is still viewed as "touching" on lashon hora. It is considered avak lashon hora, "dust" of lashon hora. It seems clear from the Rambam, however, that unless one speaks lashon hora maliciously, out of hatred for his victim, he does not transgress the Biblical injunction against lashon hora. This is supported by the fact that the Chafetz Chaim considers avak lashon hora as being an issur

midRabbanan, a Rabbinic prohibition.

Let us focus on Miriam's "speaking" against Moshe. In Hilchos Tumaas Tzaraas the Rambam perceives the incident of Miriam's lashon hora against Moshe as paradigmatic of the lashon hora whose offender is visited with tzaraas, a spiritually induced form of leprosy. Indeed, he cites Miriam's speaking about Moshe as serving as a lesson for us all regarding the effect of slanderous speech. If we were to analyze what occurred with Miriam, her behavior would not coincide with the severity of the punishment. Miriam spoke about her younger brother, whom she revered and admired. She risked her life to save him from certain death when he was placed in the river. She did not intend to hurt him in any way. Actually, her error was only in comparing him to other prophets and not realizing that he was in a class all by himself. Moshe himself certainly did not harbor any complaints whatsoever against his sister. Yet, she still suffered with tzaraas. How much more so should we be concerned when we speak lashon hora, when we maliciously slander innocent people.

In other words, Miriam's lashon hora should serve as a strong deterrent, a penetrating lesson for those who would dare to speak inappropriately of others. Now that we have established that Miriam's lashon hora was innocuous and without malice, why was she so harshly punished? Why is her slander regarded as a standard for evil speech?

Horav Shmuel Truvitz, zl, finds the root of the sin in Hashem's reprimand to Aharon and Miriam. "Why did you not fear to speak about My servant, about Moshe?" These glaring words bespeak the depth of their sin. They did not fear speaking about Moshe! Did they not realize who Moshe was, what he represented; his exalted position, unparalleled virtue and piety; and unusual relationship with Hashem? How did they dare to speak about Moshe as if he were just another human being? They did not properly appreciate his preeminence. They placed him on the same pedestal as other neviim, prophets. This in itself is a grave error, indicating their inaccurate perception of Moshe's greatness.

This is the essence of lashon hora: We neither fully realize, nor appreciate, an individual's true value. Aharon and Miriam underestimated Moshe; we, likewise, frequently do not judge people in their full context. We do not ascribe to them their proper prestige and recognition. A failure to hold an individual in his proper esteem is the seed from which lashon hora germinates.

This idea applies to all forms of lashon hora. The specific prohibition concerns actual speech, articulating slander against someone. The origin of the transgression, however, lies in one's blatant disregard, his lack of cognizance of his fellowman's value. The meraglim, spies, who returned from their mission with disparaging comments about Eretz Yisrael, catalyzed Klal Yisrael's mournful response and consequent rebellion against their leadership, to the extent that they impugned Hashem's "ability" to bring the nation into the Promised Land. The punishment for the lashon hora and its tragic results was forty years of wandering in the desert, parallel to the forty days of the spy mission. What connects the lashon hora which they spoke and their forty days of surveillance? Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that it was the forty days of looking with "closed eyes", their myopic vision in not correctly perceiving Hashem's precious gift to them, that instigated their slanderous speech. The sin was slander - the cause was a lack of true perception, a flawed outlook, an inappreciation of the sacredness and uniqueness of Eretz Yisrael. While it was the spies that slandered, the people's response, their unwarranted weeping and complaining, indicated their affinity with the spies and agreement with their slander.

It is sad to say that people have not changed very much. We still speak lashon hora, and the origin of our disparaging comments has not changed - we disregard people. This is especially true in

regard to the respect and admiration we should have for the Torah scholar, the educator, the one who devotes his life to Torah endeavor. Whether it is a lack of perception on our part, a failure to appreciate the positive and vital role they play in sustaining the spiritual fibre of the Jewish community, or just plain envy, some of us go out of their way to seek out the negative, to exploit a shortcoming, to accentuate any failing that might exist. Perhaps if we work on the origins, the results might be different.

Not so in my servant Moshe; in My entire house he is trusted. (12:7)

The Torah emphasizes the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu's nevuah, prophesy, is unlike that of other prophets, such as, Aharon and Miriam. Once Horav Simcha Zelig Reiger, zl, the Av Bais Din of Brisk asked Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, the significance of the term, "b'chol baisi neeman hu," "in My entire house he is trusted," in regard to Moshe's level of prophesy. Indeed, in his Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah in which he enumerates the various differences between Moshe's nevuah and that of other prophets, the Rambam does not mention the concept of "in My entire house he is trusted."

Rav Chaim explained that when each of the neviim, prophets, conveyed his prophesy, he prefaced his message with the words, "ko amar Hashem," "so says Hashem," identifying the source of his prophecy. He was indicating that he was following Hashem's directive in his communication. Indeed, if the individual did not dwell on the fact that it was Hashem Who commanded him to deliver this message, it was not considered to be a prophesy from Hashem. Thus, Klal Yisrael was not obligated to accept this message. On the other hand, because of Moshe's unusual status as a ben-bayis, member of Hashem's household, he did not need to preface his message with these words. It was understood that every nevuah that Moshe expressed was from Hashem's mouth. Moshe Rabbeinu's word was considered synonymous with Hashem's word. It was a given that what he said originated from the Almighty.

Rav Chaim explained this phenomenon in the following manner. The neviim did not limit their speech to prophesy. They had other conversations that, although spiritual in nature and oriented towards a more sublime goal, did not constitute prophesy. Consequently, when they were conveying Hashem's message, it was necessary for them to differentiate this speech from the others. Moshe Rabbeinu spoke only nevuas Hashem. Because everything that exited his mouth was Torah, it was not necessary to cite the source. Everyone knew that whatever Moshe uttered was transmitted from the Almighty.

What an incredible statement: Moshe embodied the highest form of nevuah, the closest relationship with Hashem. Nothing mundane existed in his sphere. His word was kulo Torah, all Torah. He represented it; he embodied it; he lived it. We may suggest that this is the idea behind Daas Torah, the wisdom that results from total immersion in Torah. One who has Daas Torah is an individual whose Torah values are integrated into his personality, with his understanding of Torah as the frame of reference for all of his rulings for Klal Yisrael, encompassing the community and the individual. As Moshe Rabbeinu was integral to Hashem's household, to the point that every word he spoke was the word of Hashem, so, too, does the Torah personality form a unified entity with the Torah, his life comprising a repository of its tradition.

This towering personality does not emerge overnight. It is the product of endless hours of study and thought, a brilliant mind coupled with an intensity of concentration. Furthermore, as the Maharal explains, one who studies Torah lishmah, for its own sake, becomes one entity with the Torah, with the

power of the Torah becoming his power. Conversely, one who studies Torah for ulterior motives, for intellectual purposes or simply to become erudite in the fascinating and mind-developing sea of Torah knowledge, remains detached from the Torah. Thus, he does not benefit from any of the characteristics endemic to Torah proficiency. The authority that ensues with Daas Torah is the reward, the product of years of dedication, determination and diligence, studying Torah lishmah, coupled with yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. The power of authority is never the goal, since this would undermine the entire process.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains that Daas Torah is measured not as much by one's knowledge as by one's striving and yearning to acquire, to uncover, to plumb the depths of Torah. Daas Torah in stagnation is not Daas Torah. It must emanate from vibrancy and perpetual renewal of one's Torah knowledge.

Many people have become accomplished Torah scholars, but not gedolim. To achieve the distinction of gadlus ba'Torah one must become integrated with the Torah, his character traits and personality perfected by its lessons.

There is yet one other aspect that complements this individual's scholarship and erudition; a special gift. This gift from the Almighty to those who fear and cling to Him is "Sod Hashem L'yiraiav," the Divine secrets that Hashem imparts to those who fear Him. This is a critical component of the constitution of a gadol ba'Torah, Torah leader, guiding him in ways that cannot be limited to scholarship alone. The Torah authority who expounds Daas Torah is uniquely equipped to address the various problems from all facets of the entire spectrum of life. He is Divinely inspired, because he is Divinely connected.

Yet, there are people who refuse to accept or respect Daas Torah, claiming that acceding to the authority invested in individuals detracts from one's intellectual ability to question and to challenge. They view deferring to the wisdom and Torah perspective of gedolei Yisrael as an affront to their own intelligence. The hostility towards accepting Daas Torah stems from an almost childlike resistance to authority. The resentment among those who challenge Daas Torah is pernicious and, at times, bizarre. This is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, it dates back to Dasan and Aviram who were Moshe Rabbeinu's nemeses in Egypt and the wilderness. As Moshe triumphed then, so, too, will Daas Torah prevail over its antagonists. As our link to eternal truth, Daas Torah is our assurance that the Torah as given to us on Har Sinai will remain unsullied and that the chain of Torah transmission will continue uninterrupted. It represents our bond with the past, providing a measure of tranquility when we face the challenges and vicissitudes of the present. Indeed, Daas Torah is our only hope for the future.

And Aharon did so...as Hashem had commanded Moshe. (8:3)

Rashi explains that the Torah presents the notion of Aharon doing as he had been instructed in order to praise Aharon, to demonstrate that he had not deviated. These words have become famous in their description of the greatness of Aharon HaKohen: "He did not deviate." From what did he not deviate? Obviously, the Torah does not have to tell us that Aharon followed Hashem's command. Maharel explains that Aharon could have delegated the kindling of the Menorah to one of the other Kohanim. After all, it did involve a certain amount of menial labor in preparing the wicks and dealing with the soot and oil. Yet, it did not bother Aharon. He was honored to comply with Hashem's command. Horav Bunim Mi'Pesischa, zl, interprets Aharon's "not deviating" as applying to Aharon

himself. Despite his exalted position as the person who lit the Menorah, he did not change. He remained the same warm, humble person he had always been. His new position did not transform him.

Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, Mi'Berditchev, explains that any person who would be granted the incredible opportunity to light the Menorah would be overcome with emotion and excitement. Certainly, having been selected to be the one to light the Menorah is a compelling experience. It would seem that the chosen individual would be extremely nervous and quite possibly not physically in control. He would be so overwhelmed with passion and enthusiasm that he might spill some of the oil and soak the wicks. Not Aharon HaKohen. He was in complete control. Never once did he falter, never did he shake. He stood before Hashem and lit the Menorah with complete confidence, his emotions restrained out of respect for the Divine Service.

We might tend to overlook another aspect of Aharon's emotion. Horav Ovadiah Yosef, Shlita, notes that Aharon was to enter the Kodosh Hakadoshim, Holy of Holies, the place where his two precious sons, Nadav and Avihu, had died on the very day of their inauguration into the Priesthood. Certainly, Aharon was filled with great pain and sorrow as he entered this place. He was to confront the tragedy over again. As he looked around the room, he saw his sons; he saw them being consumed by the Heavenly Fire. Any lesser person would have been so overcome with emotion he probably would not be able to come face to face with the reality of the tragedy. Not Aharon HaKohen, the first Kohen Gadol, who personified and exemplified gadlus, greatness, to the fullest extent of the word. He did not flinch; he did not cry; he did not deviate from that which was expected of the Kohen Gadol. He accepted the Divine command to light the Menorah, just as he had accepted the Divine decree that his sons prematurely leave the world under such tragic circumstances. This is true gadlus.

Last, Vayakhel Moshe offers an interpretation based upon an exegesis quoted from the Gaon M'Vilna. The commentators question the text of the Kiddushin when -- as a man places the ring on his bride's finger -- he says, "Behold, you are consecrated to me by means of this ring, according to the ritual of Moshe and Yisrael." "Daas Moshe v'Yisrael," the ritual of Moshe and Yisrael, is a reference to the Torah. Why would we draw a parallel between the Kiddushin, marriage ceremony of a woman, and the Torah?

The Gaon explains that when one hears a Torah thought from his friend which he already knows, he should not tell him, "I already know that." He should always view every dvar Torah, word of Torah, as novel, original, a brand new idea. This is the holiness of Torah. It is always viewed as something fresh, new and exciting.

The same notion applies to marriage. Husband and wife are, hopefully, together for the rest of their lives. Day in and day out, they are together. There is always the fear that they might get "used" to each other; the excitement, the spark of life that used to be there might be extinguished. The Torah warns us against this. Marriage is like the Torah: We must always view it as something new, as one long honeymoon.

The risk was that Aharon HaKohen might become complacent by lighting the candles day in and day out. The Torah tells us that Aharon's enthusiasm did not wane - even momentarily. The love and excitement that permeated him on that auspicious first day continued throughout his tenure as Kohen Gadol.

The people were like those who complain/ who seek pretexts of evil in the ears of Hashem. (11:11)

Some event always seems to interfere with Klal Yisrael's happiness. Obviously, this statement is relative to their lofty spiritual level. Every infraction, regardless of its size, tainted their spirituality. In this situation, we find them complaining, actually looking for something about which to complain. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, understands "misonenim" to be a derivative of "onen," a mourner, prior to burial. Moshe Rabbeinu greeted the opportunity to serve Hashem under any circumstances; he was willing to be led through wilderness and desert. His flock, however, was not. Spiritual perfection eluded them. They viewed themselves to be already dead, and they were mourning themselves! They felt cut off from the outside world. The cloud hovering over their camp and the Aron Ha'Kodesh, as well as the requirements for living in their proximity -- only made them feel more inferior. They were eluding life. They did not view their proximity to Hashem as an opportunity for a higher, fuller and happier life, but, rather, an annoyance. In accord with this definition of "misonenim," we may suggest that "mourning" over oneself is the root of all problems. Some people are just not happy. They seek a respite from their self-created problems; they look for a panacea to their ills, and it eludes them. One who goes through life in "mourning," seeking fault and finding it, is on a course of self-destruction.

The Imrei Emes derives from the words, "in the ears of Hashem," that their complaints never even exited their mouths. No human heard them. Only Hashem "heard" them. The Yodea Machashavos, One Who knows everyone's thoughts, knew what was going on in their minds. They did not have to articulate their criticism; Hashem knew it. In other words, they had an attitude problem. One can perform mitzvos, serve Hashem, be strictly observant to the letter of the law, but if his attitude is bitter, his service to Hashem is lacking.

This attitude is not endemic only to that generation. Regrettably, it has become common in contemporary times. People who seemingly have a good life, who have no reason to complain, walk around as if the world is coming to an end. A Jew should view life with a positive outlook. The Chidushei HaRim says that the realization alone that one is a member of the Am Ha'Mivchar, Chosen People, is sufficient reason for abundant joy. A great tzaddik once remarked that it is worth living on this earth for an entire lifetime just to once put Tefillin on!

Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita, relates that he heard the following from Horav Yechezkel Abramski, zl, who expounded on his experiences during his internment in Siberia: He was subjected to cruel and difficult labor under the most trying conditions. Upon arising one morning, he was about to begin to recite the "Modeh Ani," "I am gratefully thankful," thanking Hashem for returning his soul to him. Suddenly, he stopped to think, asking himself, "Am I really thanking Hashem for returning my soul? Is this a life?" What use was this neshamah Hashem was returning to him? Certainly, today would not bring with it any less labor than the day before had. The proverbial light at the end of the tunnel was not yet apparent. What did he really gain from his continued existence that it was worth his reciting, "Modeh Ani"? Then he understood the last words of the phrase, "raboh emunasehcha," abundant in Your faithfulness. That golden opportunity granted to each person - daily - the opportunity to cling to Hashem, is the greatest reason for "Modeh Ani," giving thanks. Just to be able to attach ourselves to Hashem, to imbue our lives with emunah in Him, is more than sufficient reason for living. Perhaps, in our low moments of dejection, when things just do not seem to be going the way we would like, we might think about this and realize how much we have to be thankful for.

We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge. (11:5)

The phrase "free of charge," is ambiguous. Were fish considered free because they were so

plentiful in Egypt? Or is the idea that Hashem gave Bnai Yisroel the fish with "no strings attached," no obligation to perform mitzvos? In either case, we must endeavor to understand Klal Yisrael's attitude. This was the generation that stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah. They were privy to the most incredible revelation of the Almighty. Indeed, Chazal emphasize that the simple maidservant who stood at Krias Yam Suf, the splitting of the Red Sea, experienced a greater revelation of G-d than Yechezkel ha'Navi, the great prophet whose prophecies concerning the Heavenly images were unequaled. How could such a distinguished nation, who had experienced so much, rebel so soon?

Simply, we derive from here that regardless of who one is -- or the distinction of his spiritual achievements -- at any time, if he is not careful, he can regress and return to his sinful past. One must always be concerned that he might slip and fall into the abyss of sin. Horav Moshe Rosenstein, zl, the mashgiach of Yeshivas Lomza; explains that once one has reached a lofty spiritual plateau it is unlikely that he will regress. In fact, we rarely find any of our gedolim, Torah giants, giving in to their physical/material tendencies. Do we ever find a Navi, prophet, longing for a material delicacy? He explains that it all depends upon the genesis of one's spiritual development. If it was the result of toil and total commitment, then it has imbued the individual's inner psyche, transforming him into a total ben Torah. The members of the generation of the wilderness received their level of prophecy as a gift from the Almighty. They did not work for it; they did not toil for it. It was granted to them as a result of Hashem's benevolence. They themselves did not transform. Thus, when they were confronted with challenge, they immediately resorted to their old persona. As long as things were going well, Klal Yisrael maintained their commitment. When they were confronted with challenge and adversity, they did not have the inner spiritual fortitude to overcome the challenge. Only when we work for our spiritual achievements do they become assimilated into our personality.

A similar exegesis is rendered regarding the Shoham and Milluim stones contributed by the Nesiim, Princes, towards the Mishkan. These stones symbolized the height of holiness; they were placed in the Breastplate and shoulder straps of the Kohen Gadol's vestments. Interestingly, when the Torah details the various contributions for the Mishkan, these stones are mentioned last. One would think that such sacred objects would be given a greater place of distinction. Horav Yosef Leib Nendik, zl, who was a preeminent mashgiach in a number of Lithuanian yeshivos prior to World War II, explains that these stones were granted to the Nesiim by special "messenger" - they were left for them by Heavenly clouds, complete and ready to be used. While these stones that were derived in such an unusual and unique manner, must have reflected a sublime level of holiness, they still lacked the ingredients of labor and toil. Hashem desires and appreciates human input. The fruits of one's labor have greater significance before the Almighty than stones, carried by Heavenly messenger. One's own labor evinces love and devotion, attributes for which there are no replacements.

And I will take from the spirit which is on you and place it on them, and they shall bear with you the burden of the people. (11:17)

It was just too much to bear. Moshe listened to the grievances of the people regarding the manna. They were unfounded; but is that not the nature of most complaints? Yet, Moshe told Hashem, it was too much for one person to cope with alone. Hashem responded by instructing Moshe to select seventy distinguished elders, men worthy of distinction, who would share in the leadership. Hashem promised to imbue these leaders with the greatness of spirit essential for assisting Moshe with shepherding the Jewish People.

In explaining the word, "v'atzalti", and I will take (from the spirit), Rashi cites Targum Onkelos who translates this as, "And I will make them great from the spirit which is on you." This presents a difficulty. How would this help Moshe? If his spirit was not sufficient for him to bear the burdens of the people, evidently sharing it with others would not make it stronger. How would "sharing" have made it easier?

Rashi provides us with a meaningful answer, by comparing Moshe Rabbeinu to a candle. Regardless of how many candles are lit from the original candle, its light remains as strong and as bright as before. Hashem would use Moshe's spirit as a vehicle to imbue others; their spirits would be kindled, but his would remain unchanged. Together they would carry the burden of the nation.

What a remarkable lesson for educating our children/students! Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, derives an important principle in education from Rashi. A rebbe/teacher cannot give a child/student new abilities. He can and should awaken the latent potential within his charge. By channeling this potential towards appropriate and realistic goals, he will succeed in his G-d-given task.

When you kindle the Menorah, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light. (8:2)

Rashi addresses the juxtaposition of parashas ha'Menorah upon the end of the previous parsha. The latter detailed the korbanos, offerings of the Nesiim for the chanukas ha'Mizbayach. When Aharon noticed the involvement of the Nesiim in the dedication, he became chagrined that neither he nor any member of his tribe had been included. It is not that he was jealous; he simply desired to have a part in this sacred inauguration. Hashem calmed him, saying, "Yours is greater than theirs, for you will light the Menorah." The Ramban explains that the Mishkan/Bais Ha'Mikdash would not always be around. Regrettably, it was destined to be destroyed and the korbanos offered on the Altar halted. We will, however, continue to light the candles of the menorah in remembrance of the miracle of Chanukah.

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, offers an alternative response to this question. During the dedication of the Mizbayach, after everyone had contributed heavily toward the Mishkan and the Nesiim had offered their korbanos toward the Mizbayach, Aharon realized that no member of his tribe had shared in this lofty endeavor. Perhaps the klal was truly holy and it was they -- not Shevet Levi -- who had "carried" the nation. After all, the Leviim did not go to war and had no land. To a great extent they were separated from the nation. What had their contribution been? How did they share in the eternity of Am Yisrael?

Hashem told Aharon, "Yours is still greater than theirs. You kindle the Menorah." Your work causes the light of Torah to penetrate throughout the nation. It is conceivable to build a Mikdash that is both esthetically appealing and spiritually holy, but will remain "dark" and lifeless unless the light of the Menorah, symbolizing ohr ha'Torah, is kindled. When Moshe walked into the Mishkan, only he could hear the voice of Hashem. There is no question that without the contributions of so many, the Mishkan would not have been a reality. Yet, a building that does not shine forth, in which Torah is not being studied, is nothing more than a mausoleum. Yes, Aharon had the greatest and loftiest position in the Mishkan. By lighting the Menorah, he validated the contributions of those who had preceded him. The light of Torah which emanated from the Mishkan lit up the hearts and minds of Klal Yisrael. The edifice is important, but let us not forget its purpose.

From fifty years of age, he shall withdraw from the legion of work and no longer work. (8:25)

While the Levi must "retire" at age fifty from the heavy labor of carrying the holy vessels on his shoulders, he continues to perform the remainder of Levite services, such as singing, closing the gates and loading the wagons. In Pirkei Avos 5:21, the Tanna addresses the various stages of an individual's life. At age fifty, his advice is valued. The Bartenura cites this pasuk regarding the Levi who leaves the workforce and stays on to help his fellow Leviim. He serves them through the advice he gives them. The experience he has gathered throughout the years is of great value to the "freshmen" Leviim. What type of advice is he giving them?

In response to this question, the Chidushei Ha'rim, was wont to tell the following story: A man once became lost in the forest. For days on end he wandered from place to place with no hope of finding the exit to the forest. Suddenly, he saw an old man coming toward him. Imagine his joy at this encounter; he was saved! He asked the man, "Can you direct me to the exit?" "I am sorry," answered the man, "I have been wandering in this forest for over seventy years and I have still not found a way out. In one way, however, I can help you. I can tell you where I have been so that you will not go there and make the same mistake that I did. You will have to find the correct way out on your own." This is the type of advice that the Levi offered. He was in charge of the "gates," telling the younger Leviim where not to go. His experience was invaluable in that he was able to guide others to distance themselves from those "gates"/areas that might harm them.

On the day the Mishkan was set up, the cloud covered the Mishkan...And in the evening there would be upon the Mishkan like a fiery appearance until morning. (9:15)

This is the way it always was: a cloud by day and a fire at night. Horav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, zl, says this is a foreshadowing of our future: a cloud by day and a fire at night. When man is doing well, when his success is encouraging, the sun shines brilliantly before him. At such a time, he must remember that it is not always going to be like this. There will be times when the cloud will cover the sunshine, and the radiance will not penetrate. Conversely, he who is plagued with suffering, overcome with pain and affliction, should reflect upon the good times. He should never give up. Even in his darkest hour the fire will burn brightly, lighting up his life. He must have faith in the Almighty.

The Krias Shema of the morning and the evening are similar. In the morning, when the sun is shining and life seems to be idyllic, remember, "Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad." He gives strength - whatever success you enjoy is His gift which He can take back at any time if you do not use it properly. In the evening, we recite Krias Shema to affirm our faith in Hashem during periods of darkness, that the grief to which Hashem subjects us is l'tov, for the good.

The Mishkan was an edifice, but it was to be a part of every person. It was to reside in the heart of every Jew. The lesson of the fire and the cloud was to imbue Klal Yisrael with faith in the Almighty that times may change, but Hashem is always present.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, explains that this is the reason that during the Pesach Seder, we refer to the Marror after the Korban Pesach and the Matzoh. One would think that we address the affliction prior to discussing our freedom from bondage. The Marror, symbolizing the bitterness of the slavery, should follow after Pesach and Matzoh, which signify our liberation. According to the above

insight, we understand the importance of relating to the Marror during our liberation. We should remember the bitterness during our moments of joy, so that we will remember our joy during those moments when Hashem tests our faith.

Moshe said to him, "Are you being zealous for my sake ? Would that the entire people of Hashem would be prophets." (11:29)

When Moshe delegated authority to the seventy Elders, he was teaching a significant lesson regarding the dissemination of Torah throughout Klal Yisrael. Moshe brought the Elders to his own tent. This was the tent from which he taught Torah, from which the "bottom line" in halachah was decided and disseminated for one purpose - to instruct the elders in their goal as teachers of Klal Yisrael. They were given the lofty responsibility of transmitting Torah throughout Klal Yisrael. Indeed, Chazal say that the day of the appointment of the Zekeinim, Elders, was as beloved to Hashem as the day He gave the Torah. Horav Y.A. Hershovitz, zl, explains that as long as the Zekeinim had not been nominated to accept the Torah Shebaal Peh, Oral Law, from Moshe to teach and circulate it throughout the nation, the Written Law had no purpose. Without teachers, the Torah would be forgotten! Only through the Elders of that generation -- and every generation thereafter -- does the Torah have a kiyum, is upheld and adhered to.

For this reason, Moshe's response to Yehoshua is written in the middle of the Torah's recording of the induction of the Zekeinim. Moshe tells Yehoshua that the function of the Torah teachers is to assure that each individual Jew achieves the zenith of spirituality, so that he no longer needs his rebbe, teacher, to instruct him. He has become capable of his own instruction; he is prepared to teach others. This has been the function of our Zekeinim throughout the generations. They have been the vehicle through which the Torah has been transmitted, preparing each generation to transmit our heritage to the next.

A hidden danger, however, lurks in this process. The Elders might get "carried away," thinking that they are equal to Moshe. They might teach laws that they did not hear from Moshe. If they sense that Hashem has inspired them with Moshe's spirit of kedushah, they might no longer need Moshe. They could do it on their own. No longer would we have one Torah with one standard, there would be many Toros - each one using his own perspective to develop his own position in Torah law. This tragedy must be prevented.

Thus, Hashem Yisborach proclaimed to Klal Yisrael, "Not so is my servant Moshe; in My entire house he is to be the trusted one,"(12:7). Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential teacher and Navi, is different. As virtuous as any Navi, Moshe is far greater. "B'chol beisi nee'man hu," "In My entire house he is the trusted one." Aharon and Miriam, in whose merit we enjoyed the Ananei Ha'kavod -- "Clouds of Glory" -- and the well of Miriam, preceded Moshe in prophecy. Yet, neither was as great as he. When they thought they were equal to him, that they could question his behavior, Hashem immediately reproved them. Moshe is different; he is in a category of his own. Miriam was punished. She conceded her error and lamented her transgression. All of Klal Yisrael waited for her to recover, so that forever after it would be acknowledged that Moshe Rabbeinu is different. No Navi, no sage, regardless of his virtue, holiness and brilliance, can ever compare himself to Moshe. No halachah that has not been transmitted directly from Moshe -- or derived through the hermaneutic rules that were given to Moshe on Har Sinai -- is acceptable. There is one Toras Moshe - the one that Hashem Yisborach gave to Moshe Rabbeinu on Har Sinai. It is as immutable and eternal as Hashem, Himself.

And the man Moshe was exceedingly humble. (12:3)

The word "v'ha'ish," "and the man," seems to be superfluous. It should have been written, "and Moshe." Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, cites the pasuk in Shmuel I, 15:17, "Though you are small in your own eyes, you are the head of the tribes of Yisrael," in which the Navi criticizes Shaul ha'Melech for being overly humble. In the end, this misplaced humility resulted in Shmuel telling Shaul, "You have rejected the word of G-d." Evidently, the only blemish to be found on Shaul's character was his excessive humility. Should this have been sufficient cause for the Navi to so severely censure Shaul?

We see from here that while humility may be an impressive virtue, it must be tempered with a balance of authority. Uncontrolled, humility can have tragic results, as seen in Shaul's situation. Hashem Yisborach creates man in such a manner that he is balanced. If an individual acts excessively to either extreme, if he is too humble or if he gets carried away with a desire for power, he tips the delicate balance. Then he may be consumed by this character trait.

This is the reason that the Torah emphasizes the "ish", "man," Moshe, a person who was in total control of himself. He kept within his limits. While in his heart he was the epitome of humility, he knew full well his value. Yet, he realized that as the accepted leader of Klal Yisrael, he must maintain a presence befitting his lofty position.

Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, maintains that the Torah's description of Moshe as an anav, characterizes his essence. It was Moshe's remarkable humility that rendered him worthy of his role as Klal Yisrael's leader. Indeed, in the Talmud Eruvin 13b, Chazal suggest that the reason that the halachah is most always decided according to Bais Hillel is their self-effacing nature. In his sefer, Shem Hagedolim, the Chidah writes that he heard the following from a great Jew, who had heard from a group of elders who had lived during the time of the Arizal. In the generation of the Bais Yosef, Heaven decreed that someone should codify the laws of the Torah and Talmud. Three great tzaddikim lived in that generation who were capable and worthy of authorizing the Shulchan Aruch. Hashem "decided" that the clear choice for the Shulchan Aruch's "authorship" was the Bais Yosef, as a result of his incredible humility. Never would he speak ill of anyone with whom he did not agree halachically! Imagine, the Shulchan Aruch, by which every Jew lives, the standard by which a Jew maintains his religious observance, was authored by the Bais Yosef because of his humility! This perspective supports the crucial role that - middos, character refinement - plays in the development of a true ben Torah and Torah scholar.

Speak to Aharon...When you kindle the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps light. (8:2)

Rashi addresses the relationship between Aharon's lighting the Menorah and the previous parsha, which recounts the offerings of nesiim, princes, for the dedication of the Mizbayach. He says that Aharon was upset that neither he, nor any member of shevet Levi, was included in the dedication. Hashem comforted Aharon saying that his service, preparing and kindling the Menorah, was more significant than theirs. We wonder at Aharon's chagrin. Obviously, his reaction must have had some validity, as Hashem responded by comforting him. We must also endeavor to understand the meaning

of the phrase, "Yours is greater/more significant than theirs." This comment seems to belittle the nesiim.

Horav Dov Eliezerov, Shlita, offers a number of approaches towards understanding Aharon's reaction and Hashem's response. He contends that the significance of the nesiim's korbanos lay in the fact that all of the nesiim participated together to determine the most propitious way to dedicate the Mizbayach. Nesanel ben Tzuar, of the tribe of Yissachar, spoke up at the meeting and advised them concerning the appropriate manner of dedicating the Mizbayach. When Aharon took note of the fact that the nesiim were working in unison, and he had been excluded, he was distressed. Perhaps he was doing something wrong. Was he suitable to be Kohen Gadol? If yes, why had he been excluded from their meeting?

Hashem told Aharon, "Do not concern yourself, for your service is greater than theirs. Do not think that your exclusion was an expression of a negative opinion of you. On the contrary, specifically because the nesiim held you in such esteem they omitted you from the Chanukas Hamizbayach." In the eyes of the nesiim, Aharon's tasks were in a unique class. They included: being Kohen Gadol; offering korbanos on behalf of the entire Jewish people; preparing and kindling the Menorah whose light emanated outward towards Am Yisrael. Consequently, they did not invite Aharon to join with them. Aharon's emotions were justified. The nesiim's action, in turn, also had validity. Hence, Hashem intervened, offering comfort to Aharon.

In his second answer, Horav Eliezerov distinguishes the two disparate approaches towards serving Hashem which were represented by the nesiim and Aharon Hakohen. By his very nature, Aharon was oheiv shalom v'rodef shalom; he loved and pursued peace. He reached out to all Jews, seeking to bring them closer to Torah. The nesiim, however, felt that a man is responsible to elevate himself, to demand of himself that he attain the level required to bring a korban to Hashem. Aharon brought himself down to the level of the people. In contrast, the nesiim ascended above them. When the nesiim decided to convene a meeting to discuss the correct protocol for dedicating the Mizbayach, Aharon thought they were telling him that his derech, approach, for avodas Hashem was not acceptable. Is it any wonder that he became distraught?

Hashem responded to Aharon that, indeed, the nesiim's form of avodas Hashem was correct for the dor hamidbar, the generation that had sojourned in the desert and received the Torah. Would it be equally appropriate for the ensuing generations that would not attain such spiritual ascendance? Who would reach out to them and bring them closer to the Torah? Aharon's kindling of the Menorah symbolized bringing the light of Torah into all homes. Carrying the message of Torah to the dark recesses of all Jewish hearts and minds was an endeavor that was not limited to that particular time. It was everlasting. "Shelcha gedolah m'shelahem," "Yours is truly greater than theirs," because its need traverses the generations.

This is the workmanship of the Menorah...according to the vision that Hashem showed Moshe, so did he make the Menorah. (8:4)

Chazal tell us that Moshe had difficulty in forging the Menorah. They say that Hashem "showed" Moshe by pointing a "finger" and describing the exact image of the Menorah. In the end, according to one statement of Chazal, Moshe threw the talent of gold into the fire and a finished Menorah emerged. A number of explanations address Moshe's difficulty in perceiving the image of the

Menorah. Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, views this from an homiletic point of view. He suggests an analogy between the fabrication of the Menorah and two people who were given the necessary materials for building a house. Each was supplied with wood, mortar, nails, bricks, etc. There was one problem - neither one knew anything about building a house. What did they do? One of them went to a builder to be taught "housebuilding." After awhile he felt proficient enough to undertake building the house on his own. The other man decided to take a "course" in "self-study;" he undertook to build the house without any instruction. He decided to use common sense and through trial and error to create a suitable home for himself. He was certainly correct about the trial and error approach. Indeed, he became an accomplished builder. By the time he "graduated" from his self-study program, however, he no longer had enough material left to build the house. The trial and error program had nearly depleted his resources.

The same concept can be applied to life. The time is short, and the amount we must accomplish is great. We have no time for error. When the moment comes that we confront the truth at the end of our lives, we will regretfully see how much time we have wasted. Hashem, therefore, gave us His Torah, which is our blueprint for life. By following its commands and dictates, we learn the correct way to live, thereby circumventing any errors we might have committed on our own.

The Menorah represents Hashem's Torah. Hashem pointed to the Menorah and told Moshe, "Follow this; look through the wisdom of Torah, Hashem's Heavenly mirror of life. See what it has to tell you. The 'light' of Torah will guide you and show you how to live."

They journeyed from the mountain of Hashem a three day journey and the Aron of the covenant journeyed before them...to search out for them a resting place. (10:33)

Rashi contends that the "Aron Bris Hashem" -- which was taken out with Bnei Yisrael when they went to battle -- contained the broken Luchos. The "Shivrei Luchos" retained a unique power which served as a protective armor when Bnei Yisrael were in a difficult predicament. We must endeavor to understand why the Aron that contained the broken Luchos accompanied Bnei Yisrael in time of war. What was the significance of the Shivrei Luchos? What influence did they maintain over the people?

We suggest that the broken Luchos represent the integrity of Torah and each Jew's mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, to preserve that integrity. The Almighty fashioned the Luchos and gave them to Moshe Rabbeinu. They represented the epitome of Torah. Chazal tell us that had they not been broken, the level of Torah-learning accessible to the individual would have been incredible. Indeed, Torah would never be forgotten. When Moshe broke the Luchos, Klal Yisrael's bond to Torah was weakened. Torah was no longer an integral part of them. In the future, they would be required to toil to understand and to review and to remember its profundities. Yet, Moshe broke them, and he was commended for his grave action. Why? What was accomplished by breaking the Luchos that would compensate for the irreparable loss produced by his act?

When Moshe descended the mountain and witnessed Klal Yisrael's appalling behavior, their idol worship and reveling, he was shocked. He saw a nation that felt prepared to receive the Torah, but was not ready to give up its desires for material excess. He saw a nation that behaved in a manner unbecoming a people who had received the Torah. The revelry and debauchery that reigned was not what one would expect from decent people, let alone Am Yisrael. By breaking the Luchos, he sent a

clear message; Torah is different. It is uncompromising; it does not yield to one's desires or bend to one's passions. You cannot have both. If you choose to live like a hedon, then you shatter the Luchos.

Moshe believed in the Torah. He understood its depth, appreciating the beauty and serenity of a Torah way of life. He knew that Torah is unequivocal. Torah remains intact. Man cannot change or append it. Moshe was willing to break the Luchos in order to teach Klal Yisrael that no false gods, no alien values, no strange desires can coexist with the Torah.

This integrity of Torah is preserved in the shattered shards that remained of the Luchos. They attested to Moshe's heroism, his devotion to Torah, and his love of the Torah and the people who received it. They represent Torah in its pristine form, unembellished, pure and unpolluted by alien interpretations and self-serving renderings of the text. This force, the power of truth, preceded the people into battle.

Horav Chaim Pardes, Shlita, cites the Talmud Kesubos 104A, which relates the last moments of Rabbi Yehudah Ha'Nasi's life. Chazal describe the "struggle" between the spiritual forces that sought to return the holy neshamah to its source and the tzadikim of this world who prayed fervently that he be spared. The text of Talmud Bavli reads, "And the Aron Hakodesh was captured," which is a reference to Rabbi Yehudah Ha'Nasi who was the embodiment of Torah as represented by the Aron Hakodesh. In the Talmud Yerushalmi the text reads, "The Luchos were grabbed." Both texts obviously refer to the lofty ideal to which Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi was compared. The Bavli focuses on the external Aron Hakodesh, whereas the Yerushalmi emphasizes the essence of the Aron - the Luchos.

If the Luchos represent - by their very nature - the greatness of Torah and the esteem of its scholars, then the breaking of the Luchos implies their loss.. They are the banner, the pride of Klal Yisrael. They maintain an inexorable bond between Klal Yisrael, Torah and Hashem Yisborach. It would follow logically that a talmid chacham who, either through age or illness, forgets part of his Torah learning is like the Shivrei Luchos, maintaining the original kedushah, holiness, that permeated the intact Luchos. Furthermore, those talmidei chachamim who have been abused and humiliated at the hands of our enemies throughout history, are also to be included as Shivrei Luchos. Even in their moments of pain and sorrow, during weakness and debilitation, amidst humiliation and chagrin, these people maintain their zchus haTorah, the merit of Torah. They reflect the Torah study for which they sacrificed themselves. Their pain precludes Klal Yisrael serving as a vehicle for success and victory.

Moshe heard the people weeping in their family groups. (11:10)

To express their displeasure publicly, entire families gathered outside their tents and wept. Rashi explains that the word "families" alludes to the real reason for their complaint. The family laws that were initiated at Har Sinai became a source of frustration for them. They did not care to have their relationships governed by the Torah. Rather than viewing the laws of family life and morality as a privilege reserved for the nobility that comprises Klal Yisrael, they viewed them as an infringement on their freedom. Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl, suggests a novel interpretation to the word "families." The manna descended to all Jews equally. Status did not play a role in the distribution of the Heavenly food. The rich did not receive more than the poor; those of more distinguished lineage did not receive special treatment. People were frustrated; they cried that their "families" were not receiving preferential treatment. This was bothersome to Moshe. Why should one family receive more than another, simply because of its lineage? Why should family be the prime factor in determining one's prize? They all

stood together as "one person with one heart" at Har Sinai. Why should anyone claim preeminence over another? Regrettably, for some people this is cause for weeping.

Otzar HaTorah notes Moshe Rabbeinu's ability to discern between the various complaints and sounds emanating from the people. They complained about one thing - but he was able to hear another - the real underlying complaint. They complained about the manna. He heard a much more significant complaint, one that demonstrated the depths of depravity to which they had sunk. Shlomo Hamelech entreats Hashem in Melachim 3:9, "And you shall give to Your servant an ear to listen." He was implying that a leader must possess the capacity to "hear," to listen, to understand and focus upon what the people are really saying. Every expression, every word, every nuance, carries with it a different message. The leader must be capable of hearing that message and responding to it.

In referring the pasuk in Shemos 32:17, "Yehoshua heard the sound of the people in its shouting, and he said to Moshe, 'The sound of battle is in the camp,' " the Midrash in Koheles says, "Moshe said, 'One who is destined to lead a multitude of people does not know how to discern between various sounds?' " You should be able to distinguish between sounds of war and sounds of revelry! A leader should be attuned to the pulse of his flock and understand exactly what motivates them. He should be able to focus on the origin of their desires to determine what they really seek. Moshe understood the basis of the weeping. Episodes such as this establish one's ability to lead and develop one's character in the leadership role.

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