

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshat Behar / Bechukotal

*When you will come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Shabbos rest for Hashem.
(25:2)*

Interestingly, we find that selling property to a gentile circumvents certain prohibitions. This seems to be the accepted halachic convention concerning chametz, unleavened products, prior to Pesach. While this process works for chametz, many poskim frown upon using this convention when selling a parcel of land to a gentile. Why? Does this reflect a double-standard? Horav Binyamin Mendelsohn, zl, Rav of Moshav Kommemiyut, explains that the Torah's goal is for the Jew to observe Shemittah. By selling the land, he is not fulfilling the intent of the Torah's will.

Concerning chametz, the Torah's will is that a Jew not transgress the prohibition of Lo yereai v'lo yimatzei, "Your chametz shall not be seen, nor shall it be found in your possession." Therefore, in order to fulfill the Torah's dictate, Chazal presented a way to remove the chametz from a Jew's possession by selling it to a gentile.

In contrast, the Torah wants the land to lie fallow, dormant; it should rest the entire year. Therefore, in order to avoid complying with the Torah's desire, we have come up with a device for removing the Jewish ownership from the land. The land, however, is still not resting. The Torah's will has not been fulfilled.

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for you are sojourners and residents with Me. (25:23)

Shemittah and Yovel are two mitzvos whose compelling significance seem to elude us, because they do not occur on a constant basis. Furthermore, since their primary effect is in Eretz Yisrael, it is almost as if "out of sight, out of mind." Nonetheless, there are mitzvos which are primary in Jewish life, and we must view them as such. These mitzvos teach us the importance of bitachon; trust in Hashem, as more than a desperate plea when things are not going our way, but as an inextricable part of

our lives. It is for the violation of these mitzvos that Klal Yisrael will be exiled from its land. Indeed, the seventy years of the Babylonian exile occurred in retribution for the seventy Shemittos that the nation failed to observe before and during the period of the first Bais Hamikdash.

Aside from the compelling trust that the Jew must demonstrate in preparation for and during the Shemittah and Yovel years, one of the unique commandments concerning the Yovel year is, in fact, most difficult. We refer to the unconditional freeing of all Jewish slaves, regardless whether they have served their full six-year service, or have undergone the process of re-enslavement by having their ear drilled with an anvil against the doorpost. In either case, the master must say "good by" and relinquish his ownership of the slave.

The freeing of the slaves is not only difficult, it is also quite traumatic, asserts the Sefer HaChinuch. The masters have become accustomed to the service of their slaves, so that letting them go affects them greatly. He maintains that this is the reason that on Yom Kippur, there is a mitzvah to "sound the Shofar throughout your land" (25:9). We are to sound the Shofar throughout the entire country, so that people will realize that the freeing of the slaves is not just happening to "them," but to everyone throughout the length and breadth of Eretz Yisrael. "You" are not the only one undergoing this "trauma;" everyone else is experiencing it, as well. The Sefer HaChinuch concludes that there is nothing that encourages and assures the hearts of human beings as much as an act all perform. This is consistent with the words of Shlomo HaMelech: Tzaar rabim nechamah, "The suffering of many is a consolation."

In the newest anthology by Rabbi Sholom Smith, Horav Avrohom Pam, zl, derives a compelling lesson from here. We are all aware that life is fraught with challenges. While each individual reacts to his personal challenge in his own unique manner, we all experience anxiety in one form or another. For some it is shidduchim, finding the suitable matrimonial match for either themselves or their child. Others suffer from infertility issues or shalom bayis challenges. Others experience illnesses, child-rearing issues, or financial strains. These challenges become magnified --almost unbearable--when a person thinks that he is suffering alone. If he would realize that others are in the same situation, that these similar problems plague others as well, he could put his own suffering into proper perspective.

It is hard to let go of a slave that has been almost a part of the family for quite some time. Such a strong bond is difficult to sever. When the master realizes, however, that he is not the only one who is giving up a part of his "family," it becomes an experience that is much easier to accept.

This is the idea behind modern-day support groups: Imo anochi b'tzarah, "I am with him in his pain." Our Sages were well aware of the therapeutic effect, but, like many other concepts, it seems to have been only recently "discovered" by contemporary psychologists.

Another unique requirement of the Yovel year is well worth noting: the return to their owners of all ancestral plots of land that have been sold since the previous Yovel. The pasuk tells us, "For you are sojourners and residents with Me." The pasuk is teaching us that what we think is ours really belongs to Hashem. Thus, a person should not become too attached to his physical acquisitions. Whereas he may enjoy them for years and years, he must realize that ultimately nothing is his. At the end of the pre-yovel period, it reverts back to its original ancestral owner.

The Rosh Yeshivah offers an analogy to explain this concept, thereby making it easier for one to part with what he now feels is his rightful possession. It is the story of a Jew living in a small village. He was a man of means, and, in order to provide for his young children's Torah education, he hired a melamed, Torah teacher, for a year's time. The melamed received the usual room and board in exchange for his services. Indeed, for that year, he was a part of the family. A few months went by and the

homeowner decided to make some rather costly renovations to his house, which took a number of months to complete. After he concluded the project, the homeowner made a Chanukas Habayis, dedication for his newly renovated home, inviting everybody in town to celebrate and join in this festive occasion. No celebration is complete without a tour of the new addition, and this affair was no different. Everybody took part in this endeavor - even the melamed. He became so involved that he went around informing the guests: "Here we added a wall. There we enlarged the room. Our new kitchen is so much more spacious. What do you think of my study?"

Hearing the melamed refer to the house and its accoutrements in a personal, possessive manner, the homeowner became understandably upset: "You sound as if it is your house that was renovated. My friend, while we like you and you certainly have provided an invaluable function in this home, you are only here for a limited period - one year! After that, it is l'chaim! This is not a permanent arrangement."

The melamed was no fool. He realized that he had gotten carried away, but his master also seemed to have missed the point. He, therefore, turned to the homeowner and said, "My dear homeowner, you are also here in this world for a temporary stay."

Oh, how quickly we forget that this is not our permanent home. We talk about waiting for Moshiach as we purchase palatial homes with plans to sustain generations of occupants therein. No cost is too expensive when it involves providing for our creature comforts. We clearly do not indicate that we are here for a temporary "visit". We set up shop as if our tenure in this world is of a much more permanent nature. How "surprised" and even "indignant" we become when our ownership and tenure is threatened by the Rightful Owner - Hashem!

This is the pasuk's underlying message. Even if a person has owned a parcel of land for almost fifty years, he, nonetheless, must return it to its ancestral owner when Yovel occurs. Through this medium, he realizes his true task and focus in life: prepare for the future; make yourself ready for Olam Habah, the World to Come, by studying Torah and performing mitzvos. Those are the only permanent possessions that you can acquire in this temporary world. While one cannot function in this physical world without some degree of materialism, it should not become our primary goal in life. Some of us live as if there is no tomorrow, while others make plans for generations to come. There is a happy medium. It is called a Torah life. Nothing lasts forever, and we must prepare for the future. We just have to define and focus on that "future."

*If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him.
(25:35)*

The laws concerning charity, and our obligation to see to it that no Jew is left in financial straits that are beyond his coping ability, follow closely after the laws concerning Shemittah and Yovel, Jubilee, year. Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, perceives an important lesson in this juxtaposition. Shemittah teaches us the concept of bitachon, trust in Hashem. Regardless of what our situation may seem to be, we have only to rely on Hashem as our provider and source of sustenance. Ultimately, it is all in His domain, and He will provide for our needs if He sees fit to do so.

While bitachon is a wonderful attribute and really the only way that a Jew can survive, it is a personal way of viewing life. It is not for me to encourage someone else to have bitachon. I must help him. Bitachon is the way I should live and I should address my need. It is not an excuse for not giving charity and helping out another Jew. One should have bitachon - not merely preach it to others.

We must empathize with our impoverished brother and be sensitive to his needs. Rav Shternbuch interprets this idea into the word imach, your proximity / with you. When a Jew is in dire straits, when he has fallen on hard times, the benefactor should view his suffering as having been caused by the benefactor's need to give him charity. I must give; therefore, these are people who must take. The poor are there so that those who are able to give will give. This is consistent with Chazal who say that, "Greater than what the benefactor does for the poor man, the poor man does for the benefactor." Indeed, if the poor man's financial predicament is the result of the benefactor's need and obligation to give, if he does not, in fact, give, he causes the poor man's poverty to be of no purpose. What a terrible waste!

*If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him.
(25:35)*

Whenever we consider the idea of our impoverished brother, we think of money, i.e. our brother is down and out and in need of financial assistance. Many of us shy away from another form of impoverishment: our brother who is either depressed, broken-hearted, mentally impaired, or just simply suffering from an overload of problems, and he has snapped. At times, these problems are financial, but more often than not they are a conglomerate of many issues that have, over the years, become overwhelming and have taken their toll on his emotional resources. He now needs support, the type of support that cannot simply be provided with a check. He needs personal support, the kind that takes time, patience and sensitivity. Not everyone is capable of performing this type of chesed. For some, it is just not their "expertise" or it is beneath their dignity. Others, at least, have the common sense to accept that they lack the attributes necessary to perform this form of charity successfully. This leaves the select few who are competent, willing and able, but we need more.

A number of gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants, would, despite their heavy academic schedules, take time out to reach out to the broken-hearted, the disturbed, the individuals who--for so many reasons and circumstances--had no one to whom to turn. Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, would encourage those who were down and out and befriend them. An elderly, childless man who was all alone in the world was treated kindly by many. He once commented, "Everyone speaks to me out of pity. Only one person truly enjoys speaking to me: Rav Moshe Aharon."

Rav Moshe Aharon was wont to cite the pasuk, "Your beginning shall be negligible, but your end shall be exceedingly exalted." Why is it necessary to have humble, inconsequential beginnings? Why does Hashem not allow someone to become exalted from the start? Apparently, when one's own beginnings are imperceptible, he can have much greater appreciation for the exalted world.

With this in mind, Rav Moshe Aharon treated everyone with genuine deference. He would genuflect to everyone--even the most simple of men--feeling a sense of humility, regardless of with whom he was speaking. The other person was always better and more exalted than he.

The Stern family had a very special "guest" at their table every Shabbos - a dejected, unbalanced woman who went so far, on several occasions, to demand that all of the children leave the table. Without a word, Rav Moshe Aharon motioned for the children to move to another table. Other times, she would insist that the children move from one side of the table to another, and Rav Moshe Aharon and his family complied with her irrational demands. When the Stern family moved to another apartment, Rav Moshe Aharon suddenly reminded himself after the Shabbos prayers that he had not

told her of their new address. He immediately ran to her house, and she continued to be their "guest" for a number of years.

Rav Moshe Aharon would often cite the Talmud in Bava Basra 9B that one who gives a prutah, penny, to a poor man, receives six blessings, while one who cheers him up, receives eleven blessings. He explained that a beggar will not become rich from a penny. It will be more effective to change his current lifestyle. A few words of encouragement will enrich a person and lift him from a life of depression to a feeling of self-esteem. This is worth more than the money.

I was recently reading about Horav Eliyahu Moshe Shisgal, zl, a Rosh Yeshivah of note and rav of a large congregation on the Lower East Side. He was a brilliant talmid chacham, Torah scholar, one who impressed the venerable Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, and eventually became his son-in-law. His ability to transmit Torah to his disciples, with love and devotion to each and every one, was legendary. His outpouring of heart and soul during prayer was something to behold. Yet, the story that the writer sought to publicize was one which demonstrated Rav Shisgal's incredible compassion for another Jew who was mentally unstable. This reiterates my point that we seem to ignore people's feelings, probably because we do not know how to deal with them.

Rav Shisgal once met an individual who had earned the appellation, "Professor of the East Side." He was a deranged man who had earned this title by presenting himself as both a physician and a high-ranking military officer. He was harmless, and people would ignore him, especially the nurses at the hospital which he would enter upon occasion dressed in complete military uniform and bark orders to everyone. He was not dangerous, just weird and unbalanced. In those days, people were more compassionate and did not consider him to be a threat. As a result of a casual meeting, Rav Shisgal became the Professor's closest confidante, and the Professor had welcome access to the rosh yeshiva's home - whenever he saw fit to visit. Furthermore, he was treated with ultimate respect, as befitting a man of his "high rank and stature."

The story takes place during the beginning of the electronic revolution when transistor radios were a novelty, and certainly so to someone of the Professor's condition. He obtained a small transistor and went around with the sound on the highest decibel as he alternated from station to station. Understandably, this proved to be a considerable nuisance for anybody who had the "good fortune" of being within range of the cacophony of sound.

The situation was very challenging. On the one hand, how does one rid himself of the irritant without hurting the feelings of the irritator? Rav Shisgal approached the Professor and said, "I seem to be picking up military signals on the transistor." The Professor, falling for the ruse, agreed. "Yes, yes! This is an ultra-secret radio, and I am one of the select few who are privy to hear these classified messages."

"If so," commented Rav Shisgal, "I should not be listening to these secret signals."

"You are correct," agreed the Professor, as he quickly shut off the radio. I wonder how many of us would have reacted the way this gadol did.

My Shabbosos shall you observe and My sanctuary shall you revere. (26:2)

Shabbos is a basic tenet of our faith and a testament to our belief in the Almighty as the Creator and Ruler of the universe. Nonetheless, it seems to be repeated quite often. Rashi's interpretation that

this pasuk is discussing a Jew that is sold as a slave to a gentile still does not solve the problem completely. Rashi says that a Jew sold to a gentile should not think that he may engage in the abominable behavior that has become a way of life for his master. He cites the prohibition of incest as an example of what the Jewish slave might hypothesize is permissible. Yet, the Torah does not mention incest. It mentions only idolatry. Therefore, we must ascertain that the Torah is addressing idolatry and the prohibition of Shabbos is under the heading of the prohibition of idolatry. Once again, why is it repeated and what is its connection to idolatry? Furthermore, why is reverence for the Sanctuary mentioned altogether at this point?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, suggests a powerful lesson to be derived from here. The Torah is concerned that a Jew living in the home of a gentile, especially if the gentile is his master, might begin to err and think that he may serve his G-d in the same manner that his master serves his deities. Their entire faith and worship are centered around their temples, whereas at home they are really not very bound to their faith. As a result, the temple, with its images and rituals, becomes the focus of their religious worship. Judaism's view of serving the Almighty totally contrasts with that of the heathen religions. While we certainly do revere the Sanctuary, it is not the edifice itself upon which our faith and service is centered, but rather upon the One Who commanded us concerning it. The Temple only provides opportunity for the service to be expressed.

Furthermore, our essential service to Hashem is performed at home and in the market place, where one eats, does business, and conducts his affairs. Hashem is an inextricable part of our lives. Reverence for the synagogue is not an explicit command. Indeed, even the command to revere the Bais Hamikdash followed many other mitzvos. It is important, but not the primary mitzvah. The mitzvah of Shabbos precedes that of the Sanctuary, because Shabbos is of paramount significance. Without its observance, one's life as a Jew is extremely lacking. We have survived without the Bais Hamikdash for almost two millennia, and we are still considered Jews, despite not having the resting place of the Shechinah in our midst.

The Temple's absence is quite painful, but a Temple without Torah or a synagogue without Torah is an implacable void. Torah without the Temple, however, still has meaning and viability. We, the Jewish nation, cannot exist without the Torah. Lamentably, we have had to endure without the Temple for almost two thousand years.

Ki lo yitosh Hashem amo, v'nachalaso lo yaazov.

For Hashem will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His heritage.

We are assured that Hashem will never leave us, nor will He forsake His inheritance - regardless of our shortcomings. Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, views amo, His People, as being related to imo, with Him. In other words, those who are "with Him," who declare their allegiance to Him, will merit never to be deserted by Him. I guess the "others," who did not fit this category, have deserted Him. The ones who are imo possess an additional merit in being considered "His estate / heritage," because not only are they loyal to Him, but they perform deeds of service to Him and seek to provide Him with pleasure. This is similar to an estate which produces profit and brings pleasure to its owner. This is another reason for the Almighty to be devoted to our welfare.

Horav Moshe Almusnino, distinguishes between yitosh, cast off and yaazov, forsake. Yitosh refers to the Divine Providence which is "conscripted," meaning Hashem is sort of "bound" to maintain His Providence over us because of a commitment He made to the Avos, Patriarchs. It is a constrained form of a relationship. The pasuk teaches us that Hashem will maintain his relationship with us as a result of His promise to the Avos and His mercy on us. Second, there are those whom He will not

forsake, a figure of speech which bespeaks a relationship of love, unconstrained and uncompelled. This applies to those unique members of the nation who warrant Hashem's Divine Providence due to their positive actions and meticulous observance.

You shall proclaim freedom throughout the land to all of its inhabitants. (25:10)

During the Yovel, Jubilee year, there is a mitzvah to free all slaves. This refers to the Jewish bondsman who had originally been sold as a slave in order to make restitution for a theft which he had committed, as well as the individual who sold himself as a result of his economic difficulties. He is now set free. When we consider it, the number of indentured slaves during the Jubilee year was small. This usually referred to a slave who, instead of leaving at the end of the usual six year period, opted to stay longer. Together with the recent bondsmen, he constituted a small minority of the people. Why does the Torah write that freedom should be proclaimed to "all of its inhabitants." It would seem implied that a large number of Jews was involved, when, in fact, this was not true. The vast majority of Jews had always been free.

The Pnei Yehoshua explains this with a profound psychological insight. When a person sells himself as a slave to a master, two people become servants: the slave and the master. Any person who takes another human as a slave has an ego problem. He feels the need to dominate, to control others, to make other people serve him. This lack of self-mastery manifests itself in his need to purchase another Jew who is down and out.

There is clearly something redeeming about the parshah of eved Ivri, the laws dealing with the Jewish bondsman and the tremendous sacrifice the master makes in purchasing a servant and supplying him with the opportunity to better himself. Is there no alternative, however, to avdus, servitude? If the potential master wanted to help, could he not just have given the poor Jew the money, instead of purchasing him? Is it possible that the title of master does something for his ego? Does he feel a need to be in control of another person's future and destiny? A society that helps its down and out members by purchasing them as bondsmen is certainly better than one that totally ignores them. Is there no alternative, however, to this "positive" form of assistance, other than making a slave out of another Jew? Are we not supposed to be avadim, slaves, only of the Almighty - and no one else?

Yes, he who needs to dominate is himself a slave. Thus, the number of Jewish bondsmen doubles, since the master is also a servant to his ego. Thus, when the Jubilee year occurs, both the master and servant are freed from their respective forms of servitude.

Perhaps it is neither my place nor the appropriate forum, but as we enter into the period of Kabbalas HaTorah, a time that resonated with the concept of k'ish echad b'lev echad, "like one man, with one heart," when Jewish unity had reached its zenith, it would be derelict of me not to mention the following. There are Jews who are in trouble. There are Jews who are in dire economic straits. There are Jews who function under severe emotional stress. There are also Jews who can help alleviate the pain, misery, the hardship, and they do! There are those, however, who perform this assistance on their own terms - terms that might seem somewhat compelling. When one is up against the wall, however, any form of comfort will help - regardless of the level of interest one is forced to pay. Tzedakah does not mean charging an outrageous amount of money (of course, through a heter iska, halachic dispensation) as an added gift for a loan. How many people have come to us for loans, when they

actually need a gift, but are too proud to ask? Is it a need to dominate, to demonstrate our position, that compels us to perform? The bottom line is: When we are asked to help a Jew in need, or, when we know -- or even suspect -- that a Jew is in need (one who is sensitive to others will notice when something is wrong), we should respond in a positive manner and act to preserve his dignity and self-esteem - not our own.

Do not mistreat one another. (25:27)

Rashi quotes from the Sifra that this pasuk does not refer to mistreating a person financially, but, rather, to mistreating him personally, either by insulting him, or by hurting his feelings. This prohibition of onaas devarim is severe and requires extreme caution, because other people are vulnerable and hurt easily. It goes without saying that one is prohibited from knowingly causing another Jew to feel bad. It is equally important, however, to make sure that we do not inadvertently cause pain to another Jew and that we do whatever we can to engender positive feelings among our fellow Jews.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonenfeld, zl, was an individual who, besides his vast knowledge of Torah and extreme piety, was known as a man of sterling character. He was painstakingly observant in his observance of onaas devarim. A well known Torah scholar once wrote a Torah treatise in which he included the following statement: "In our day, the phenomenon of scorning Torah scholars and their scholarly works exists. In fact, I myself recently approached a wealthy Jew who was something of a scholar, asking him to help defray some of the high cost of printing my sefer, volume of Torah thought. He not only refused, but he went on to heap scorn on the Torah and its disseminators. I left feeling greatly depressed and aggravated."

When Rav Yosef Chaim saw this story in print, he was most upset and wrote his colleague the following note: "I was surprised that you included your negative encounter with that wealthy man in your book. Indeed, if that man had regretted what he had said and repented - something for which we are supposed to give everyone the benefit of the doubt - then it is forbidden to remind him of his sinful behavior. To remind a repented Jew of his negative past constitutes a violation of onaas devarim.

Although you did not mention his name in the book, if he reads the story one day and understands that it is a reference to him, you will have caused him to feel bad. That is onaas devarim."

Rav Yosef Chaim would make a point of noting that the gematriya, numerical equivalent, of ish, man, is equal to that of l're'ei hu, to his fellow man. This alludes to the fact that a person is not worthy of being called an ish, human being, unless he focuses his attention on re'ei hu, his fellowman. Furthermore, this is the root of all difficulties in interpersonal relationships. It is when I think that I am better than my fellow man, when the ish does not equal re'ei hu, that problems arise among us.

If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him. (25:35)

David HaMelech says in Tehillim 41:23, "Praiseworthy is he who contemplates the needy; on the day of disaster Hashem will deliver him." The word maskil, contemplate, seems a bit misplaced. How does contemplation relate to the poor man? Apparently, the Psalm is teaching us that it is

incumbent upon the would-be benefactor to consider the needs of the man who is standing in front of him. Sometimes the poor man asks for one thing, actually meaning something else, but he is ashamed to ask. It is up to us to contemplate in order to find out what the poor man is lacking. This does not necessarily apply only to a poor man. It means that we should use seichel, common sense, to try to find out what our friend needs before it is too late. We are a compassionate people, but, at times, we forget to think. This thoughtlessness can cause us to misappropriate funds or not give to those who are secretly in dire need.

Achicha, brother, is a generic term that applies across the board. Yaakov Avinu refers to his sons as achim, brothers (Bereishis 31:46). Thus, we find that a child who acts differently, whether he is strange or simply behaving out of character, could be conveying a message. Maskil, contemplate, means to listen, even when there is no sound. Listen with your heart; listen with your eyes; listen with your head.

The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna writes that the joy we cause another Jew catalyzes incredible reward for us. This applies equally to the joy we have for a child, a student, or one who is lost, and we show him the way. Indeed, in the Talmud Taanis 27A Chazal relate that a Talmudic sage once "met" Eliyahu HaNavi in the market place and asked him, "Who is there here that is destined for Olam Habah, the World to Come?" Eliyahu pointed out two brothers. The sage approached and queried them concerning their business. They replied, "We are badchanim, jesters. Our function is to make sad people happy." This was their business. While some might laugh off such a position in life, these two men were going to "laugh" all the way to Olam Habah.

The story is told that when Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, was studying in the Kollel, for a short period of time he would come to seder about fifteen minutes late. Horav Elya Lopian, zl, was Rosh Kollel and Mashgiach at the yeshivah during this time. Being the consummate mashgiach, he took note of Rav Moshe Aharon's tardiness and questioned him about it. Rav Moshe Aharon explained that he lived in a cramped basement, which leaked terribly when it rained. This was especially problematic during the winter months, when the cold seeped into the apartment causing his young children to become ill. His wife worked to support the family, and she had to leave for work early every morning. Therefore, he would stay home and attend to his children's ailments or take them to the doctor.

Rav Elya heard all of this and was shaken. He immediately demanded to see the apartment. They went together to the apartment, and Rav Elya was appalled by the stark poverty of the cold, damp apartment. "How can you live like this?" he asked. "You must move immediately!"

"Rebbe," Rav Moshe Aharon said, "how can I move? I have no money."

Rav Elya said, "You have a responsibility to your wife and children. If you have no money, then take a position as mashgiach in a yeshivah. No matter what, you must move!"

Rav Moshe Aharon accepted the position of mashgiach of Yeshivas Kamenitz, and thousands of bnei Torah were the fortunate beneficiaries of his decision. He would note that this only occurred because Rav Elya noticed. He saw a change in his schedule and immediately questioned it. The "why" provoked an immediate reaction. This is similar to a hospital in which the cardiac patients are hooked up to a monitor which is closely watched at the main nurse's station. As Rav Moshe Aharon points out, however, the monitor is of value only if the nurse is in her station with her watchful eye on the monitor. If the monitor goes off while she is having a cup of coffee elsewhere, by the time she returns, the patient could have suffered irreparable damage.

People convey messages all of the time. At times, it is a little innocuous change in schedule, or it could be a bad mood or a strange activity. If no one is listening, it is to no avail. We must be maskil, contemplate the messages, listen, and act.

Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow. (25:17)

The phrase here refers to not hurting people with words. Chazal teach us that it is forbidden to remind a person of his past if it was slightly checkered or to give advice that is not really beneficial. It is worse to hurt someone with words than to hurt him financially. One can always repay the money that he has taken or has caused the other person to lose. The hurt and humiliation, however, that the individual sustains as a result of a shtoch, jab, does not disappear.

Not only should one not denigrate his fellow, he should go out of his way to make him feel good publicly. For instance, if a group is sitting together, and a member of the group makes a statement which lacks erudition or common sense, it is wrong to degrade the statement or the individual who has made it. The best response is no response. If you cannot say something nice, keep quiet. This applies equally to facial expressions and other bodily language that allude to one's displeasure with the speaker or the speech. Regrettably, some of us have a serious problem with complimenting another person. It is almost as if saying something nice to someone constitutes a form of personal affront.

David Hamelech says in Sefer Tehillim 22:7, "But I am a worm and not a man." Horav Baruch zl, m'Meziboz explains this homiletically. There are people who are very careful not to eat any forbidden insects. They shudder at the thought that they may bite into a fruit or vegetable that has a chashash tola'im, suspicion of insects or worms. Immediately, upon discovering anything suspicious, they spit the fruit out of their mouth. Heaven forbid should they transgress this prohibition. On the other hand, if these same individuals were to become involved in a disagreement with another person, they would apparently have no problem doing whatever they deem necessary to prove that they are right. This self-righteous attitude, whereby they would never eat a worm, but would readily swallow up a man, is to what David Hamelech is alluding. He says, "I am but a worm - not a man." Treat me as a worm; you would never swallow a worm. Therefore, do not devour me.

A similar interpretation is attributed to Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl. It was at a time when the Eidah HaChareidis instituted its own supervision on the shechitah, ritual slaughtering, in Yerushalayim. A young man whose wife had just given birth to his firstborn son was arranging a seudas Pidyon HaBen, feast in honor of the Redemption of the Firstborn. He insisted that he would only use the shechitah of the Eidah HaChareidis, while his mother-in-law refused to allow that shechitah into her home. She ordered meat from the local shechitah and prepared it for the feast. Her son-in-law was beside himself. What should he do? He turned to Rav Yosef Chaim, who replied, "David Hamelech says, 'I am a worm and not a man.' This implies that it is better to eat a worm than to suck the blood of a man. In other words, one does not hurt another person if there is any way to circumvent the issue."

This does not mean that, if one sees or hears about something inappropriate that is being done, he should ignore it, or if someone makes a statement that goes beyond the parameters of common sense, he should ignore it. If he knows that the individual in question is happy to acknowledge his shortcomings, and has a willingness to listen to and accept constructive criticism, he should, by all means, tender his feelings - in private and in a respectful manner.

Concern for the feelings of the individual applies even if the subject of one's critique is a person

who is infamous for his malevolent behavior, or whose hashkafos, outlooks on life, are not synonymous with Torah dictate. In Pirkei Avos 4:3, Chazal say: "You should never treat any person as if he is worthless... for there is no person who does not have a time when he is needed."

The Koznitzer Maggid, zl, interprets this Mishnah in the following manner: Do not be loathe to any man - regardless of his literacy and behavior. Even if he is a rasha, a wicked man, you should not be condescending towards him. Why? Because, there is no man she'ein lo shaah, which is usually translated as, "having his moment." In this instance, the word shaah means "turns to listen", as we say in Tefillas Retzei, in the Shemoneh Esrei, V'lisfilasam she'eih, "and to their prayer You shall listen." Everyone has his moment when he is in need, when he turns to Hashem. This does not have to be a long, penetrating prayer. It could be a simple conversation. At that moment, however, he is sincere, and Hashem listens to him. Indeed, if the rasha would have no redeeming value, Hashem would not keep him around.

Therefore, we are admonished to respect all men and to treat them with dignity - regardless of their position, religious affiliation, or level of observance. This applies even if their actions are contemptible. One may censure their actions, but he should not denigrate the individual. Indeed, it is recorded concerning the Chasam Sofer, that when the secularists began to undermine the Torah community, acting in a manner that was reprehensible and antagonistic to the Torah, the Chasam Sofer would certainly speak out against them and deride their activities. He was, however, extremely careful not to embarrass anyone publicly. After all, if Hashem has created a person and He sustains him, he must be performing a vital function. Who are we to decide otherwise?

You shall perform My decrees... then you shall dwell securely on the land. The land will give its fruit... you will dwell securely on it. (25:18,19)

The above two pesukim are redundant. In both, Hashem promises us that we will dwell securely. Rashi explains that the first v'yeshavtem betach assures Klal Yisrael that, as a result of their Shemittah observance, they will not be exiled. In the second pasuk, they receive affirmation that those who let their land lie fallow during the Shemittah year will not lose out. They will not go hungry and be forced to travel to other countries in search of sustenance. The Kesav Sofer offers an alternative explanation. Two dangers confront a country during troubling times. First, in a time of travail, when hunger is taking its toll on the people, there is usually widespread depression and anger. Second, the bitterness that prevails causes people to do strange things. Rebellions and uprisings are commonplace.

On the other hand, when a country enjoys a period of abundance, when peace and prosperity reign, it may not have to worry about trouble from within, but it has reason to be concerned about its external neighbors. Jealousy is an issue among countries and communities as well as with individuals. Someone is always envious of the individual who is successful. This envy breeds contempt and discord, which, eventually, can lead to war.

This is the underlying meaning of the two assurances. First, Klal Yisrael will be blessed with material abundance, whereby the nation will have inner peace and harmony. Satisfaction will reign throughout the people. Second, the fear from without that emerges under such circumstances, an external attack brought on by malicious envy, will also not be reason for concern, because Hashem will see to it that they remain secure.

For you are sojourners and residents with Me. (25:23)

We should never forget our position on this world. We are travelers passing by with a focus on reaching a more lofty and meaningful destination. This is what Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos 4:16, "This world is like a lobby before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall." This statement implies that during his stay in This World, the individual is like a traveler, passing through a strange land. Therefore, one should be sure to focus his attention on his goals and objectives for the future. He should make his Torah study fixed and regular, while his mundane pursuits should be of a transient, provisional nature. The Maggid, zl, m'Dubno explains that this is the message of the pasuk. A ger is a sojourner, while a toshav is a resident. These two meanings contrast one another. Therefore, Hashem tells us that if we view our position in this world as that of a sojourner, then Hashem will be to us as a toshav, resident. In order to develop a permanent relation with Torah and mitzvos, one must view his presence on this world as nothing more than a sojourn.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, offers the following analogy to bring the idea into greater perspective. One does not build a house by himself. He lacks the skill necessary to bring this project to fruition. He hires an architect who will draw a blueprint, followed by a builder, who does the final construction. Obviously, the dimensions allotted for the various rooms and entranceways are designed to coincide with the available space and function of the room.

There was once a wealthy man who commissioned an architect to prepare the blueprint for a magnificent home. He instructed the architect to lay out the home for him in such a manner that the entryway would be large and roomy and to do likewise for the dining area. This was all fine and well until the architect saw the size of the lot. It was not nearly as large an area as the owner had indicated. There was no way that both the entryway and dining area could be as large as he wanted. Something would have to be compromised. He presented the problem to the owner, explaining, "While the final decision is yours, I suggest that you change your dimensions for the entryway, so that the dining area can be a nice size. This is what most people do. The entryway is only of secondary significance to the dining area. If you do otherwise, you will be the joke of the community."

The nimshal, resemblance, is unambiguous. During our stay on This World, we occupy ourselves with building our great dining hall in Olam Habah. Some of us, however, are more concerned with the entryway, i.e., This World, thereby neglecting to build a sizable dining hall. We act like that foolish man who wanted to build a large vestibule at the expense of his dining room.

Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai saying... When you come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a Shabbos unto Hashem. (25:12)

The mitzvah of Shemittah, to allow the land to remain fallow for an entire year every seven years, is the only mitzvah in the Torah that is introduced as having been "given on Har Sinai." While we are certainly aware that all of the mitzvos were given on Har Sinai, the commentators give reasons

that the Torah emphasizes the mitzvah of Shemittah. Let it suffice to assert that this is a mitzvah of great significance. Indeed, later on (in 26:24-35), the Torah warns that if exile occurs, it will be the result of our failure to observe the laws of Shemittah. Why does this mitzvah have such overriding significance?

Two aspects to Shemittah observance are unique. An element of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, is built into the mitzvah. Each individual, as well as the nation collectively, must refrain from working the land - an action that could affect the economy of the entire nation. Also, bitachon, faith and trust, is reflected in the belief that Hashem will compensate the people for their sacrifice when the Divine blessing results in an overabundance of crops. Thus, Shemittah serves as the paradigm of a mitzvah that apparently demands a sacrifice, while simultaneously, assures the respondent that he will not suffer as a result.

When we peruse Jewish history, we note an interesting phenomenon. The Divine promise was fulfilled when the people inhabited Eretz Yisrael and kept the mitzvah of Shemittah. Hashem also meted out Divine retribution when they discontinued their observance. The glaring question that confronts us is: What happened? Why did they violate the Shemittah when they clearly saw that it was working? Their land produced threefold in order to defray any loss incurred by the Shemittah. The Torah warned against this attitude and the warning, regrettably, came true. Why was Klal Yisrael so foolish to risk everything, especially when they saw Divine results? Why did they seek punishment when they were reaping rewards?

Rabbi Abraham Twersky uses this incident to support a psychological theory that considers this a weakness of human nature. There is often a compulsive urge to see whether we can "get away with it," despite the fact that this action is contraindicated by logic. In other words, we act foolishly because we have this urge to "see" if we can do it and go unpunished. How often do we find people who have successfully overcome addiction and other dependencies for a number of years only to succumb once again to their craving? Why? They think that they can get away with it. What could be so bad if "one" time they would give in to their craving? That one time is usually the beginning of their end.

For many years our ancestors observed Shemittah and received the wonderful blessings that are intrinsic to this mitzvah. Then they thought they could "have their cake and eat it too." They sought to use the additional income that they received in their sixth year and to continue working the land during the seventh year. They were wrong. Divine blessing is not negotiable. If one observes Shemittah, he is blessed. If he does not observe Shemittah, he will lose Eretz Yisrael. This phenomenon has clearly been demonstrated in the observance of the mitzvah of Shemittah. Hence, this mitzvah serves as the prototype for all mitzvos that Hashem gave at Har Sinai. The rule that is indicated through Shemittah stands true for all mitzvos.

Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow. (25:17)

Onoas devarim, hurting people with words in personal relationships, embarrassing them by calling attention to their past indiscretions or questionable ancestry, rendering bad advice to the unknowing and unassuming, are acts that are deplorable for which Hashem metes out punishment. Included in onoas devarim is the sin of using people, cheating them in business, even if no real monetary loss ensues. An example is when one visits a merchant under the pretense that he wants to purchase one of his wares, when, in truth, he only wants to check out the price. He wastes the

merchant's time and raises his hopes, all for nothing. Referring to a person or to a group by a derogatory nickname is *onoas devarim*. This attitude has been one of the primary catalysts of a number of unfortunate incidents that have occurred to the general Jewish community throughout history.

There are people who feel that with a little *shtoch*, a sharp word, they might encourage a person to repent. Indeed, a piercing comment has the power to generate a reaction when simple talking has failed. What we do not realize is that these well-meaning *shtochs* hurt people, and, rather than create a positive response, the reaction might be of a negative nature. It all depends on one's true purpose: If it is solely to create a positive reaction, it might be permitted, but who really knows their innermost feelings, and who is so sure that the positive results overwhelm the negative feelings generated by a hurtful comment?

Chazal teach us that descendants of Haman studied Torah in Bnei Brak. It seems like a fairly incongruous reward. What merit did the wicked Haman have that gave him such *nachas*, spiritual pleasure? Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites the Dubno Maggid, zl, who gives the following parable as explanation for Haman's reward: The prince of a region was eating, when suddenly a sharp bone became stuck in his throat. A robber who had intended to kidnap the prince and later kill him after he collected a hefty ransom, unknowingly grabbed hold of the prince as he was choking. The various movements needed to compromise the prince caused the bone to come loose. Inadvertently, the robber had saved the prince's life. The kidnap was foiled, and the robber was apprehended. Now it was up to the king to decide the robber's fate. On the one hand, he sought to kill the prince. On the other hand, he did save his life. The king decided to punish the robber for his intended actions and to reward his children for the positive results.

A parallel applies to the evil Haman. His intentions were certainly evil. He sought to destroy the Jewish People and erase them from the face of the earth. His actions, however, catalyzed their repentance and return to the Almighty. For his nefarious actions he was required to pay, but his descendants were the recipients of a great reward because of the positive reaction that he had inadvertently generated within Klal Yisrael.

Rav Zilberstein cites another interesting question. A young man, who clearly did not take care of his health, visited the doctor complaining of difficulty in breathing. The physician diagnosed a simple lung ailment that would respond to therapy - if it were followed properly. Aware of the young man's careless attitude concerning his health, the doctor decided to scare him and instead delivered a crushing diagnosis: he was ill with a dread disease that would certainly kill him unless he took immediate action. The young man took no chances, and overnight he altered his lifestyle. The question that was posed to the rav: Did the physician act appropriately? Does the end result justify the means?

At first glance, Rav Zilberstein posits that the physician had acted inappropriately, since he caused the young man to worry needlessly. He cites the incident between Peninah and Chanah, Shmuel HaNavi's mother, to substantiate his thesis. Peninah caused Chanah enormous grief when she called attention to the many children she had, each time alluding to Chanah's childlessness. As a result of Chanah's grief, Peninah lost seven children. Peninah's motivation was positive, seeking to galvanize Chanah's resolve to daven with greater intensity and fervor, so that her *tefillos*, prayers, would pierce the Heavens and reach the Heavenly Throne. She, nonetheless, was guilty of causing her co-wife extreme emotional pain. Why should the physician who misled his patient be any different?

Afterwards, Rav Zilberstein opines that the validity of such behavior is determined by the individual's personal suffering. If the subject of one's hurtful words stands to benefit personally as a result of the remarks it might be permissible. Thus, in the case of the young man, the doctor's actions

might have been justifiable. Peninah, however, had no reason to act the way she did, since Chanah was not in any danger.

Playing with another Jew's emotions is similar to playing with fire: one gets hurt. The best way to sensitize ourselves to this danger is to circumvent it, by doing everything to think and act positively with regard to our fellow Jew. Share another Jew's burden, think of his plight; be sensitive to his needs: that is the way a Jew is supposed to act. Rabbi Yissachar Frand relates a powerful incident in the life of Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, one that aptly characterizes this venerable sage. It was in 1970, when two planeloads of Jews were hijacked. Among the victims was Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, and a group of his students. There were Tehillim and tefillah rallies throughout the Jewish world supplicating Hashem for their safe return. The joy and relief when they were released was felt by all, and an enormous welcome gathering was arranged in Kennedy Airport to greet them upon their arrival. Thousands of Jews sang and danced to the music of a band hired specifically for the event.

The gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, was also in attendance at the airport. As he entered the airport, an interesting phenomenon occurred. His face became clouded, and he walked over to the band and asked them to cease performing. He did this because the fate of six of the hostages was as yet undetermined. How could music be played if their lives were still in danger, if their families were still sick with worry concerning their fate? It is certainly incumbent upon everyone to celebrate the safe return of Rav Hutner, but it could be done without music, out of deference to the feelings of the other families who were not as fortunate. This was Rav Moshe! This was only one aspect of his gadlus, distinction.

Our obligation extends further: we must feel their pain. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, once visited a young couple who were sitting shivah, observing the seven-day mourning period, for the loss of their young son. There were no words of consolation to express to the bereaved parents. What could one say? How could one penetrate their grief to reach them? Rav Pam said nothing. He just sat down and cried - and cried. For twenty minutes, his tears flowed freely. He then rose and wished the couple the traditional words of consolation and left. A short time later, these people commented to a friend that Rav Pam had comforted them more so than anyone else. Why? What did he do? He really had said nothing, but he cried. He empathized with them. He conveyed to them a powerful message: You are not alone. Others care and share in your sorrow and grief.

When we demonstrate our concern for others, we sensitize ourselves to the point that negative feelings or comments are not consistent with our character.

*If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him.
(25:35)*

Do not wait until your fellow Jew falls under the pressure of financial constraints. Help him before he reaches the poverty level. It is much easier for one who has not yet descended to the pit of despair to arise from it, than it is for one who has lost his financial footing completely, who has bottomed out, to emerge from his predicament. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, notes that the word mote (u'matah yado, "and his means falter") to totter, to falter, to be about to fall, does not occur elsewhere in connection with the word yad, hand (yado), but only with regel, foot (the general condition of the individual). Were it to say u'mato raglo in reference to his general condition, it would designate a circumstance where the situation is such that his existence is already threatened, and the assistance

which he needs is life-sustaining. The phrase *u'mato yado* describes his "hand" as becoming shaky; it is only his activity - not his existence - that is in peril. His means for actively gaining and earning a livelihood have begun to fail. Assistance at this point would enable him to continue independently earning his living. Help him before he falls completely, for then it will be very difficult to raise him back up.

This endeavor must be made *imach*, with you. In offering and lending assistance, do not reduce him to a condition of sloth and loss of self-respect. He is to be supported - with you - next to you. You must assist him in such a manner that he does not sink below you in morale.

In the Talmud Bava Basra 9b, Chazal say that one who gives a poor man money will be blessed with six blessings. One who appeases and comforts him receives eleven blessings. What is the reason for this? Horav Yisrael Yaakov Lubchenski, zl, the venerable *mashgiach* of Baranowitz, explains that there is no comparison between he who relinquishes his money and he who gives up his precious time for another Jew. Time is more than just money; it is life itself. It should be viewed as a man's most precious possession. One who achieves the high spiritual plateau of *chesed*, kindness, in which he is willing to give up his time for a poor man, to console him and give him succor in his time of need, demonstrates by his actions that *tzedakah*, the *mitzvah* of charity, has great meaning and value for him. Anyone who abnegates his greatest asset for his fellow Jew deserves all of Hashem's blessings.

A good word, a caring remark at the right time can make the difference in a person's day and even life. There are people who are in need of financial support and there are those who beg for emotional support. They need a bit of praise, some encouragement - even a simple smile. Yes, that is also *tzedakah*. Horav Simchah Bunim Alter, zl, the Gerer Rebbe, was a practical person whose name became a byword as a champion for Torah interests in Eretz Yisrael. His initiative set standards of restraints on *simchos* and marrying off children. He was revered and loved by Jews of all stripes. He was a loving and caring father, as well as an uplifting mentor to thousands. He had a kind word for everyone. Shortly after he became Rebbe, a young boy came to him grieving. "I have been left bereft of my parents," he cried.

"I will be your father and mother," the Rebbe replied. Although this boy had a number of married brothers, the Rebbe took him into his house, eating meals with him and concerning himself with all of his needs, and finally leading him to the *chupah* as his own grandchild. He was just one of the many orphans the Rebbe adopted over the years.

The Rebbe's concern for the needs of Klal Yisrael was exemplary. He would often cite the Rebbe, Reb Bunim, zl, of Peshischa, who made the following comment concerning the structure of *Shema Yisrael*. The second section of *shema* (*V'hayah im shamo*) which is written in the plural does not mention "to love G-d... with all your possessions," as the first section does, because when taken on the public level, economic issues become matters of life and death, and these have already been included in "with all your lives." The Rebbe added that added financial constraints prevent one from focusing on his service to Hashem.

To this end, the Rebbe looked into various ways to ease the economic plight of his *chassidim* - and others as well. He offered suggestions that, in effect, left an imprint on all sectors of Israeli society in different ways. He was accessible to all, because he cared about all of them. I think the following vignette sums up his essence and conveys to us what our relationship with our fellow Jew should be.

When the Rebbe married off his first grandchild, the *chassidim* asked whether they should wear their *shtreimels* (a practice usually reserved for close family) at the wedding. The Rebbe told them to ask an elderly *chasid* who had lived in Gur. The man recalled that those who were close to the Rebbe

would wear their shtreimels. When the Rebbe heard this account, he said, "Everyone is close to me."
If your brother becomes impoverished that his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him.
(25:35)

We have an obligation toward our fellow Jew that is both moral and filial. In order to help him get back on his feet, it is essential that we feel his pain and experience his hurt and humiliation. The Ben Ish Chai gives an incredible mashal, analogy, that underscores this point. A king wanted his only son to become proficient in all areas of knowledge, so that when the time came, he would be able to assume the position of monarch. He also wanted him to become knowledgeable in all areas pertaining to running the country. The king chose a wise man who was a master teacher to perform the task of educating the prince. After a number of years, the teacher sent the prince home to the king to be tested in all areas of knowledge. After successfully passing the various tests, the king acknowledged the teacher's singular ability to teach the prince, rewarding the wise man with one hundred thousand gold coins.

A short while later, the wise man approached the king with a request, "If it pleases the king, I would like to take the prince for a short course to teach him something that he has not yet learned. It will take only about an hour." The king acquiesced to the wise man's request, immediately sending the prince to the wise man's house for his lesson. The prince entered the man's home, and the teacher locked the door, pulled out a rubber truncheon and began beating the prince mercilessly on his legs. Fifty times he struck him until blood began to ooze from the welts. The prince cried out in pain, but no one heard his pleas for help. When the "lesson" was concluded, the teacher sent the wounded prince home to his father.

We can only imagine the king's anger upon seeing his blood-spattered, injured son. He immediately sent his guards to pick up the teacher and prepare him for the gallows. Yet, the king could not bring himself to go through with the execution until he received some kind of explanation for the teacher's inexplicable behavior.

"Before I carry out the death sentence against you, explain to me why a person in his right mind would throw everything away - the wealth, the glory, the honor! Why?" asked the king.

"I will explain my actions, my dear king," replied the teacher. My intentions were totally noble, consistent with your mandate to me that I teach the prince the dynamics of monarchy. A leader must mete out punishment that is commensurate with the degree of the transgression. Imagine if a person would steal a cow valued at two hundred dollars, and the prince would sentence the thief to one thousand lashes. As a prince, he is unaware of the experience of pain and injury to one's body because he has never sustained any punishment. Therefore, it was necessary for the prince to feel firsthand what pain felt like. Otherwise, when he issued a sentence, he would conceivably overdo it."

When the king heard the logic behind the teacher's actions, he immediately freed him and added to his reward.

The same idea applies to those who are asked to assist those who have fallen on hard times. How should the wealthy man know what it means to go hungry? Hashem provided them with one day a year - Yom Kippur - when we all fast and sense the feeling that poor man has on many-a-day. When the poor man stands at your door seeking alms, put yourself in his shoes, so that your assistance to him will be meaningful as well as beneficial.

*If your brother becomes impoverished that his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him.
(25:35)*

The mitzvah of Vehechezakto, "And you shall strengthen him," remains in force regardless of how many times one is called upon to help his fellow. Moreover, the obligation to lend financial assistance to a fellow Jew in need applies, no matter how the person uses the money - even if it is used inappropriately. That is precisely what the yetzer hora, evil inclination, tells us: "Do not help him, for he only squanders the money that you give him. Do not waste your valuable time from Torah study on charitable acts of loving-kindness. Leaving the house at night to help a Jew in need taxes your shalom bayis, marital harmony." The list goes on. The yetzer hora will always present you with an alternative to the chesed you are about to perform. In reality, some of these taanos, claims, have merit. How does one respond to the yetzer hora?

The Chafetz Chaim gave the following response. When he attended the Kenisiah Gedolah in Vienna in 1923, he was a guest in the home of Rav Akiva Schreiber. Many people came to the house to get an audience - or even a glimpse of the Chafetz Chaim. The answer to most people was - no. The Chafetz Chaim was not a young man, and his time was limited. A wealthy Torah askan, mover and shaker, from England came to Rav Schreiber and said that he must speak to the Chafetz Chaim for a few moments. Indeed, his entire future depended upon the result of his meeting with the Chafetz Chaim. Apparently, the man's toil and involvement on behalf of Klal Yisrael made a difference, and he was invited to the Chafetz Chaim's table.

The man waited for the Chafetz Chaim to bentch, say the Bircas Hamazon, Grace after the meal, to present his dilemma. It did not take that long. During the meal, the Chafetz Chaim recited the twenty-third Psalm of Tehillim, Mizmor leDavid, Hashem ro'ie lo echzar, "Hashem is my Shepherd, I shall not lack." As he concluded the last pasuk, "May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life," he turned to the guest from England and asked, "What does David Hamelech mean when he requests that goodness and kindness be his pursuers? To be pursued is to be harassed. Why would David want to be badgered by tov and chesed?"

"The answer is," explained the Chafetz Chaim, "that there are times when one's involvement in many acts of loving-kindness can actually haunt him as they rob him of his every free moment. He has neither night nor day. The acts of chesed get in the way of his business. They disrupt his home life. He literally becomes a prisoner to the many demands on his time and good nature. The yetzer hora sees this situation as an auspicious time for him to sneak in and use his wiles to put a halt to these wonderful activities. David Hamelech admonishes us, Do not worry if your pursuers are tov and chesed. On the contrary, pray to Hashem that they should be your only pursuers and nothing else. From such lofty pursuers as tov and chesed, one has nothing to worry about."

When the guest heard these words from the Chafetz Chaim, he picked himself up and thanked his host. To the bewilderment of his host, he was about to leave. "Why are you leaving?" he asked. "You came to seek the Chafetz Chaim's advice. Why are you leaving so soon?"

The visitor replied, "I came to ask the Chafetz Chaim a question which he has already answered for me. Let me explain. In my city, I have undertaken to support a school and also a gemillas chesed, charitable organization. These two endeavors are eminently successful, but they rob me of my time. I

simply have no time whatsoever left for myself. My personal business ventures are suffering because I do not have the time to attend to them properly. My wife feels I should transfer the daily control of these organizations to someone else, so that I can return to my business. I personally would rather not defer control of these wonderful organizations to others. Thus, in the interest of shalom bayis, I came to the Chafetz Chaim to advise me. When I heard the saintly Chafetz Chaim explain the pasuk in Tehillim that David Hamelech asks that good and kindness should always be his pursuers, I realized that the sage was referring to my query. He had given me the answer before I even asked the question. I am returning home to my wife to relay to her the gadol hador's reply."

When you come into the land... the land shall observe a Shabbos rest to Hashem. (25:2)

The pasuk seems to imply that Shemittah is to commence immediately upon the arrival of Klal Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael. The Torah, however, continues, "Six years you may sow your field," indicating that Shemittah does not begin right away. Why is the Torah so ambiguous in conveying to us when the laws of Shemittah are to take effect?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that while Hashem gave us Eretz Yisrael as a gift, certain criteria that are critical to the land's maintenance must be met in order for the gift to endure. Mizekeinim Esbonan gives the following analogy to elucidate this idea. Reuven looks over a prospective parcel of land. He is satisfied with the product and the price, and he is about to close the deal. Shimon, the seller, is pleased, but first asks Reuven to sit down. He must discuss with him certain aspects of the agreement for the sale of the land.

"First of all," Shimon states, "you are limited in the hours that you may work the land. After 8:00PM, no work is permitted. You cannot drive across the field with heavy vehicles, and pesticides are forbidden. You also must use the finest seed and fertilizer. If you agree to these conditions, the sale can become final."

"I do not think you understand," Reuven interjected. "I am purchasing the field. When it becomes mine, I can and will do whatever I please. There are no conditions to a sale."

Shimon quickly responds, "My intention is not to limit your ownership of the field. It should and will be yours unconditionally. The conditions that I have detailed are for your good. If you want the land to produce its maximum, then you must adhere to the aforementioned conditions. Everything that I included was for your good."

The same idea applies to Shemittah. Immediately, when we enter Eretz Yisrael, we must realize that in order for the land to attain its potential, its sanctity must be maintained. If we decide to do otherwise - it will just not be Eretz Yisrael. You will eat your fill; you will dwell securely upon it. If you will say: what will we eat in the seventh year? ...I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year. (25:19-21)

Klal Yisrael is assured that, in return for observing the Shemittah laws and allowing the land to rest during the seventh year, they would not be exiled. Furthermore, to those of little faith, who question how only one crop can sustain them for more than one year, Hashem promises that the prosperity will be to such an extent that their questions will be without basis. Yet, the Torah felt that the question of Mah nochal, "What will we eat?" was of such significance, that it was eternalized in the

Torah. This question, however, should have been asked only once. After their very first Shemittah, they would have seen that there was nothing to worry about. Why, then, does the Torah include this question for posterity? Moreover, when is this question asked? Prior to the sixth year, it is too early to ask. After the sixth year, Hashem's blessing of increased abundance has already been realized.

The Alter, zl, m'Novardok, explains that this is human nature. Already during the first year, Klal Yisrael are asking, "What will we eat?" We worry about what will be tomorrow before we even know what is occurring today! Additionally, worrying during the first six years about the seventh year directly contradicts the concept of Shemittah, which is supposed to imbue us with bitachon, faith and trust, in only the Almighty.

This is underscored by the pasuk, "You will eat your fill - you will dwell securely upon it." This is not a mere promise. This is a demand! We are to live securely, faithfully, trusting in Hashem's "ability" to provide for us. If we worry and question, then we are defeating the very foundation of Shemittah. The question, "What will we eat?" is asked constantly by people. Shemittah negates this question by engendering a firm sense of trust in the Almighty for he who has faith; there is no cause for questioning.

\ *If a man will have no redeemer. (25:26)*

What a terrible feeling - not to have anyone. It is our obligation to see to it that no Jew is alone or feels alone. Some individuals make it their business to see to the physical and emotional needs of their brethren, realizing how important this is. One individual who was a towering example of chesed at its zenith was the Skverer Rebbe, Horav Yaakov Yosef Twersky, zl. After World War II, he took a small apartment in Bucharest, Romania. During the three years that he spent there, this tiny apartment served the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of thousands of Jews from all walks of life. The Rebbe did not wait for someone in need to come knocking on his door. He sent agents daily to the train station in search of Jews who were arriving from the various concentration camps. Broken, dejected and oppressed, these shards of humanity came seeking hope, encouragement and a reason to continue living. More than once, a survivor would arrive to be greeted by a hearty, "Shalom Aleichen, welcome! The Skverer Rebbe has sent me to invite you to his home. This is his address. He awaits your arrival!"

The rebbetzin and her daughters would stand for hours on end happily preparing meals for whomever appeared. They were hearty, filling meals that sustained and nourished, as well as made the individual feel wanted. The Rebbe was their father, and the rebbetzin was their mother. One can only conjecture how many neshamos, Jewish souls, returned to observance, how much Jewish faith was catalyzed as a result of the Rebbe's love and chesed.

What motivated the Rebbe and his family to give so much of themselves? They simply wanted to serve as sheluchei d'Rachamana, Hashem's agents, to assist in rebuilding the nation that the Nazis had so cruelly decimated. Their love for each Jew was overwhelming. The apartment was a restaurant, bais ha'medrash and dormitory. No one complained. They were carrying out Hashem's will.

Friday night, the Rebbe's Kiddush and Zemiros brought tears of ambivalence to everyone's eyes. They wept in sadness over what they had lost, but cried with renewed hope for what they would rebuild.

One chasid remembers his first welcome to Skver. He walked into the apartment. He knew no

one, having recently arrived from a displaced persons camp where it had been confirmed that he had lost his entire family. As soon as he entered, the rebbetzin noticed him and said, "Bachurel, young man, go wash your hands and eat!" One can only imagine the meaning of these words to a broken-hearted survivor. No one asked him who he was, from where he had come, whether he had the ability to pay. He was Jewish and in need - and they were there for him.

As soon as he had completed eating his meal to his heart's content, he broke down and cried uncontrollably. The years of pain and persecution, the terrible loss he had sustained, all surfaced with the unprecedented love and kindness that was manifest by the Skverer Rebbe.

The Rebbe looked at the young man with a father's compassion and said, "Do not worry, my child. From here on, this will be your home. My bread is your bread; my beverage is your beverage. You are my son." These powerful words were reiterated many times, as the Rebbe gave encouragement and hope to those in need. He was their goel, redeemer. He saw to it that they did not feel alone.

*If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him.
(25:35)*

The responsibility to help a Jew in financial need is a serious one. We live in a time when financial struggling has, regrettably, become a way of life for many. Throughout Jewish history, there have always been those who give and those who take. Due to circumstances beyond our control, today's times are creating more who are relegated to take and fewer who are able to give. Yet, the Jewish people have always risen to their appellation of being rachamanim bnei rachamanim, compassionate sons of compassionate ones. We help, many doing so beyond their means. Let us peruse some of the Rabbinic literature that addresses this critical subject, so that we can better sensitize ourselves to the need to give.

V'chi yamuch achicha, "If your brother becomes impoverished." Do not wait until he becomes poor. Rashi cites the Sifra which gives the following analogy. When a donkey's load begins to slip down from its back, even one person can right it and prevent the donkey from falling. Once the animal has fallen, however, even five people cannot get it back on its feet. Once our brother has fallen into the pit of bankruptcy, it is so much more difficult to raise him up. Help him when he is faltering. The Alshich Hakadosh notes that the preceding pesukim speak in the plural, while this pasuk employs lashon yachid, the singular: achicha, your brother. Why?

The Alshich explains that the Torah takes a pragmatic approach towards financial assistance. How often do we direct the fellow in need to see someone else? We always know the address of our well-to-do neighbors, and we are only too happy to give it out. We do anything but offer our own help. It is easy to give the poor man the shirt off someone else's back. What about our own responsibility to offer assistance? The Torah turns to every yachid, individual: You must help. You have an obligation. Do not shirk your responsibility and place it upon your wealthy friend. He will do his, but you must do yours!

Horav Shlomo, zl, m'Karlin goes further in his interpretation of the Torah's demand that we help our impoverished brother. V'hechezakta bo, "You shall strengthen him." In order to help another Jew, at times we have to get into the mud with him. If you want to help a Jew who has fallen into the mud, get down on the ground. It is necessary to get down on the ground with him, get into the mud and raise him up. We do not pull him up; we lift him up. In other words, it is easy to write a check, but what about

getting our hands dirty and personally doing something about our friend or our neighbor in need?

The Midrash says that when a poor man comes to our door asking for assistance, Hashem stands to his right side, as it is written, "That He stands at the right of the destitute" (Tehillim 109:31). If you give the poor man what he needs, Hashem will repay you. If you do not, then remember what is written in Tehillim 41:2, "Praiseworthy is he who contemplates the needy, on the day of disaster Hashem will deliver him." What does it mean to be maskil el dal, "contemplate the needy"? How should one consider the plight of the poor man?

The Chafetz Chaim paints the following scenario. A person lives his life on this world, and one day he is summoned to his eternal rest. He now has to give an accounting for his deeds. He stands before the Heavenly Tribunal holding a Sefer Torah, as he is questioned in regard to each mitzvah in the Torah that he is holding - "Did you fulfill this mitzvah?" Certainly, he will also be queried regarding the mitzvah of V'hechezakta bo, "You shall strengthen him." The Tribunal will refresh his memory. "Remember that night when the poor man came to your asking for help. You told him, Tonight is not good. I cannot help you. He turned away dejected, depressed, broken-hearted. You were his last resort.

"The decision to see you did not occur overnight. He spoke it over with his wife, and they felt that - while it was not easy to go to a man of means and beg - they had no other alternative. He gathered up his courage and came to your house and begged - and you said; No! Do you know how he cried that night, the tears of depression that flowed in his house? Do you have any idea how his children must have felt when he came home empty-handed? They lost hope, and it was all because of you.

"Stand here and accept responsibility for your actions: the pain you caused the poor man, his family, and Hashem, Who listened to their inconsolable weeping. As you had no compassion on them, the Heavenly Tribunal will have no compassion on you!"

This, explains the Chafetz Chaim, is the meaning of "Praiseworthy is he who contemplates the needy." He understands their pain, their sorrow, and he does something about it.

Last, I close with a compelling thought from the Kopyczinitzer Rebbe, zl. The Rebbe once came unannounced to the home of one of his worshippers. The layman said, "I would have come to the Rebbe." The Rebbe smiled, "I need you, so I came to you." "Please, Rebbe, what can I do to help?" the layman asked. "There is a family that is in serious financial straits. The father has no job. The mother must remain home to care for the young children. Two of the children are ill and must have medical intervention which is very expensive. I have taken it upon myself to provide for this family," the Rebbe told him. "If that is the whole problem, the Rebbe could have called me, and I would have sent a check," the layman said. "No," the Rebbe explained. "I feel that this situation warrants a personal visit to explain the seriousness of the problem."

"Rebbe, I will give whatever is needed," the layman practically pleaded.

"It is not up to me to tell you how much to spend," the Rebbe explained. "Tzedakah is up to the contributor. You must decide for yourself how much to give."

"Rebbe, can I write out a check for the amount?" The layman asked.

"Certainly," answered the Rebbe.

"To whom shall I address the check?" the benefactor asked.

The Rebbe looked at the ground, thought for a moment and said haltingly, "Write out the check

to achicha ha'ani, 'your impoverished brother.'"

The message was clear: It is not important to know to whom the money is going. A Jew is in need. He is our brother. What more do we need to know? A poor Jew needs neither pedigree nor references.

You shall count for yourself seven cycles of sabbatical years, seven years seven times; the years of the seven cycles of sabbatical years shall be for you forty-nine years. (25:8)

Time is our most precious commodity. Regrettably, we do not always appreciate its value until it is too late. The Dubno Maggid applies the above pasuk as a basis for a parable which conveys a profound message. One day, a poor man who went from town to town and village to village begging, decided to tally up his hard-earned pennies. After he spent hours upon hours counting, his pennies amounted to an impressive number. Indeed, he considered himself a rich man. He had amassed hundreds of thousands of pennies. It began to go to his head, he was a rich man!

One of his close friends noted his foolhardiness and said, "You are making a great mistake! Your entire life, your coin of exchange was the penny. You begged for pennies, and you received nothing but pennies. You do not realize, unfortunately, that when you attempt to exchange your vast amount of pennies for gold coins, you will find that you have accumulated a meager sum of gold. It takes thousands of pennies to total one gold coin. Indeed, by the gold standard you have accumulated very little."

A similar thought applies to our outlook on life. We think that we have a long time to live - when we divide the average human being's lifespan into days, hours, and even minutes. When we think in terms of Shemittos and Yovlos, Sabbatical and Jubilee year segments, however, how much do we really have? The Torah instructs us to count Shemittos and Yovlos, seven times seven years. Suddenly, fifty years is no longer a long time. It becomes a single unit - one that passes quickly. Quite conceivably, if our perspective on time changes, it would simultaneously transform our perspective on life.

If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him. (25:35)

How often do we see someone who is "down and out," and we are distressed that we have not come to his aid before the situation deteriorated irreversibly? The Torah admonishes us to extend a helping hand to the Jew who begins to lose money, who is slowly falling into the abyss of poverty. Slow his decline and help him to regain his prosperity. It is much more difficult to rescue someone from bankruptcy than to help him before his fortune completely reverses. What is the reason that we wait? If it is so much better to help before the tragedy is complete, why do we not "get our act together" a little bit earlier?

We rationalize. We figure that when our friend "really" needs us, when he is completely destitute, then our aid will be most appreciated. Just because he has lost his job, or his business is

faltering we do not need to run to his house with our checkbook.

The Torah does not seem to agree with this rationale. It is a greater act of chesed, kindness, to prevent poverty than to help an individual who is already poor. When we help someone before he has fallen, we maintain his dignity, something which is more vital than balancing his checking account. In many circumstances, helping a Jew to preserve his dignity is like saving his life, which is unquestionably more important than serving his material needs.

*If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him.
(25:35)*

We are commanded to be charitable, to think of our poor brother in need. It is not easy. I have worked hard to amass whatever material possessions I have. Now I am told to share a portion of my hard-earned savings with someone else - who has not worked for it! How do we demonstrate the fallacy of this idea? Horav Avraham zl, m'Kelisk, cited by Otzar Meshalim, gives the following analogy.

Two men are about to leave for a long trip. Each one has a small fortune to take with him. Obviously, traveler's checks were not an option. What do they do? One decides to take a few dollars with him and sends the balance by mail. Concerned about the cost of shipping, the other person decides to take the money with him, hidden in his clothes. Along the way, they are attacked by a gang of robbers who demand to see their money. The man who took nothing with him has nothing to lose. His friend, who was concerned about the rising postage rates, becomes a victim and loses everything.

Life is not much different. Some of us feel the need to hoard every penny. Those individuals quickly squelch the thought of sharing any portion of their hard-earned money with the less fortunate. They regrettably fall prey to the robbers, the thieves - who symbolize the yetzer hora, evil inclination, and the vicissitudes of life and their own deficient character traits. They demand money for reasons which they justify, and for whims and fancies which they do not even bother justifying. Before long, there is nothing left to take along for the trip through life. When he arrives at the final destination on the day that he meets the Creator, he has nothing to show. He is bereft of his savings!

His contemporary, who wisely sent his money away, sharing it with others, arrives in the world of Truth with his many-earned merits, products of the charity which he gave. This should serve as a powerful incentive to share one's material possessions with others. Regrettably, as in so many areas, many of us wait for the moment when we have to use hindsight to realize our errors. By then, however, it is too late.

While we might have implied that tzedakah, charity, is an obligation of the well-to-do, it is unequivocally not so. Tzedakah is for everyone; even the poor should share with those less fortunate than they are. I recently read about an individual who was traveling through a predominantly observant section of Brooklyn before Rosh Hashanah and observed a moving sight. On the corner of a busy intersection stood an elderly woman - begging. "Tzedakah, tzedakah! Helft mir, help me! Please! Tayereh Yidden, dear Jews, help me!" she called out. One by one, almost everyone who passed by dropped some change and even a bill or two, into the purse that she held with both hands. Even little children, taught by their parents the significance of the mitzvah of tzedakah, were sure to throw in their nickels and pennies. Indeed, parents should teach their children from the earliest age the overriding importance of sharing with others.

Suddenly, a change occurred in the lady's facial expression. With a look that seemed to indicate, "I have had enough!" she leaned against the wall, took out some crackers from her jacket and began to munch on them. The moment she moved away from her coveted spot, another woman materialized as if from nowhere and began to do her own thing, calling out, "Tzedakah, tzedakah!" Not realizing that she was infringing on the previous woman's "turf," she approached the woman and asked her for tzedakah - which she promptly received! Although she was herself a beggar, she was acutely aware that tzedakah is for everyone - to give.

Do not harass one another. (25:17)

Rashi interprets the pasuk as an enjoinder against *onaas devarim*, verbal harassment.

Ridiculing someone can have an enduring effect upon his personality development. The humiliation and scorn one is subject to at the hands of others can damage his psyche, impairing his self-esteem and his ability to relate to others. Humiliation does not only result from words; it can also be the consequence of an intentional snub. There is nothing as demeaning as being ignored by others, so that one feels as if he does not exist in their eyes. While the individual should not be obsessed with his ego, self-esteem is a pre-requisite for emotional stability. One who denigrates a fellow Jew, either with disparaging words or by giving him the cold shoulder when a smile would make his day, is acting reprehensibly. Perhaps it would serve the individual well to realize that Hashem will act towards him in the same manner in which he has acted towards others. Hashem's rebuff, however, hurts much more.

As mentioned above, we often do not realize the long term effect of our actions. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites the following narrative from Chazal in the Talmud Shabbos 145b and notes the accompanying lesson to be derived from it.

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Chiya Bar Abba and Rabbi Assi were sitting before Rabbi Yochanan, and they asked him, "Why are the Babylonian fowls fat?" Rabbi Yochanan responded, "Because they were not sent into exile, as is quoted in Yirmiyahu 48:11: 'Moav has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees... Neither has he gone into captivity.' He quoted this pasuk to demonstrate the adverse effects of exile.

Upon reading this passage in the Talmud, one wonders about its purpose. Are Chazal debating a zoological question, or are they teaching a profound lesson? Horav David Wein, zl, explains that Chazal seek to emphasize to us that the pain and anguish that are intrinsic to galus, exile, unfortunately endure for many generations. Babylonians did not drink from the bitter cup of misfortune that was the lot of those who were exiled. Thus, their fowl were fat and, because they were not driven from their homes, they did not suffer.

Horav Zilberstein concludes this thought with his own reflection on the consequences of verbal harassment. We think that after we have insulted or humiliated someone, a "quick mechilah," forgiveness, on Erev Yom Kipur, will suffice. This is not true. The pain and suffering endured by the one upon whom we have vented our abuse lasts, even after we have apologized. Abuse is a terrible assault on a person's total being. Verbal abuse may seem to be non-violent, but it creates damage that lasts long after the marks of a violent blow have disappeared. An abused child becomes an abusive parent, an abusive mate, and an abusive person. The lack of self-esteem resulting from being the object of someone's verbal abuse can have deleterious effects that stigmatize generations. Can someone grant forgiveness for such far-reaching emotional damage?

If you will say what will we eat in the seventh year?...I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year. (25:20,21)

If one were to go to a great tzaddik and receive a blessing for success and Divine assistance in all of his endeavors, it would be incredible! Who would not do anything to receive such a guarantee? As Horav Uri Kelerman, zl, was wont to say, the opportunity is there for all of us - all of the time. Indeed, we recite the pasuk daily: "Baruch ha'gever asher yivtach b'Hashem, v'hayah Hashem miyvach," "Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem and Hashem is his source of trust." The pasuk clearly states that one who has bitachon is blessed. What more do we need? What greater assurance of blessing do we seek?

Apparently, there are various levels of bitachon, trust in Hashem. This basis is found in a single word: sincerity. One is blessed in accordance with his sincerity. Sincere bitachon catalyzes blessing. The Torah cites the famous question which plagues so many Shemittah observers: "What will we eat in the seventh year?" To those with little faith, the Torah responds that Hashem will increase His blessing during the sixth year. The Commentators are bothered by this pseudo-dialogue. It seems that as a result of their questioning, their doubting, they will receive a greater yield during the sixth year. On the contrary, the one who does not ask should receive the blessing! He is the believer, he trusts enough not to question. Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, explains, based upon an insight of Sforno, that indeed he who does not question will receive greater nourishment within him. He will not need more food. What he already has will more than suffice. The one who questions needs the blessing of a greater yield. It all depends upon one's sincere level of bitachon.

Horav Yaakov Beifus, Shlita, relates a story that occurred concerning the Alshich HaKadosh that demonstrates this idea. The Alshich once gave a lecture to his students about the concept of bitachon. He reiterated time and again that one who sincerely trusts in Hashem will reap the greatest benefits. Among the assemblage was a simple Jew who earned his living by hauling sand and clay for the construction trade. When he heard what the Alshich had said, he decided to drop everything and recite Tehillim all day. When the money ran out, he promptly sold his trusted donkey and wagon, his original "partners" in his vocation, to a gentile farmer. He continued with his daily recitation of Tehillim, firm in his belief that all would be well, for he was in Hashem's Hands.

One day shortly thereafter, the donkey appeared at the home of the man, pulling the wagon laden with sand and limestone. He quickly unloaded the wagon to find that beneath the sand was a sack of gold. After investigating, he discovered that the gentile to whom he had sold the donkey was digging a pit. He unearthed a gold treasure in the ground, which he promptly loaded upon the wagon and covered with sand. The gentile went back into the pit to continue digging. Suddenly, the wall of the pit caved in, and the gentile was unfortunately buried. The gentile had no family. The donkey knew only one place to go - to its original owner, who now became a very wealthy man.

When the students of the Alshich heard this story, they were visibly shaken. "What was so unique about this man's bitachon? Why was it greater than ours? Why have we never discovered such a treasure?" they asked. The Alshich responded to them, "He took everything that I said in the correct manner - literally. His trust was sincere, his faith unequivocal. Hashem rewarded this Jew commensurate with his sincerity.

Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai saying...when you make a sale to your fellow...do not aggrieve one another. (25:1,14)

Of these two pesukim, one introduces the institution of Shemittah and Yovel; the second institutes the laws of social justice and righteousness in Jewish life. Chazal infer that the two are connected. They cite the pasuk in Mishlei 28:22, "The selfish man piles up wealth and does not (even) realize that want will be his lot." Chazal say that this is a reference to Kayin who killed his brother, Hevel, because he wanted the world all for himself. He did not realize that his terrible act of violence would ultimately cause him only anguish, ending his earthly existence as a refugee fleeing from place to place. Kayin murdered his brother after Hashem rejected his offering. Chazal attribute the rejection to Kayin's negative attitude. He brought his offering from that which was "left over" from his food. Hevel, however, brought the first fruits, the finest and best. Hashem responded to Hevel's korban. Kayin could not tolerate the underlying concept and spirit of Bikurim, the law that instructs us to bring the first fruits to Hashem.

Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl, investigates some aspects of the Bikurim rite in an effort to shed light on this significant institution and its lesson to us. Klal Yisrael was obliged to bring Bikurim only after the entire land had been conquered and apportioned. They were told to fulfill this mitzvah, since they were granted Eretz Yisrael as a result of this mitzvah. Furthermore, when they brought the first fruits to the Bais Hamikdash, they presented them to the Kohen accompanied by a prayer of Vidui, confession.

The farmer would exclaim, "Today I have acknowledged that I have entered the land." His ancestors that preceded him had been there for centuries, yet, he was acknowledging the gift of the land - today. This confession was designed to express the feeling of gratitude to Hashem for His constant beneficence.

Chazal express a similar idea regarding Moshe Rabbeinu, who became wealthy from the "pesoles," shavings, of the Luchos. Hashem told him, "I gave the wealth of Egypt to the Jews - who did not participate in the mitzvah of caring for the remains of Yosef. You, Moshe, should not remain poor because you were too preoccupied to gather the wealth of Egypt. You will receive the shavings of the Luchos, so that you will also become rich." Klal Yisrael was involved in a mitzvah: gathering Egypt's wealth. They were obligated to another mitzvah, although perhaps one not as financially rewarding: taking care of Yosef Hatzadik's remains. Moshe Rabbeinu took care of that mitzvah. He did not, however, lose out on the riches. Hashem provided for him, just as He provides for all those who have the courage and conviction to trust in Him.

There are priorities in Jewish life. We do not scorn material gain, but it surely should not be our first priority. Fulfilling mitzvos does not require us to renounce material wealth - only not to make it our priority. Hashem showed Klal Yisrael that Moshe, who busied himself with another mitzvah, one that did not bring him material gain, would also one day have riches beyond their wildest dreams. Hashem takes care of His own.

In this spirit, the institution of Bikurim requires us to bring from the first fruits. After we demonstrate our conviction that the first and the best belong to Hashem, we gain the right to establish our dominion over that which is left over. This was Kayin's error. He offered Hashem from his leftover fruits. He demonstrated his contempt for the spirit of true worship of Hashem. The best he took for himself; the rest he left for Hashem.

Consistent with this thesis, we cite Chazal who say that the downfall of the Jewish state was due to "their failure from the first to recite the blessing over the Torah" "Shelo beirchu ba'Torah techillah."

Horav S.R.Hirsch, zl, notes that Chazal do not trace the source of our national destruction to the fact that the Jewish people did not study Torah, or that they manifest a lack of erudition. Even at a time when the Torah was alive and well, studied and considered a precious possession by Klal Yisrael, the downfall of the Jewish state was a foregone conclusion in the eyes of Hashem. This was because they did not praise Hashem "first and foremost" for possessing the Torah. To the people, the Torah was not their most precious possession. It was not the central source and goal for all of their aspirations. It was not their priority. They placed their interests elsewhere, engaged their primary energies into other achievements. This attitude would sooner or later lead to a total estrangement from the Torah. Torah is either first or it is, regrettably, last.

This attitude was evinced by Klal Yisrael when they concerned themselves with taking Egypt's gold and silver rather than Yosef's remains. When they would have time "left over," they planned to address this mitzvah. First, they would take care of themselves. Hashem showed them, as He has demonstrated throughout the millennia, that making Torah and mitzvos one's priority -- without regard for material gain -- is not a reason for concern. In fact, this is the only way a Jew should conduct his life. Moshe Rabbeinu did not "lose out" because he was preoccupied with Yosef's remains. Neither will those who realize and act on Hashem's priorities.

This is the message of the two introductory pesukim of our parsha. One of the primary purposes of Shemittah and Yovel is to foster the spirit which the Bikurim institution is to imbue in the Jewish People. Shemittah and Yovel remind us that the land belongs to Hashem, We use it as a gift, as long as we follow its Owner's directive. Immediately following the laws of Shemittah, we are instructed in the precepts that will help to develop our social structure under the banner of love, kindness, integrity and righteousness. These chapters have an internal relationship with one another. As long as Klal Yisrael remains dedicated to the notion that everything it thinks it owns really belongs to the Almighty -- and that He is the sole source of their material possessions, then, and only then, will they remain receptive to the laws of social justice and fellowship. Kayin taught us this lesson. He considered himself the sole owner of the land, selfishly and greedily leaving the leftovers for Hashem. This egotism grew, his greed took hold of his better senses, until the point that the unthinkable act of murder was no longer unthinkable. This should give us something to deliberate.

If you will say what will we eat in the seventh year...I will ordain my blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three years. (25:19,20)

Observance of Shemittah requires an enormous amount of conviction. Chazal consider those farmers who observe Shemittah to be on a very high spiritual plane. Inevitably, some individuals will wonder, "What will we eat?" To them Hashem responds, "Wait, and you will see an increase in your yield." Veritably, one who has true faith does not question, "What will we eat?" He accepts Hashem's command and trusts in His "ability" to sustain him. Accordingly, asking "What will we eat?" is a shortcoming. Nachlas Tzvi cites the Noam Elimelech who interprets the pasuk in the following manner: "If you will say, 'What will we eat?', one who is wholehearted in his trust in Hashem does not question. He believes that whatever he needs will be provided for him. The Torah addresses the one whose faith is not so absolute, one who has questions. He who will ask, 'What will we eat?' will compel Me to ordain My blessings, so that the fields will increase their yield." Regarding the one who will not question, he will not want; he will continue to be sustained, not noticing any change whatsoever. The ones who question but, nonetheless, observe, will receive a special dispensation. The ones who do not

question, who place their complete trust in Hashem, will not want. The ones who do not observe because of their questions will one day learn the meaning of "wanting."

In his inimitable manner, Nachlas Tzvi cites a story in support of this idea. Once a chasid of Rav Mendel M'Kotzk, zl, came before the rebbe, imploring him to intercede with the Almighty on his behalf. His daughters had reached marriageable age, and he had no funds with which to marry them off. Immediately, the Kotzker Rebbe took a piece of paper and wrote a letter to a well-known philanthropist, Reb Moshe Chaim Rottenberg, requesting that he assist in marrying off the poor man's daughters.

The poor man could not thank the Rebbe enough. He borrowed money for the fare and traveled to the wealthy man's city to ask him for help. After much trial and travail he arrived in the city. Obtaining directions, he presented himself to Reb Moshe Chaim with the letter of appeal from the Kotzker. Reb Moshe Chaim read the letter with the greatest passion, manifesting a deep sense of reverence for the Rebbe's impassioned plea to help the poor man who stood before him. With incredible enthusiasm, he stood up from his chair and went over to his cabinet and took out two rusty copper coins, giving them to the poor man.

One cannot begin to imagine the immense depression and sense of dejection that immediately enveloped the poor man. He came here in the hope that his prayers would be answered, and he was leaving with these coins that were not even sufficient to cover his traveling expenses. How could this happen to him? What would he do now? As he was walking slowly down the street, broken-hearted and dispirited, he reminded himself of the Kotzker's lectures regarding bitachon, trust, in Hashem. After awhile, he came to realize that to trust in man is futile. One must place his entire trust in Hashem with the hope that he will be worthy of His favor. Indeed, he became ashamed of his behavior. Imagine, traveling this entire distance - for what? For a couple of rusty rubles? Where was his trust in Hashem?

Suddenly, he heard the sound of an approaching carriage. He turned around and saw that the wealthy man whose house he recently left, the "major benefactor" who was "supposed" to have helped him, was coming up behind him. He moved over to let the carriage pass, when it stopped right in front of him. The doors of the carriage swung open wide, and Reb Moshe Chaim leapt down. With a great big smile, he reached out to the poor man with a large bag filled with gold coins. He explained, "When you came to me earlier with the letter from the holy Kotzker, you indicated that you were placing your entire trust in the letter. Your bitachon in the Almighty vanished into thin air. You thought all of your problems were solved. You had the letter, I had the money - you were all set. What about Hashem? Did you forget about Him? I, therefore, sent you away with practically nothing, so that you would begin to think and realize that the only source of sustenance is Hashem. We are merely His agents. Now I am giving you the money to marry off your daughters, because you have realized from where this money really originates."

If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters in your proximity, you shall hold on to him - proselyte and resident - so that he can live with you. (25:35) We are enjoined to reach out to our brother who has fallen on hard times. One who listens to the impassioned pleas of his fellowman will surely be rewarded. Indeed, the Midrash cites the pasuk in Tehillim 41:2, "Praiseworthy is he who contemplates the needy; on the day of disaster Hashem will deliver him."

Is there a special relationship between this pasuk in Tehillim and the pasuk in the Torah, or is it cited merely for its supporting role? Furthermore, why is it necessary to include the words "u'mato yado imach," "And his hand falters in your proximity?" It could have stated simply, "If your brother becomes impoverished." Horav Yosef Konvitz, zl, son-in-law of the Ridvaz and one of the founders of the Agudas Harabonim, explains that in areas of tzedakah, charity, we Jews distinguish ourselves from

the rest of the world. If one takes note, charity in the non-Jewish world is an endeavor which is performed only by the wealthy upper class. Philanthropy is something to be expected of those who have amassed enormous wealth or who are at least very comfortable financially. Rarely, do we find the lower and even middleclass working person involved in philanthropic endeavors. Tzedakah is for the rich.

Klal Yisrael is different. We give out of a sense of compassion - not style. One of Klal Yisrael's three basic characteristics is "rachamanim," compassionate. To have pity on others less fortunate than we are, or simply to show compassion for someone else who has come on hard times - even if we are not much better off than they are. Indeed, a Jew who does not have compassion is seriously deficient in a vital part of his Jewishness. When we contribute to charity, it is out of a sense of empathy and compassion. Consequently, the poor give just as well as the wealthy. They might not give as much - but they certainly give.

This is conveyed by the Torah's text, "If your brother will become impoverished in proximity to you," - even if you are also poverty stricken, nevertheless, you must reach out to your brother to sustain him. The mitzvah of tzedakah is a mitzvah that focuses upon a Jew's compassion - not necessarily his wallet. One should never say that he does not have enough for himself - let alone for someone else. It is our moral obligation to sustain our fellow Jew with whatever we can manage. Our own negative situation does not justify reneging on fulfilling this mitzvah.

This is also the underlying message of the pasuk in Tehillim cited by Chazal, "Praiseworthy is he who contemplates the needy, on the day of disaster Hashem will deliver him." This means that the one to praise is he who, despite the fact that he himself is confronted with disaster, still has the time and compassion to think about the plight of another Jew. He does not say, "I am just as poor as he" or "I have it worse than he." He reaches out to others regardless of his own sorry state of affairs. Such a person has truly earned Hashem's deliverance. The secret to personal redemption is not to be so internally focused that you are unable to think of others. Hashem will then reciprocate and think of you.

And in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath to be celebrated by the cessation of work for the land a sabbath unto G-d... and you shall sanctify the fiftieth year... a Yovel it is for you. (25:4,10) Shabbos and Shemitah have a common denominator - they are both spiritual entities. Shabbos implies the unbreakable bond that thrives between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. This bond is manifest in a cessation from one's secular affairs, as an opportunity and mandate to devote his time to Torah study and spiritual reflection. The Torah emphasizes that the seventh year is a period of time, an entire year, which one is to dedicate as a "Shabbos l'Hashem." The individual is to infuse himself with spirituality during his refrain from agricultural labor. Yovel, which derives its name from the blowing of the shofar on Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year, is parallel to Shabbos and Shemitah in perspective. That tekiah, sounding of the shofar, is the clarion call of freedom for all Jewish slaves; the land reverts to its original owner, as it conveys the message to Klal Yisrael that we are here only temporarily. We do not take permanent ownership of the land, because it ultimately belongs to Hashem. Olam Hazeah, this world, serves as a medium for enabling us to attain spiritual ascendancy in the Eternal World, Olam Habah. The shofar awakens us from our physical slumber, reminding us of our spiritual calling.

Thus, our parsha begins with the words, "When you come into the land that I give you." As long as Klal Yisrael sojourned in the wilderness, with no agricultural responsibilities and their sustenance provided directly by the Almighty, they were free to devote themselves to spiritual pursuit with no hindrance.

The Torah now assures Klal Yisrael that if they will observe the Shemitah/Yovel mitzvos,

Hashem will sustain them as miraculously as He had in the desert.

Interestingly, the fiftieth year's sanctity was of a progressive nature. From Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur, the slaves left their posts and remained in the homes of their master. They were not yet free to go, but they were not obligated to work. They remained in the home, eating and drinking joyously, as royalty. On Yom Kippur, the Bais Din would blow the shofar, and they became free to go. We might question the manner in which they were released. For ten days, from the beginning of the year until Yom Kippur, the slaves were no longer slaves; yet, they were not free to go home. Why?

Horav Avraham Kilav, Shlita, offers two reasons for this "progressive" manner of freeing the slaves. First, as mentioned above, during Yovel one comes to realize that he is not in charge of his own life. Hashem directs the world and everything in it belongs to Him. It is ours to use temporarily. The slave that heretofore was ours, is now free. He is like us. Indeed, we feed him as royalty. It is almost as if the slave becomes the master, and the master becomes the slave! In order to fulfill this mitzvah, the master has to swallow his pride and -- so to speak -- serve the slave. These ten days of service to the slave imbue the master with a deeper understanding of his own role in the world, clarifying what it is that Hashem expects of him.

Second, the slave must "upgrade" his mindset. Until now he has been a member of an inferior class, subservient to a master, not really having the proper perception of how to serve Hashem. It is difficult for one who has been subservient to a human master to transfer his whole heart and mind into service to Hashem. This ten-day period "eases" him into this new role. He is able to grow emotionally as he develops a sense of self confidence in the home of his master; He is no longer a slave, but an equal. He has the freedom to be a full time servant to the Master of masters - Hashem.

For unto Me are the Bnei Yisrael servants, they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt. (26:55)

At the conclusion of the laws dealing with personal freedom, the Torah states the reason that our freedom is not for sale: We were redeemed from Egypt by Hashem. We belong to Him - a fact that takes precedence over and precludes our belonging to anyone else. Every fiber of our being, every fraction of our strength and powers, belongs to the Almighty. The principle of a Jew's unalienable freedom is nurtured by Jewish law, to the point that not even the normal contract of a daily worker is considered binding. It can be revoked by the po'el, worker, at any time of the day. We must endeavor to understand what there is about our obligation to serve Hashem that overrides every other obligation. Is not the Jewish servant, eved Ivri, obliged to observe all Taryag, 613, mitzvos? How is he revoking the yoke of Heaven by being an eved?

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, initially suggests that it is not the actual servitude which takes away from his relationship with Hashem. Rather, the name "eved," slave, demeans him as a Jew and as a servant to the Almighty. This would be true if it applied only to a slave. We mentioned before, however, that a worker is permitted to break his contract because he has a "prior" commitment to Hashem. Apparently, our servitude to Hashem supersedes everything - even the average working man's contract.

Horav Solomon cites Horav Simcha Zissel, zl, M'Kelm, who explains that everyone is obligated in mitzvah performance - even an eved Ivri. There is something more to serving Hashem, however, than just an obligation to perform His mitzvos. An eved Hashem is one who has nothing else, no

subservience to anyone but Hashem. His mind and heart are totally sublimated to serve the Almighty. Although he can observe mitzvos to a certain extent while he is in his master's possession, the eved Ivri cannot fulfill his total obligation to Hashem. He cannot give all of himself, all of the time, to Hashem, because of his responsibilities to his master. One who senses the depth and beauty of this relationship will feel the essence of true freedom. His "work" is given primary status while everything else is a distant second place.

If you will say, "what will we eat in tThe seventh year....." I will ordain My blessing. (25:20,21)

Rashi explains that the Torah's dual We note that Hashem promises His blessing only after Bnei Yisrael will ask the question, "What will we eat?" This is an unrealistic approach. Why would Hashem not ordain His blessing regardless of whether or not the people were anxious about their sustenance? Do those who observe his mitzvos without question deserve to go hungry? Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, offers a practical answer. If Bnei Yisrael had not asked this question, Hashem would have granted an even greater miracle. Indeed, He would have ordained that the initial output of the sixth year would suffice for three years. Since the people were doubtful of Hashem's ability to provide, they lost the opportunity to experience an even greater miracle. Horav Feinstein adds that quite possibly there were two distinct miracles. Those who did not question survived on the basis of the produce of the sixth year, while those whose bitachon was not as great were granted a miracle of lesser significance.

What powerful words! People are granted miracles, but had they exhibited greater trust in the Almighty, they would have sustained yet an even greater miracle. Moreover, even the miracle/salvation for which they prayed might have been granted more easily -- if they would only have maintained more faith in the Almighty. Perhaps, we should consider this insight and place our entire trust in Hashem.

If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him (25:35)

Rashi says, do not wait until he has fallen and must be picked up. It is difficult to raise up someone who is down -- completely. Rather, one should support him, trying to catch him when he is faltering. Give him sustenance; lend him a helping hand, give him the courage to continue. Horav E. M. Shach, Shlita, comments that chesed, kindness, begins with understanding and forethought. We should look around and study the plight of those around us, and with an intelligent eye try to see what it is our friend needs and how we can be of assistance. First we look, then think, and afterwards act. Our acts of chesed should be the result of "seeing" and "thinking", not simply acting. One who thinks before he acts has a more clear appreciation of his act of kindness.

Horav Schach explains that this is the reason we find the word "vayaar", and he saw; regarding Avraham Avinu's noticing the three "wayfarers", repeated twice. First Avraham saw three men, then he saw once again and ran to greet them. Avraham did not act hastily - he saw, it registered in his mind,

and he acted. His act of chesed was not a spontaneous or impulsive act. It was well thought out and planned.

This is the meaning of Chazals' dictum, "He who closes his eyes from charity". One who does not see does not give. The reason/excuse he has for not helping is that because he did not see, he did not know about it, etc. Obviously, if one wears blinders or shelters himself from exposure to other people's tzaros, problems, he will be unaware.

How many of us can say that we do not look away when we see a poor, dirty man in need, or a child that is physically or mentally challenged. We think that if we do not look it will go away. Unfortunately, the only thing that will go away is our opportunity to perform a deed of kindness, to help another person in need.

If your brother becomes impoverished.....you shall strengthen him.....Do not take from him interest and increase.....and let your brother live with you. (25:35,36)

The prohibition against paying or receiving interest is beyond comprehension. Why should it be forbidden? If it is normal for one to make use of his tools, his animals and his home, why can he not make use of his money? Logically speaking, "renting out" money should be no different than renting out a house. Moreover, interest should be the logical payment to one who has lent his own money to someone who was unable to use his money. Also, if interest is forbidden, why is it permissible to receive interest from a non-Jew? If it is wrong, it is wrong in all instances.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, offers a noteworthy insight. He maintains that taking interest is not a breach in society as we know it, in deed, it might even be good business to "rent out" ones' money. It is not the correct thing to do in regard to a brother. One simply does not take interest from his brother. The framework of business is different. What is permissible and even correct in the context of a business deal becomes reprehensible in regard to a brother.

The Torah wants brothers to act as brothers. Those who demand interest destroy the very fiber of achdus, unity, among Klal Yisrael. That is why the Torah emphasized, "If your brother becomes impoverished"..... and let your brother live with you." Different rules apply in regard to family. It behooves us to take stock every once in a while and reflect upon the way we treat our fellow Jew. Is he like family, or have we lost that type of sensitivity --also?

You shall eat long stored grain, and you shall remove the old because of the new. (26:10)

Rashi explains that the granaries will be so full with the new grain and the storehouses so full of the old grain. This will force us to remove the contents of the storehouses to make room for the new grain. This is an enigmatic blessing. While it is certainly wonderful to have such an abundance of grain, what benefit is there in having so much surplus that we are compelled to get rid of the old grain? Food should be guarded and preserved, not thrown out. In this blessing we are told that we will have so much excess that we will have to remove the old grain. Is this really a blessing?

In order to understand this issue, let us digress and focus on the concept of simchah, joy. In the

Talmud Pesachim 109a, Chazal state that during the time that the Bais Hamikdash was standing, there was no simchah without meat, and now that the Bais HaMikdash is no longer extant, simchah occurs only through the medium of wine. What are Chazal teaching us? The Shem MiShmuel cites his father, the Avnei Nezer, who explains that simchah on YomTov is unique in that it is an inner experience, one that should be savored by the emotions and intellect. It is not simply a time for external expression of joy. Yom Tov is a time for dancing and singing - both external manifestations of joy-- but they should be engendered by an inner sense of simchah. How is this inner sense of joy awakened within the person to the point that he overflows with joy and seeks to express himself outwardly? The sacrificial offerings that were brought in the Bais Hamikdash looked and tasted no different than ordinary meat that was purchased at the butcher store. There was, however, one difference. Butcher store meat was not inherently holy; sacrificial meat was. Thus, the individual who ate from a korban became internally infused with the inherent kedushah, holiness, of the meat. Ingesting holy meat imbues a person with holiness that promotes a feeling of inner joy, which is later expressed externally through song and dance.

Once the Bais Hamikdash was taken from us, wine became the medium for arousing the necessary kedushah. Chazal state, "When wine goes in, secrets come out" (Eiruvim 65a). Simply, this means that inebriation leads to the individual's loss of control and the divulging of his secrets. On a deeper level, it suggests that wine has the power to release one's innermost feelings.

The Shem M'Shmuel explains this further. Because the physical elements of this mundane world are subject to the ravages of time, everything deteriorates as it ages. Wine is one of those physical elements that is unique in that the more it matures, the better it becomes. The finest vintages are often very old. Wine is, thus, the symbol of the spiritual dimension, a world which improves with time. Its character is innate and possesses none of the extrinsic, superficial properties of the physical world. When one drinks wine, it stimulates a feeling which parallels a spiritual tendency, such as an outpouring of one's innermost emotions. Therefore, it has been selected as a suitable alternative for the sacrificial meats of Yom Tov. Now that the Bais Hamikdash is no longer extant, we imbibe wine, so that we are able to catalyze the appropriate feelings of inner joy.

We now return to our original query: Why did Hashem bless Klal Yisrael with excess produce? This is a difficulty only if food ages in the usual manner and spoils. If produce were to improve with age, however, as mentioned above, whereby it provides us with "wine-like" features that bring out the best of our inner spiritual emotions, excess would be a blessing. In this scenario, the food would not lead to the negative - gluttony or gross coarseness - but, rather, to increased sensitivity to matters of the spiritual dimension. The more grain we would produce, the greater would be the opportunity for absorbing spirituality. This would certainly constitute a blessing.

If you consider My decrees loathsome, and if your being rejects My ordinances...so that you annul My covenant. (26:15)

Rashi explains that a seven step chain reaction of sin leads to total apostasy. Interestingly, along the path of digression, the hatred of the sages who expound the ordinances develops, leading to one's preventing others from following the commandments of G-d. We wonder why an individual who does not do should hate one who does. Indeed, we do not find this phenomenon concerning any other

religions. Just because their priests lead an ascetic lifestyle, removed from reality, it does not provoke a reaction of animosity from the common person. Yet, in Judaism, the talmid chacham, Torah scholar, the tzadik, righteous and pious Jew, who dedicates himself and his life to Torah study and mitzvah performance, is often the subject of scorn and derision. Why?

Judaism is a religion of action. It makes demands upon a person to act, to do, to perform. Judaism is not only about the heart, as in other religions in which one has to be good in his heart, have good thoughts, and act ethically. Those who live in a lifestyle removed from the people, who devote themselves to their god, neither infringe on the beliefs of the common man nor impugn his devotion. They are priests, and, as such, are meant to be different.

Our religion does not distinguish between the common man and the rabbi. Everyone is obligated to observe all 613 mitzvos to the fullest extent and minutest detail. Thus, when the sage observes and performs, he represents a threat to the common Jew's lack of observance. His insecurity is breached, and the self-loathing that motivates so much of his negative reaction to the observant goes into overdrive. He knows in the deepest recesses of his heart that the observant are wrong, and the sage is living proof of their folly.

*I will remember for the covenant of the ancients, those whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt.
(26:45)*

Hashem promised the fathers of the twelve tribes that He would not forsake their descendants, and He would redeem them.

The foundation of Klal Yisrael's sense of mutual responsibility, one Jew for another, stems from the fact that we are all family, descendants of the twelve tribes. Yehudah was the first one to express the Jewish concept of areivus, mutual responsibility, when he said to Yaakov Avinu that he would ensure Binyamin's safe return: Anochi aervenu, "I will personally guarantee him" (Beresihis 43:9). In his Tiferes Shlomo, Horav Shlomo zl, m'Radomsk, writes that it was specifically due to Yehudah's sense of achrayos, responsibility, that Yaakov sent him to Egypt to precede the family and establish a yeshivah prior to the arrival of the rest of the family. Yaakov wanted a yeshivah that articulated and manifested a sense of achrayos, a feeling of areivus for all Jews.

This sense of mutual concern is what motivated the shotrim, Jewish officers who were in charge of their brethren in Egypt, to take the lashes for the slaves, rather than compel them to work harder. They ignored Pharaoh's instructions, because they cared about their brothers. These shotrim merited to become the members of the first Sanhedrin, High Court. Only one who is sensitive to the plight and feelings of his Jewish brothers deserves to be selected to adjudicate them.

If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them. (26:3)

Study leads to observance, which leads to performance. Shemiras hamitzvos, observance of mitzvos, is for the most part a rhetorical phrase, since what purpose is there in "observing" a mitzvah if one does not carry it out? Mitzvos were given to us to be fulfilled. Perhaps there is a deeper meaning to

shemiras hamitzvos. A shomer is a guard, a watchman. He makes sure to guard and protect whatever is in his possession, whatever has been entrusted in his care. Hashem enjoins us to guard His mitzvos, to make sure that they are not being ignored, that they are carried out to the fullest detail. It is all in the attitude one manifests towards mitzvah performance. If it is a mitzvah he cares about, he does not simply perform the mitzvah; he takes care of it, looking forward to carrying it out, making sure that everything leading up to its actual performance is properly prepared. When one guards Hashem's mitzvos, Hashem sees to it that the mitzvos serve as a protection for him. Yes, mitzvos protect the individual who cares about them. The following story demonstrates this idea.

Two Jews from a small town in Poland attached themselves to a band of Polish partisans, who were waging war with the German Army. They lived in the forest, hiding in places that were unnoticeable to the casual view of the human eye. There was always one partisan who hid in the trees outside the camp's perimeter to warn the partisans of an enemy approach. One day, the lookout gave an emergency call to break camp. He noticed that, in the distance, a German column was on its way into the forest. Immediately, they broke camp, concealing any sign that would reveal their presence, and left for the other end of the forest. Because of the tumult, the two Jewish partisans did not realize until they reached safety that they had left their Tefillin in the camp. What were they now going to do? To return to their camp meant placing their lives in danger. If they were discovered by the Nazis, they would immediately be put to death. To live without Tefillin meant a life that had very little meaning. They decided that they would return for their Tefillin.

They prayed to Hashem saying, "Ribono Shel Olam, please protect us. We are returning for our Tefillin, only so that we may serve You properly." Miraculously, they were able to avoid the German army. After they located their Tefillin, they davened and rested for a short while and prepared to return to their group at the other end of the forest. When they arrived, they were confronted with a grizzly scene: every member of their group was dead. Apparently, the Nazis had been able to locate and ambush them. Because they had returned for their Tefillin, the two Jewish partisans were spared. The mitzvah of Tefillin had protected them. It was reciprocity for the attitude they had manifest for this mitzvah.

And you behave casually with Me. I will behave towards you with a fury of casualness. (26:27,28)

Rashi translates *keri* as "casually", meaning that - despite the punishments that Klal Yisrael will sustain - their performance of mitzvos will remain haphazard, erratic and, at best, complacent. They will view mitzvos as a matter of choice, not as a Divinely ordained decree. Other Rishonim, such as Ibn Ezra and Rabbeinu Bachya, define *keri* as happenstance. Klal Yisrael will refuse to recognize the source of their misfortune. Rather than attributing it to Hashem's displeasure with them, they will view their punishment as coincidental or the result of natural causes. They will shut out G-d from their lives.

The punishment for this form of behavior will be reciprocal. Hashem will shut them out. If we continue to interpret Hashem's messages as coincidence, then Hashem will conceal Himself from us, so that it will be more difficult to perceive the truth. We will not see that Hashem is the cause of all causes and that He is behind every event that occurs. We will be lost, because we will not have someone to whom to turn.

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, suggests that the word *keri* is derived from *kar*, cold. The people will lose their passion in their relationship with Hashem. They will become cold and distant, aloof and

remote. Rav Yisrael emphasizes the severity of this kerirus, frigid, reticent and emotionless attitude. Water is considered ritually pure and clean and is not mekabel tumah, cannot become ritually contaminated. When water turns into ice, however, its nature changes and it now can become tamei.

People are no different. When the passion is there, it binds them to the source and protects them from harm - both spiritual and physical. When the warmth is gone, they lose that protective ingredient that distinguishes them from the other lost souls.

The sound of a rustling leaf will pursue them... they will stumble over one another. (26:36,37)

The pasuk addresses the pirud levavos, separation of the hearts of Jews, whereby the harmony and unity that should exist among brothers does not exist. As difficult as exile is to bear, it is that much more overwhelming when one does not have the support of his compatriots. Earlier (Ibid 33), the Torah writes, "And you, I will scatter among the nations." Rashi explains that it will be similar to one who scatters barley. Due to the nature of the grain of barley, none will stick to the other. Likewise, even when they are in exile, in a circumstance which usually brings out the best in people, in which one usually empathizes with his fellow, Klal Yisrael will be different. The individual Jews will isolate themselves from one another.

In a way, the Jew in exile suffers both from within and from without. As a stranger in a strange land, he is at the mercy of his host country, who is far from benevolent to him. Indeed, the Jew is, for the most part, held in contempt. That is to be expected. After all, he is in exile. What makes things worse, however, is that when a Jew is persecuted by his host, he takes it out on his fellow Jew! This is similar to reeds being blown by the wind across the water. First, they are struck by the wind. Then, as a result, they strike each other, so that the reeds are doubly struck. This causes them all to bang into each other.

The Kli Yakar explains this parallel to the Torah's analogy to a rustling leaf. The leaf is very light and weak and, thus, easily blown against the next leaf. Likewise, the Jews in exile are blown by their persecutors, and, in turn, strike each other. This assault takes the form of lashon hora, slanderous speech, and other forms of misuse of one's G-d-given power of speech. They hurt each other using their tongues as potent and malicious weapons. This is the "sound" of a rustling leaf, a reference to the sound caused by their evil speech against one another.

The Kli Yakar concludes with the following statement: "And in our generation, this negative character trait is in itself sufficient reason for the extension of our stay in galus, exile."

The Kli Yakar lived some four hundred years ago. What should we say?

If you will follow My decrees. (26:3)

Rashi explains that this pasuk, which enjoins us to follow in Hashem's decrees, is an injunction to engage in intensive Torah study, to study diligently, to toil in the field of Torah. There are many definitions for the ameilus ba'Torah, toiling in Torah, and there are many situations in our history during which this indomitable commitment to Torah study has been demonstrated. Going back to the Talmud in Eiruvim 54b, wherein Chazal cite the incredible episode concerning Rabbi Preida, who had a

student who was educationally challenged. Rabbi Preida would have to repeat each lesson four hundred times before the student would grasp it. One day, Rabbi Preida was required to leave and attend to a certain matter involving a mitzvah. Prior to leaving, he taught his student the usual four hundred times, but, for some reason, he still did not grasp the lesson. Rabbi Preida thereupon asked him, "Why is today different?" The student answered, "From the very moment that the rebbe was notified that he must attend to a mitzvah, my attention was diverted. I was concerned that at any moment the rebbe will leave me and, thus, I could not concentrate well." Rabbi Preida then said to him, "Pay attention, and I will teach you." He then taught him the lesson another four hundred times. A Heavenly voice emanated and asked Rabbi Preida, "Do you prefer that four hundred years be added to your life, or that you and your generation merit life in the World to Come?" Rabbi Preida replied, "I ask that I and my generation merit the life of the World to Come." Hashem said, "Give him both rewards."

This is a truly powerful story about an incredible rebbe who would give up so much of his time to teach one student. This is how important Torah was to him. He toiled and labored a labor of love, so that his student would achieve proficiency in his Torah lessons. What should bother us is how did Rabbi Preida allow himself to spend so much time with one student at the apparent expense of perhaps hundreds - or even thousands - who could have imbibed his teachings during this time? During those long, difficult hours of teaching one simple lesson to one student, Rabbi Preida could have taught many halachos to multitudes of students who certainly thirsted for the knowledge he could impart.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, gleans an important lesson from here concerning Rabbi Prieda's personal derech ha'limud, approach towards learning Torah. In order to achieve success in Torah, one must exhibit patience. Not every sugya, topic, is simple. At times, one must labor with great intensity in order to understand the profundities of Chazal's lessons. This requires patience and perseverance. One who gives up quickly, as soon as the going gets difficult, does not go very far. When a passage in the Talmud is perplexing, it is easy to give up in exasperation or despair. Yes, that is the easy way out. The correct way is to review the passage, research the commentaries, and, with a little patience, the student of Torah will soon himself become a master.

Rabbi Preida accepted upon himself to teach this student, because it helped him develop his own middah, character trait, of savlanus, patience. From teaching this student, he would himself become a better student. He would develop greater patience in dealing with his own issues in learning.

Moreover, we might add that a rebbe, to be successful, must develop the middah of savlanus. In today's day and age, it is increasingly difficult to succeed in reaching out to students unless one exhibits much patience. A rebbe who is quick to become angry, not only hurts the student, but he hurts himself, as well. Anger produces confusion, and what is normally apparent to the calm mind becomes obscured by rage. Additionally, the issues and problems that a rebbe faces today, with students that are exposed to the many blandishments of contemporary society's ills, are many and different from the "old days." Patience and perseverance, hope, encouragement and much Tehillim - that is the only road towards achieving the goals we set for our students.

One more lesson that is to be derived from Rabbi Prieda's actions is: he did not lose out because of the extra time he invested. In fact, he gained by receiving both rewards. Hashem calculates the amount of ameilus that a person expends for Torah study and rewards him accordingly.

If you will follow My decrees. (26:3)

Rashi explains that following in Hashem's decrees is a reference to *ameilus ba'Torah*, toiling in Torah. One must exhaust great energy and diligence in studying Torah and, indeed, his reward for Torah study will be commensurate with the effort he expends. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, once spent a number of hours together with his son-in-law immersed deeply in a difficult halachic question. They studied the various sources in Talmud, Rishonim and Achronim. After great effort and toil, they arrived at a decision which was then written into the Mishnah Berurah. The entire effort took hours; the result was one and one half short lines in the Mishnah Berurah. The Chafetz Chaim's son-in-law turned to his venerable rebbe and asked, "Will anyone who studies the Mishnah Berurah have a clue as to how much effort and toil went into producing this one and one-half line addendum to the halachah?"

The Chafetz Chaim replied in his patient and sweet voice, "Let me tell you a story that will clarify the issue. It was during the reign of the Czar of Russia, a father and son worked together in Siberia to lay the tracks for the railroad. This was backbreaking labor. Night and day, under the most brutal conditions, from freezing cold to stifling heat, they worked putting their blood, sweat and tears into the Czar's railroad. One day, the son turned to his father and asked, "Father, will the people that ride the train have any idea concerning the backbreaking labor that went into preparing this railroad?"

The father looked at his son and said, "Czar Papushka. It is not important what people will or will not think, what they will or will not know. We work for one reason and for one purpose: to fulfill the command of the Czar. He is our leader, our father, who provides for our country. He has asked us to build the railroad. That is all that counts."

"The same idea applies to Torah study," continued the Chafetz Chaim. "It is unimportant for us to know if those who later delve through our *chidushim*, *novellae*, will appreciate the time and effort expended in their production. Likewise, it should not matter to us the amount of toil that we put into learning a difficult *sugya*. Everything that man does in this world should be executed with one focus in mind: he is carrying out Hashem's will."

This idea should apply to every endeavor that we are asked to do on behalf of Klal Yisrael. When the *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah leadership, issue forth a proclamation asking for our attendance at a function or our participation in an assembly, we must attend regardless of the hardship and inconvenience. We should have one mission in mind: to serve Hashem and carry out His will as interpreted by His emissaries, *gedolei Yisrael*.

But despite all this... I will not have been revolted by them, nor will I have rejected them to obliterate them. (26:44)

Hashem consoled His exiled people with the notion that, regardless of the suffering they endure in *galus*, exile, they still remain Hashem's nation, His Chosen People. This covenant remains in force until the end of time. We will suffer in exile, and we will be tormented, but we must remember the source of our pain and the promise that accompanies it: Hashem will never forsake us. This idea applies equally to all suffering. While it does not mitigate the pain, it should allay the depression that is intrinsic to our travail. The commentators emphasize that while we are all affected with pain at one time or another, some more, some less, we should, nonetheless, focus on acceptance and acquiescence,

rather than defer to the abjectness and gloom that tends to envelop us. Hashem has given us the resolve and fortitude of spirit to cope. We must attempt to be upbeat, conjuring up whatever feelings of affirmation that we can muster, so that the pain and negativity do not overwhelm us. Everything comes from Hashem with a reason and for a purpose.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites an incident in the Talmud Taanis 22a, that relates that once Rabbi Beroka encountered Eliyahu HaNavi and asked him to show him a ben Olam Habah, an individual destined to receive the ultimate reward of life in the World to Come. Eliyahu HaNavi pointed out two men who had achieved this great accolade. Rabbi Beroka then approached these men to ascertain the reason for their incredible reward. "What do you do?" he asked them. They replied, "We are comedians, and we go to cheer up those who are depressed." The Maharasha explains that they actually perform a dual service. Since Hashem shares in everyone's pain, when these men relieved someone of his depression, they were also relieving Hashem of His "pain."

Now, it goes without saying that these comedians were not simply making jokes as a vehicle for ridding someone of his depression. How then did they effect this transformation? Rav Zilberstein cites two sources to explain this phenomenon. First is from the Shlah HaKadosh in his Shaar Ha'Osios. He explains that these men would address whatever emunah and bitachon, faith and trust issues, a person might have. When a person understands that whatever occurs in his life is from Hashem, for a purpose, he will relate to his pain on a totally different plane. Whether it is bad news, illness, financial crisis or an annoying neighbor - they are all agents of Hashem sent on a mission: to cause pain for the designated individual. When one knows the source, he can better relate to and deal with the accompanying depression. The pain is still there, but the depression no longer has the power to overwhelm.

The second approach is that of the Ben Ish Chai, written in his Aderes Eliyahu, that depression is a man-made nuisance. Hashem, indeed, decrees pain and misery, but the ensuing depression is self-inflicted. On the contrary, Hashem wants man to accept his misery with a positive attitude, even with joy. Depression represents a lack of emunah, faith, in the Almighty. Why would Hashem decree that a person lose emunah in Him?

The Ben Ish Chai suggests three approaches through which one can triumph over depression. First, he should speak over and share his worries with others. Human nature is such that when one talks about his problems, they seem to dissipate. Second, one should look around at other Jews, at members of his immediate community, of other people in his generation who have undergone trials and tribulations and emerged triumphant. Individuals have gone from rags to riches, from sickness to good health, from misery to good fortune. This encourages and heartens a person and elevates his spirits from the depths of depression. Last, he should speak to a tzaddik, righteous person, who will share with him stories of individuals who had suffered greatly and triumphed over adversity and travail. At the very last moment, when it appeared that all was lost, Hashem granted them a miracle.

This scenario is to be derived from the pasuk in Tehillim 115:2,5. "Our G-d, is in the Heaven; whatever He pleases, He does. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of the hands of man. A mouth they have, but cannot speak; eyes they have, but cannot see; ears they have, but cannot hear." A man should not be overcome when he is afflicted with pain and suffering, because of the origin of this torment - "Our G-d, is in the Heaven; whatever He pleases, He does." Those that are depressed about the losses they have incurred in their silver and gold should realize that atzabehim, their idols, using a word which has a similar root as atzeiv, depression, to imply that this depression/idols is maasei yedei adam, "the work of the hands of man." The depression does not originate from Heaven; it is self-

inflicted, the work of man. Indeed, why should one worry? He has a mouth - let him speak to others. He has eyes - let him look around at the success achieved by others who, until recently, had also suffered. He has ears - let him go hear from the righteous Torah leaders; let him listen to them relate the success stories of the past generations. Yes, the suffering comes from Hashem, but the emotional upheaval, the depression, is a creation of man.

He shall not exchange it nor substitute it, good for bad or bad for good. If he does substitute one animal for another animal, then both it and its substitute will be holy. (27:10)

Once one has designated a specific animal as a korban to Hashem may not exchange it for another animal, regardless of the value or quality of the second animal. In the event that he does replace the animal, the substitute animal attains the same kedushah, sanctity, as the korban, and both must now be brought as korbanos. This is referred to by the Torah as Temurah, substitution. What is the rationale behind this law?

The Rambam in Hilchos Temurah 4:13 explains that the Torah has delved into the human psyche and understands that it is human nature for a person to be concerned regarding his possessions, always seeking to increase his holdings. Although he has chosen an animal to serve as his korban, there is always the possibility that he will retract his first choice and seek to replace it with an inferior animal. Thus, the Torah discourages his action by consecrating both animals. It is, likewise, forbidden to exchange an animal of lower quality with one of better quality, since this will ultimately lead to substitution of animals in which one might substitute an inferior animal for one of improved quality.

Horav Avrohom Pam, zl, in his Ateres Avraham, recently translated by Rabbi Sholom Smith, cites the Sefer HaChinuch who derives a fundamental lesson in Jewish history from the law of Temurah. Once an animal has been consecrated as a korban, the kedushah is lasting. Unless the animal develops a mum, physical blemish, that renders it pasul, invalid, it retains a holiness that cannot be removed or exchanged. If the owner attempts to rescind the kedushah, not only will his attempt be in vain, it will bring about additional kedushah, for the second animal will now also be sanctified, since he came with his actions to uproot holiness. Instead, the converse will occur. The kedushah will expand further, and other objects will, in turn, become sanctified.

Rav Pam notes that the history of Klal Yisrael's persecutions coincides well and attests to the rationale of the Temurah law. Throughout the millennia, attempts have been made to impugn the integrity of Torah and to undermine the kedushah of Klal Yisrael. Each time they ultimately failed, and, in fact, the paradoxical result was unprecedented Torah expansion. Let us go back to the first exile, galus Mitzrayim, whereby the Egyptians sought to assimilate Klal Yisrael into their immoral society. They failed, and Klal Yisrael grew and became stronger. Indeed, a number of Egyptians converted and joined Klal Yisrael upon their redemption.

A parallel was experienced by the Jews during the tenure of Mordechai and Esther, when the wicked Haman sought to destroy every Jew. The result was the same: failure for Haman and increased devotion to Hashem by the Jews, followed by joy and festivity with the Yom Tov of Purim. Haman's downfall catalyzed an increased awareness of, and respect for, the Jewish religion bringing about mass conversions in the land. This was the Jewish response to Haman's decree: the more they were pushed down, the more they would grow.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The lesson extends into contemporary times. We live in a day and age when Orthodoxy and its way of life are not accepted - nor can it be

ignored. The non-Jewish world either vilifies us or, at best, views us as parasites. Some of our own alienated brethren who would do anything to remove the taint of Jewishness from themselves have established ideological platforms to extirpate the Torah's teachings and traditions from this assimilated society. Rav Pam suggests that while this circumstance is certainly tragic, we cannot and must not forget the lesson of Temurah. Wherever there is an attempt to abate kedushah, it eventually results in a positive augmentation of Torah life and a rise in commitment. Not only will those who asperse Torah fail, they will personally attest to its veracity and sanctity. Today we find baalei teshuvah, newly-returned, committed Jews, descendants of prominent free-thinkers who contended with the Torah authorities of their day, who devote their lives to Torah and mitzvos. This is the ultimate victory: the eternity of our Torah and its intrinsic kedushah within our People.

And you will lie down with none to frighten you. (26:6)

A Jew who trusts in Hashem maintains the firm belief that regardless of the situation, Hashem is always there and can turn things around at any time. Indeed, Chazal have stated it best with their powerful maxim, "Even if a sharp sword lays on the neck of a person, he should not give up believing that Hashem's compassion will spare him." We have only to look at Eretz Yisrael and the way people live there to see this truth. Hashem protects us under the most precarious circumstances. Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, relates an incident that occurred during one of the more traumatic days of World War II, when he was prisoner in one of the concentration camps. On that day, the accursed Nazis had burnt all the inmates' Tefillin and - if that was not sufficiently devastating - they killed out many of the Jewish prisoners. It was a day when hopelessness and despair reigned throughout the camp.

It was on that very day that an inmate, a simple Jew from a small village in Poland, came over to Rav Galinsky and said, "Even if a sharp sword lays on the neck of a person, he should not give up believing that Hashem's compassion will spare him."

The man continued by underscoring the various parts of this maxim. "First, what greater danger can one face than having a sharp sword on his neck. The sword is there; it is already sharpened; and it is already in place on the neck. Death is imminent! Yet, Chazal tell us to continue hoping, not to give up, to believe that even at this very last moment - he could still be spared - if Hashem wills it."

Rav Galinsky remembers how those poignant, but powerful, words left an enduring impression on him, infusing him with courage and hope to keep on hoping. Do not worry about tomorrow. Live today to its fullest. All too often, we waste today's gift of life wondering what tomorrow will bring. A Jew never gives up.

But if you will not listen to Me... and I will turn My attention against you, you will be struck down before enemies; those who hate you will subjugate you. (26:14,17)

Anyone who has studied Jewish history knows that this curse has regrettably become true. Sixty years ago, during the European Holocaust, the world saw how Hashem orchestrated events so that we were "struck down before enemies;" and "those who hate you will subjugate you." There were also those who survived those tragic years with their faith and conviction intact. Regrettably, there were those who survived in body, but their belief in the Almighty was impaired. While no one can question

anyone who survived those atrocities, there is one question that keeps on being asked, a question that goes right to the core of our "emunah", faith, in Hashem: "Where was Hashem during the Holocaust? How could He have allowed this to happen?"

While there are a number of possible explanations, the following analogy cited in Otzros HaTorah gives us a practical approach. A young boy was acting his age. At times, he was proper and his behavior was exemplary. Every once in a while, however, he would lose it and act up. Whenever this occurred, his father would take him to the window of their home and point to the forest. "My child, do you see that forest outside of our home?" the father would ask. "In that forest there is a fierce wolf. When you act inappropriately, the wolf will come out of the forest and hurt you." This form of discipline would probably not receive any great accolades from any child psychologist, but it seemed to work for that father. After a few days, the child's fear of the wolf dissipated, and he was back to his old ways. The father warned his son one more time, but the response to that did not last very long either.

Seeing that he had no recourse but to take action, the father went to the forest, sought out a hunter and purchased a wolf's skin. He dressed himself in the wolf's skin and went home. As soon as his son saw him masquerading as a wolf, he trembled with fear. He thought this was the real thing. The father went through the whole act, howling and baring his teeth. The child was already hysterical. For good measure, the father even scratched his son slightly with his "paws" and left the house.

The child cried bitterly, realizing that he was being punished for his misbehavior. A bit later, the father returned home to find his son crying. The child related to his father everything that occurred and then asked, "Where were you when the wolf attacked me? Why were you not here to protect me?"

Anyone with a modicum of intelligence understands the message of this analogy. One who studies the history of the Holocaust sees quite clearly that there was no mere concealment of Hashem's Presence. This was no simple chain of events. On the contrary, one can sense Hashem's Guiding Hand throughout the process. Hitler's rise to power is a historical anomaly. He was poor and unstable, totally incapable and unfit for any kind of employment. Yet, this man who lived on the fringe of society rose from the dung heap to reign over half of the civilized world. He ascended to the throne of German leadership directly from a jail cell. Is this to be regarded as a natural course of events?

The entire progression of the Second World War was atypical and unnatural. The German Army's ability to vanquish strong countries in a short span of time was unpredicted by the greatest military strategists. Hitler's pact with Soviet Russia, a pact which enabled him to quickly overrun Poland, was inexplicable. Stalin's refusal to respond to intelligence about an imminent German attack was unexplainable. The result was that two million more Jews became subservient to the Nazi empire. Indeed, the only thing more astounding than the Nazi's success was their sudden failure and ultimate defeat. Historians are hard-put to develop any sort of reasonable theory to explain these anomalies.

Thus, it seems clear that "Hashem was there." Indeed, He brought it about. We have to wonder why. It was unquestionably the Middas Ha'Din, attribute of Strict Justice, that was visible throughout. While we cannot fathom Hashem's reasoning, we are obliged to deal with those matters that are in the realm of our understanding. To the extent that we can, we are mandated to define and clarify for ourselves the general paths of Divine Justice. This paper is neither the place nor the forum for this thesis. Our objective is to ponder - not to accuse; to derive a lesson - not to critique. The question which is catalyzed by the Holocaust is not the issue of Divine Justice, but rather the meaning and significance of the Holocaust, its message and future lessons. The question is not, "Where is G-d?" but rather, "Where was man?"

*Any tithe of cattle or sheep, any that passes under the staff, the tenth one shall be holy to Hashem.
(27:32)*

Chazal describe the process of tithing animals as being a tedious process in which each group of ten animals are counted, with the tenth animal being marked as Maaser for Hashem. This procedure applies regardless of the number of animals one owns. One can have ten thousand head of cattle; he must count each one individually, with the tenth one being designated as Maaser. This seems quite inefficient. One would think that it is more efficacious to simply count all the animals and deduct ten percent.

Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl, was once on a fundraising trip for the Telshe Yeshivah in Lithuania, when he posed this question to a wealthy man who had balked at the Rosh Hayeshivah's request for a sizable contribution. Rav Leizer asked the businessman, "Why does the Torah demand such a roundabout, inefficient manner for counting one's assets?" The wealthy man was also at a loss for an answer.

"Let me explain," said Rav Leizer. "If the Torah would enjoin a wealthy man to give up ten percent of his possessions, he would be hard-pressed to comply. Ten percent can amount to a considerable sum of money. Therefore, the Torah prescribes the method of individual counting of one's flock. Over and over, the wealthy man counts his flock, realizing that for every nine animals that he keeps for himself, he gives only one to Hashem. He might even feel a bit of embarrassment at how much he possesses and how little he is giving to Hashem. This will motivate him to give generously and joyfully. When a person realizes with how much he has been blessed, he will gladly part with the Maaser."

"My friend," continued Rav Leizer, "look at how much you have and you will realize that, in proportion, I am not really asking for that much."

In citing the above, Horav Avraham Pam, zl, notes that people often refrain from being as charitable as they should be because they do not acknowledge all of Hashem's blessings to them. When a person takes the time to contemplate the many blessings that Hashem has granted him, he moves readily to acquiesce to share some of it with those less fortunate than he.

If you will follow My decrees. (26:3)

Rashi understands the concept of following Hashem's decrees as engaging in intensive Torah study. Ameilus, toil, in Torah is a critical aspect of Torah study. The Taz in Orach Chaim 47 writes, "The Torah is retained only by he that toils in it diligently and with great intensity. Those who study Torah casually - amid comfort and without toil - will not retain it." The study of Torah is unlike any other scholarly pursuit. For a Jew, it is his lifeblood and must be viewed as such. Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, explains that one who toils in an endeavor or puts his heart and soul into the development of a certain goal will naturally develop a close bond with it. One who plants a tree or works in a garden becomes attached to the tree or the bushes on a level consistent with the effort and toil that he has expended. If this is true in the material/physical dimension, how much more so is it true in the spiritual dimension. The more one toils to achieve a foothold, to acquire a level of spiritual accomplishment, the

stronger his relationship with the Torah becomes. Indeed, when one studies Torah with great intensity, it becomes his acquisition; it becomes an integral part of him.

Our great Torah leaders, past and present, have viewed *ameilus baTorah* as the only way to study Torah. Indeed, the more toil, the greater was their enjoyment. There is a story told that when Horav Meshulam Igra, zl, was rav in Sismanitz, two laymen from a different town came to him with the request that he render judgment in regard to a monetary dispute between the two. Rav Meshulam listened carefully to the two litigants as they presented the case. He told them that the matter was laden with various opinions in halachah, and he would need some time to sort out the halachah and render judgment. The two men realized that it would take a few days, so they decided to return home and ask their local rav, who was also a Torah scholar.

They presented the question to their rav, who asked them to return in a few minutes. As soon as they left the room, the rav began to entreat Hashem with bitter tears, begging Him to guide him so that he would render the correct judgment in this most difficult case. He feared that if he could not give a correct judgment, he would lose his esteem in the community and eventually his position. Hashem listened to his prayers and guided him to look in a certain volume of halachic responsa that quoted the correct judgment to their dispute. The rav rendered judgment; the laymen accepted; everyone was happy.

A few months went by, and these men once again had the occasion to be in Sismanitz. They went to Rav Meshulam and apologized for not waiting around for his ruling regarding their earlier dispute, asking "By the way, what was the psak, ruling?" Rav Meshulam said that after much deliberation, he had come to a judgment. The men began to laugh, explaining how they had left Sismanitz earlier because they could not wait a few days for Rav Meshulam's psak. When they returned home, their rav had rendered judgment almost immediately.

When Rav Meshulam heard this, he was determined to meet the rav. Anybody who could render judgment in such a difficult dispute so quickly must be an erudite Torah scholar of the highest calibre. He must go to pay him homage.

When Rav Meshulam came to visit the rav, the rav became frightened. Rav Meshulam was one of the preeminent Torah leaders of the generation. This was an honor of the highest accord. It also could prove embarrassing, because Rav Meshulam was under the impression that the rav was a great scholar, a fact which the rav viewed as somewhat discrepant from the truth. Rav Meshulam began by saying how impressed and astounded he was that the rav was able to render judgment so soon after being presented with the dispute. The rav responded humbly, "It is not that I am a great scholar. Indeed, I feared that I would not be able to render judgment, so I prayed fervently to Hashem to guide me."

When Rav Meshulam heard this, he shrugged and said, "To cry - I could also do that. The proper and correct manner to render judgment is through *ameilus*, toil in Torah study, and careful, didactic perusal of the sources. I bid you good-day."

The message is loud and clear. Certainly, the rav must have been a pious individual, since Hashem had immediately responded favorably to his supplication. He was, however, lacking one point in his Torah study: *ameilus* - toil, and that was everything. We can pray for success before a test, or we can study for it. In the end, the scholar is the one who has studied diligently.

Studying Torah does not come easily to everyone. For some, it means overcoming the challenge of aptitude, while for others it is time. Then there is a challenge that we do not realize exists: parents who do not understand the value of their sons' achievements. These are simple challenges. What about

studying Torah under duress, with extreme mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice? Horav Chaim Kreisworth, zl, would note that he had greater mastery and deeper insight into those sections of Talmud that he was compelled to study under great hardship and mesiras nefesh. He went so far as to posit that not only was he proficient in these areas, but his sons even achieved greater expertise in those sections of Talmud that he studied with mesiras nefesh. He cited a famous maxim of Chazal in support of this phenomenon. We are taught that any mitzvah which Klal Yisrael accepted with mesiras nefesh remained with them forever. These mitzvos were transmitted through the generations from father to son.

The simple interpretation of Chazal is that any mitzvah for which Klal Yisrael demonstrated remarkable commitment - accepting it from the beginning - endured. A classic example is the mitzvah of Bris Milah, which is still an accepted Jewish tradition by even the most alienated Jew. Rav Chaim contends that Chazal are teaching us that any mitzvah - and we may add that this applies to any activity - that increases Kavod Shomayim, honor of Heaven, which is performed with mesiras nefesh, will remain in the family. It will become a father's legacy to his children.

Horav Moshe Neuschloss, zl, Rav of New Square, maintained such a strong bond with the Torah. Indeed, he lived his life with the acute awareness of the centrality of Torah to the Jewish people. After the Holocaust, which he miraculously survived, he took upon himself the commitment to study Torah diligently - especially during such times in which the community in general would be engaged in other areas of Jewish tradition.

At one point, towards the end of the war, he was so sick and weak that the accursed SS guards took him for dead and removed his body to the morgue to be incinerated with the other corpses. He survived and was allowed to go on living. After the war, he returned to his native Hungary, settling in Paksht. His brother, who also survived, was overwhelmed with joy when he heard that Rav Moshe, who was originally sent to the crematorium, had actually survived. He took advantage of the first opportunity to go see him.

He arrived on a Friday afternoon at the doorstep of Rav Moshe's home. With great joy and trepidation, he knocked on the door. One can only imagine the joy that reigned during this meeting of the two surviving brothers. Rav Moshe immediately invited his brother into the house and said, "We must learn Torah - now." For five uninterrupted hours, they sat together delving into the intricacies and minutiae of the Talmud.

As the time to usher in the holy Shabbos drew near, they closed their Gemorrah. Only then did they embrace with great emotion and weep uncontrollably on one another's shoulders over their own and Klal Yisrael's losses. Rav Moshe then told his brother why, at first, he quickly retreated to studying Torah for five hours. "Since the world was devoid of Torah for so many years of the Holocaust - and even now, so many are involved with rebuilding their lives - I feel it necessary that someone carry the world's spiritual needs, which can be accomplished only through intensive Torah study. I have made this my life's commitment, expressing my gratitude to Hashem.

"Furthermore," Rav Moshe continued, "there is another reason. In repayment for my room and board in this home, I agreed to a Yissacher/Zevulun partnership with the owner, whereby I spend my time learning and he shares half of my Olam Habah, reward in the World To Come. I did not think it appropriate that I detract from my responsibility for personal reasons."

It is also noteworthy that throughout his life, Rav Moshe made a point to engage in Torah study on days preceding Shabbos and Yom Tov, knowing that due to the pressures of the upcoming days, people would not be as inclined to study Torah with the same fervor and diligence.

I will provide peace in the land (26:6)

Rashi cites the Sifra, which suggests that the positioning of the blessing of peace climaxes the precious blessings of material abundance. The Torah teaches us that peace is equivalent to all the other blessings combined. What a wonderful blessing - peace among people. Imagine a community with no strife, no controversy. Indeed, when people are embroiled in dispute, they have no time or energy to enjoy the fruits of their success. They are too busy fighting.

How is peaceful co-existence achieved? Commenting on the pasuk, Ibn Ezra explains, shalom beineicham, "peace among you." Usually, we translate beineicham as "among you." Perhaps, we can go a bit further and suggest that beineicham is a reference to inner-peace, a sense of security and pride - "peace among/within oneself." One who has been able to control the demons within himself, who has achieved inner satisfaction and is content and at harmony with himself, has no reason to contend with others. Hashem will cause shalom within us so that we will have no reason to clash with others.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites an insightful incident concerning the Alter, zl, m'Slabodka that teaches how careful we should be to distance from any altercation, however innocuous, with another Jew. The students of the Slabodka Yeshivah exemplified ahavas Torah, love of Torah, at its zenith. Every endeavor, every action, was for avodas Hashem, service of the Almighty. It was no wonder that when the Alter spoke, everyone would push themselves to get as close to his shtender, lectern, as possible. They did not want to miss a word of his discourse.

As soon as the Alter entered the study-hall, everyone would begin to hurry for a close seat. Regrettably, at times, this involved pushing, as each student tried to get that special seat for himself. The Alter would rebuke his students, explaining that they were defeating the whole purpose of the lecture. Where was their respect for their fellow? To take someone else's seat was disrespectful and wrong. Pushing another student aside was uncharacteristic of a ben-Torah. The Alter substantiated his words with proof from the Torah. When the trees were created, they did not all spring forth together, one on top of the other. No! Each tree grew in its own place, removed from its "neighbor," so that it would not infringe upon its neighbor's space.

Chazal teach us in Talmud Chullin 60a that the herbage/grasses derived a kal v'chomer, a priori argument, from the trees. Hashem told the trees to sprout forth l'mineihu, each according to its own specie. The earth yielded trees each according to its own specie, in its own place, not crowding its neighbor. Now, trees always grow one at a time. Yet, Hashem specified l'mineihu. So herbage which always grow together in clumps, how much more so should we be sure to sprout forth each one away from the other. The grass that grew did not have even one blade touching the others.

The Alter looked at his students and said, "If trees and herbage understand what it means not to crowd one another, surely we human beings who might hurt each other through the pushing should take great care not to jostle one another." Sometimes we get so involved in the michamtah shel Torah, battle for success in Torah study, that we forget who the enemy is.

Then they will confess their sin... and also for having behaved toward Me with casualness, I, too, will behave toward them with casualness. (26:40,41)

If they confess to their sins, why does Hashem say, "I, too, will behave toward them with casualness"? Why does He not accept their repentance? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that when one peruses the parsha, he will note that the underlying sin for which Klal Yisrael is held in contempt is the sin of kerī, casualness. Their lackadaisical attitude to everything is what led to their downfall. Yet, when they confess, they admit only to avonam, their actual sin. They also happen to confess to their casualness - disregarding the fact that it was specifically this apathetic observance that catalyzed their other sins. Hashem demands a complete reckoning, an unbiased and open recognition of their sin and its source. To relegate the sin of indifference to the back burner, to consider it an "also," defies the essence of teshuvah, repentance.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, posits that historically the scenario of Hashem responding to our dispassion - with religion in general and tradition in particular - with a corresponding casualness has played itself out more often than we realize. It begins with our phlegmatic treatment of halachah, granting it secondary significance to everything else. This leads to a slow decaying of our spiritual and moral life. Eventually, our social life will begin to atrophy. When we come to our senses and realize that our lack of fidelity to Hashem's mitzvos did not achieve for us the happiness that we thought it would engender, we will confess to our sins. We will recognize the consequences of our indifference.

Hashem's response coincides with the sin. Since we did not completely sever our relationship with Him, but remained in contact with the Torah in a passive manner, Hashem will also not give us up. He will act with us b'kerī, casualness. We will be left entirely to the influences of the historical occurrences of the various nations among whom we live. In all these happenings, which seem to us to be just unlucky "chance," Hashem will still be with us. He will not let us become destroyed. The world historical events, which seem to be isolated occurrences, are actually for the purpose of the spiritual and political rehabilitation of Klal Yisrael. The painful educative effects of the developments of the history of the world itself will have consequences in the maturing of Klal Yisrael. They will ultimately be fit for independence and return to their homeland. Thus we understand that the long exile in "the land of the enemies" is all part of a long circuitous route, guided by Hashem as part of His Master Plan to return us to our eternal calling. We are never alone.

And a sword will not cross your land. (26:6)

The blessing of peace will be so preeminent that armies will not even cross through Eretz Yisrael on their way to do battle with other nations. Peace will reign throughout the land with no semblance of war in any shape or form. The pasuk also intimates that our enemies will have no power over us. Even if they want to do us harm, they will be ineffective. A beautiful and poignant demonstration of our enemies' inherent weakness, unless he is given power by the Almighty, may be seen by the following story.

Rav Yeshayah Feuer, zl, was an erudite and pious Jew who spent most of his long life in the service of Klal Yisrael. His ability and unrelenting efforts for reaching out to the alienated and searching Jew were legendary. Prior to World War II, he served as a rav in America, after which he moved to Eretz Yisrael. He seemingly had a strange habit - he would make a point of whitening his teeth in public, calling attention to his teeth. Interestingly, as his children would note, they were all false teeth! He sustained a miracle vis-?-vis his teeth, and he felt that they had thereby become a cheftza d'kedushah, sacred object. The story they told was incredible. It was in the midst of World War II, and Rav Feuer was in Europe. While he was walking down the street one day, he was challenged by

an accursed Nazi, who asked him why he looked so well, calm and relaxed. Rav Feuer drew himself up to his full stature and responded emphatically, "I am going to the synagogue to pray."

The Nazi needed to hear no more. He seethed with anger at the Jew's sheer "audacity." He pulled out his pistol and shoved the barrel into Rav Feuer's mouth. Rav Feuer, fearing the worst, began to recite Viduy, confessional, which one says prior to leaving this world. The Nazi beast pressed down on the trigger and squeezed. Lo and behold, nothing happened! Again and again, the Nazi squeezed the trigger and nothing happened! The Nazi saw that regardless of his efforts, the gun just did not shoot. The Jew still stood there - unscathed! This was too much for the evil beast to tolerate. He proceeded to jerk the barrel of the gun around in Rav Feuer's mouth, breaking a number of teeth.

We now understand why the replacement teeth meant so much to Rav Feuer. They were a testimonial to the remarkable miracle that had occurred to him. They reminded him daily, that if not for the will of Hashem, he would be dead. What a wonderful and meaningful way to show one's gratitude to Hashem. Perhaps, if we were to look around, we would also discover objects or places which we could associate in some way with miracles revolving around our own well-being.

And I shall give peace in the land and you shall lie down without fear...and no sword shall cross your land. (26:6)

The assurance that the sword of war will not cross our borders is sufficient reason to rest peacefully at night. The mere fact that we have nothing to worry about should put our minds at ease. Why, then, does the Torah find it necessary to add to the blessing of no sword throughout the land, the additional blessing that we will sleep without fear? This question becomes more pressing with Chazal's statement in the Talmud Taanis 22:b that no sword, not even the sword of other warring nations, will cross our borders.

In his sefer Be'er Moshe, the Ozrover Rebbe, zl, explains that the Torah is alluding to another "ein macharid," without fear. The Torah refers to the imaginary sword, the imaginary demon that one conjures up in his mind. This is the sword that pursues a person even after the shutters have been drawn and the windows and doors have been locked. This sword festers behind closed doors, penetrates the most sophisticated security system. This is the sword of envy, the blade of jealousy towards one another. Its genesis is a person's dissatisfaction with his lot in life, it manifests itself with the individual's constant backward glance at his neighbor's success. Envy consumes a person like a sword. It cuts away at a person. He cannot rest peacefully, as his days and nights are filled with anxiety and fear, the result of his imagination.

The Torah bestows another blessing on the committed Jew, the Jew who transcends the blandishments this world has to offer, to devote himself to a life filled with Torah and mitzvos. He is guaranteed to "lie down without fear." This blessing is not redundant. It is a separate blessing that regardless of one's circumstance - even if he is wealthy - he will sleep peacefully. He will not fear losing what he has amassed, nor will he experience the anxiety resulting from a deep-rooted envy of others who have as much as he does.

Fear has both physical and emotional components. Truthfully, I am not sure which is worse:

reality or the product of an overactive imagination. The Torah protects us from both.

You will flee with no one pursuing you. (26:17)

The Gaon M'Vilna questions this curse. One can understand the seriousness of needing to run from enemies. What is negative about running from no one? Would this not be considered a blessing? In response to this query, the Gaon cites a pasuk in Koheles 3:15, Elokim yevakesh es ha'nirdaf, "G-d always seeks the pursued." Simply, this means that Hashem protects the oppressed. We derive herein that the mere fact that one is pursued is reason enough for him to be the beneficiary of Hashem's favor. Hashem comes to the aid of the "underdog." The curse is that since no one will be pursuing us, we will run from no one. As a result, we will have no reason to hope for aid, because no one is actually pursuing us. Indeed, with this idea in mind, we must find a silver lining in the cloud of oppression. When we struggle against oppression, we need Hashem on our side.

Alternatively, we suggest that one who runs from imaginary demons, who is insecure and thinks that everyone is after him, everyone is out to "get him," is really a cursed person. When the enemy is real, we might be able to develop a strategy for dealing with him. An illusory enemy, which is nothing more than a figment of an overactive, insecure imagination, is impossible to vanquish. One must come to terms with the source of his problem, which is a major hurdle in its own right.

If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments...then I will provide your rains in their time...you will eat your bread to satiety...I will provide peace in the land. (26:3,4,5,6)

The Torah provides the recipe for success, material abundance, and peace: connect with the Torah. We are faced with problems, vexing situations, challenges to overcome. Where do we turn for the answer? How do we get out of the quicksand of life's challenges? "If you will follow My decrees" - "Im bechukosai teileichu" - connect with the Torah. It is the wellspring, the source of life and sustenance. In it you will find the answer. It will provide the solution to your problems.

Horav Yaakov Galinski, Shlita, once spoke to a group of not yet observant Jews and gave the following analogy to support this idea. It once occurred that emissaries from a Beduin Arab tribe came to Tel Aviv to visit and learn about life and culture in a large, modern metropolis. They spent an entire day seeing the sights, staring with awe at the incredible modern inventions that contemporary society takes for granted. The visit was capped with a lavish dinner in City Hall. At the end of the dinner, the mayor told the group that his community would like to give the visitors a gift that would enhance their daily lifestyle. If there was anything they had seen that impressed them, they could have it, as long as it was within reason.

The leader of the Bedouin group turned to the mayor and said, "Yes, there is something that we noticed that would truly enhance our lifestyle. We would be indebted to you if you could avail us of this gadget. You know that we live in the desert where water is scarce. Whatever water we use must be brought in from afar, carried in large jugs on the backs of donkeys. We noticed that here in the city, you just turn on the faucet and an endless stream of water flows. Could you please give us forty faucets, so that our lives would be enhanced by this wonderful convenience?" The mayor was quick to respond in the affirmative and promptly had the faucets delivered to the group.

One can imagine the consternation and disappointment when after they had "attached" the faucets to their tents, the water did not flow in the desert as it did in the city. They called for a technician to come from the city to investigate the matter and figure out why their faucets were not working. As we can all well understand, when the plumber arrived he looked at them and laughed, "Do you think that water flows freely from the faucet? No! It is not the faucet that gives the water, the faucet is connected to a pipe which is, in turn, connected to a source of water. The faucet is only a medium for transferring the water from the source to the house. Did you think that by mounting the faucet on the wall of your tent, the water would instantly appear? It must be connected to a source."

"This same idea applies to Torah study," continued Horav Galinski. "If one thinks that Torah study is a purely intellectual pursuit which does not have any demands connected to it, he is greatly mistaken. It is our obligation to connect and cling to the fountain of life, the source of Jewish life, the Torah. Regrettably, many of our brethren have abandoned this source of life. They have gone on to create new sources for sustaining themselves, sources that either do not produce or that quickly dry up. We are engulfed with challenges that test our faith. We have questions that tax our commitment. Where do we turn? The Torah provides the answer: connect with it, and your questions will be answered."

If you consider My decrees loathsome. (26:15)

Rashi explains that this pasuk refers to one who hates the sages that have expounded the ordinances, who denigrates Torah scholars, ridiculing them, humiliating them, despising them. The reason for this unwarranted hatred is simple: they represent everything he seeks to destroy. The Torah scholar demonstrates that Torah is viable; it refines and develops an individual into the consummate example of what a human being should be. The individual who blatantly takes it upon himself to impugn the authority and honor of a venerable Torah sage will answer to Hashem. In the sefer, *Likutei Imrei Avos*, cited by Horav Yitchak Zilberstein, Shlita, the author, who was a distinguished rav in Baghdad, relates the following incredible story to demonstrate the severe punishment sustained by one who denigrates a talmid chacham, Torah scholar.

The story is about a very special young man. Himself the scion of a wealthy family and the son-in-law of one of the wealthier men in the community, he spent his entire day secluded in his home studying Torah. Other than going to shul for the daily tefillos, he spent his entire day immersed in the sea of Torah. One day, the prince of the country came to visit. The entire town turned out to greet the monarch. The young man refused to halt his Torah study to welcome the prince. When the prince rode by his apartment, however, the young man went to the window in order to recite the appropriate blessing made upon seeing a monarch.

Suddenly, as the prince was passing by and the young man stood by the window, a brick from the vicinity of the apartment loosened and fell on the prince's horse. A hush fell over the crowd as everybody wondered who would have had the nerve to strike at the prince. The police immediately searched the building and found only one person - the young man.

The young man, of course, claimed innocence, but the prince was sure that this young man was the perpetrator. He quickly sentenced him to death. Every Jew in the city was troubled. They all knew that this young man had not committed the crime. He was pious, virtuous, and gentle. He would never have done anything of the sort. People wrote letters to every government officer, pleading for the young man's life. Alas, it was to no avail.

Finally, after much pressure from the community, the prince decided to ask the rav of the community for his opinion in the matter. If the rav would intercede favorably on the young man's behalf, his life would be spared. To everyone's shock and dismay, the rav did not intercede and the young man was led to his death. Shortly after the execution took place, the rav asked that the body be brought to the shul. When the pallbearers brought the remains to the shul, the rav went over to the casket and in a loud voice exclaimed, "I command you by decree of the Torah to arise and tell everyone the true cause of your death so that the citizens of the community will harbor no ill will against me for not pleading your case to the prince."

To everyone's amazement, the corpse sat up and spoke the following: "I am the neshamah, soul, of the first one who threw the stone at Yirmiyahu Ha'Navi. As punishment for this grave sin, I have been sent back to this vile world to correct the spiritual blemish caused by my sin. Finally, during this most recent gilgul, reincarnation, I was able to correct everything I had done to my neshamah. My soul is now pure and holy. The rav, with his ability to see beyond the limitations of the human eye, saw b'Ruach Hakodesh, with Divine Inspiration, that my chance to return to Heaven on a lofty spiritual plateau was now. He, therefore, did not attempt to prolong my life on this world, allowing me to be executed and gain external rest." The deceased finished and lay back down - dead. Understandably, members of the community now realized that their spiritual leader was a great man who saw farther and deeper than they.

This remarkable story teaches us two very important lessons. First, we note the severe punishment for one who rises up against a Torah sage. Second, we understand that not everything that we observe is actually the way we see it.

If you will go in My statutes. (26:3)

Rashi explains that "going" in Hashem's mitzvos does not simply mean following His decrees. Rather, "teleichu," "going" in Hashem's statutes, is a reference to ameilus ba'Torah, laboring in Torah, studying it with intensity and extreme devotion. Why is ameilus ba'Torah conceptualized as halichah, going/movement? In his commentary Gur Aryeh, Maharal explains that just as an individual travels from place to place, so, too, does one who labors in Torah move onward as he delves deeper into the profundities of Torah. Thus, one who studies with intensity is considered "moving" from place to place because every time he understands Torah "better" as a result of his ameilus, he "moves" upward in his spiritual achievement. How are we to understand this?

Horav Chaim Goldvicht, zl, explains this by first citing an exegesis from Horav Simcha Zissel, zl, M'Kelm regarding Chazal's statement in the Talmud Shabbos 112b, "If the first ones (our predecessors) are like angels (on a spiritual plane), then we are like human beings; if the first ones are like humans, then we are like donkeys." Why does Chazal contrast humans to donkeys? If their goal is to emphasize the distance between generations, could they not have employed a more "dignified" distinction?

The Alter M'Kelm explains that a disparity in quality and disparity in quantity are quite different from one another. When the contrast is in quantity, then, even if the difference between both subjects is great, we can still view the smaller, or lesser, of the two as related in some manner to its greater, or larger, counterpart. They are of the same essence, distinguished only by size or number. When the

distinction is in quality, however, no basis of comparison exists. The distance between the two is so vast because they are comprised of two different essences. We are not talking about numbers, we are addressing the essential nature and composition of each subject. It is as impossible to comprehend angels as it is for a donkey to comprehend a human. To paraphrase the "Alter": "If we were able to combine a number of human minds we could meld them into one 'super mind.' If we were to meld together many minds of donkeys, however, we would still not come close to creating a human being."

This is Chazal's lesson for us. The difference between generations, from those that are closer to the generation that accepted the Torah to our generation today, is not a quantitative distinction, but a qualitative one. Just as humans can never be compared to angels, so, too, can donkeys never be in the same league as humans. Two generations - the past and the present - may both be studying the same Torah. The distinction between the two is not merely in the amount of Torah studied or the profundity that each has achieved. Each has had a totally different experience. One is like a human; the other is not. If we view the previous one's Torah experience as a human experience; if we look at the individuals as mortals, then we must realize that our generation is totally removed from theirs, to the point that we are like mere donkeys. We have absolutely no area in which we are similar to them. In the area of the spiritual experience, comparisons defy description and definition. It is not that one is simply greater than another; they are comprised of a completely different nature!

The concept of makom, place, is a term that expresses the individual's spiritual plane in regard to The Makom, Hashem. Just as the word "place" defines one's physical standing in relation to something, so, too, does makom delineate one's spiritual standing. This idea is reflected in Chazal's reference in Pirkei Avos 6:6: "One who recognizes his makom, place" or to Avos 2:14, "Do not judge your friend until you reach his makom, place." or Kesubos, 103b, "One who fills the makom, place, of his ancestors in wisdom and fear of the Almighty." Indeed, when Moshe Rabbeinu implored Hashem to "show me now Your glory," Hashem responded, "Behold there is place near Me; you may stand on the rock" (Shemos 33:21). In his Moreh Nevuchim, Rambam explains that this place is a reference to a unique spiritual position to which Hashem elevated Moshe, so that he would be able to perceive a greater perspective and understanding of Hashem's glory. Last, when Adam ha'Rishon sinned, Hashem asked him, "Ayeica?" "Where are you?" (Bereishis 3:9). Where is your place? You have fallen in spiritual position as a result of your sin.

Thus, we understand the concept of halichah, movement, as depicting a change in one's spiritual standing. Ameilus, toiling in Torah, has the power to transform an individual in a manner unlike any other mitzvah. One who clings to Torah lishmah, for its own sake, clings to Hashem! This conviction enhances one's essence as well as elevating his spiritual standing. Ameilus ba'Torah, indeed, changes one's makom. Even if one changes only a little, he is no longer on the same spiritual plane. He has changed his place. This is how he becomes a mehalech, goer. With this thesis in mind, we have but a glimpse of the difference between a true ben Torah, who devotes all of himself to Torah, laboring and toiling in its endeavor, and his counterpart in the secular world who, regrettably, does not avail himself of this opportunity. They are two totally different individuals.

If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them. (26:3) What is the purpose of the phrase, "v'asisem o'som" "and you will perform them"? Obviously, if one is following Hashem's statutes and observing His mitzvos, he certainly is performing them. The text appears to be somewhat redundant - or is it? The Baal HaTurim notes that the word "o'som," "them," is spelled aleph, taf, mem, which spells the word "emes, truth. This leads him to suggest that the Torah is focusing upon the necessary attitude one must maintain for mitzvah performance. It must be with an "emes," with truth, with integrity, with a passion and enthusiasm, not complacency, lacking feeling or

intensity.

This is consistent with Chazal's dictum in the Talmud Nedarim 81a, when they ask: Why is it uncommon for a talmid chachom, Torah scholar, to produce sons who are also scholars? They attribute this to the fact that they do not make a Bircas haTorah, blessing the Torah, before they begin to study. Nachlas Tzvi cites the Ran who quotes Rabbeinu Yona in his sefer, Megillas Setarim, who explains that Torah study has always been considered an active pursuit. Throughout history everyone has studied Torah. This brings Chazal to question why the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed. If people had been studying Torah, what more could have been expected of them? They responded that, while it is true that they studied, it was not their primary focus in life. They also studied. It was not important to them. Hence, they did not feel the need to begin their daily study with a blessing. The brachah was irrelevant, because the learning was inconsequential. Hashem demands that we perform mitzvos with a passion, with enthusiasm. We should be excited to act on behalf of Hashem to perform His mitzvos with "emes."

Nachlas Tzvi cites an incredible story related by the Bendiner Rav zl, in his sefer Yechahein Pe'er. In the city of Nickolsburg, a group of laymen came to the rav, the famous Rav Shmuel Shmelke of Nickolsburg, to tell him that there is a butcher/shochet in the city who constantly slaughters glatt kosher. This was considered to be unusual, given that some animals are naturally prone to have some physical blemishes that would render them not glatt. Rav Shmelke decided that he would go to observe the shochet during one of his sessions and see for himself if the animals were really glatt kosher. After spending a day with the shochet, he was amazed that, indeed, every animal was glatt kosher.

Rav Shmelke summoned the shochet to his home and asked him how it came to be that he had such remarkable good fortune. The shochet responded that every time he went to the market to purchase animals, he would meet a Jew who would point out to him which animals to purchase. "If this is the case, then I must go with you to the market to meet this person," said Rav Shmelke. They agreed to go a few days before Pesach, since the shochet would be filling a large order for Yom Tov. They met at the market on the appointed day. After being introduced to the man in question, he asked him, "How do you know which animals are glatt kosher?" "Rebbe," responded the man, "I do not know on my own. Before I go to the market, Eliyahu Ha'Navi appears to me and points out which animals to use. It seems that those animals are the gilgulim, reincarnated souls, of animals that were destined to be korbanos, sacrifices, in the Bais HaMikdash. These animals must be eaten by Jews on Shabbos and Yom Tov in order for them to achieve their tikun, spiritual correction, and enter the Eternal World." Obviously, Rav Shmelke was taken aback with the man's response, particularly his "familiarity" with Eliyahu Ha'Navi. He turned to the man and asked, "If Eliyahu Ha'Navi is so close to you, why do you not ask him why Mashiach has not yet come to redeem us from this galus, exile?" "Rebbe," the man responded, "in just a few days it will be Pesach. I am sure that Eliyahu Ha'Navi will grace my home during the Seder. I will ask him this question and relay to you his response to you."

During Chol HaMoed, the Intermediate Days of the Pesach festival, Rav Shmelke traveled to this person to find out what Eliyahu Ha'Navi had revealed to him. When he came into the man's home, the person said, "Rebbe, I asked Eliyahu Ha'Navi your question, and he told me that an illusion to the answer is found in the Mah Nishtanah." The Four Questions are actually four queries and requests of Hashem regarding the exiles to which we have been subjected. "Why is this night different from all other nights," means "why is this exile different from the other exiles?" Night has often been used as a metaphor for the darkness of galus. Each question concentrates upon a different exile. The last question centers on the present galus. The answer to why this galus is different, why each of the previous exiles had an end while this one does not seem to have an end in sight, is that during the other nights, exiles,

we either sat or reclined, but on this night we only recline. This means, that during the other exiles there were people who made Torah study their primary vocation. They studied, relegating their mundane labor to secondary focus. Basically, they would sit and study Torah. During our exile, our attitude towards avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty, is "kulanu mesubim," totally from "subim." Subim is the bran of the wheat, the inferior, hard portion of the wheat. This means, that we serve Hashem without our heart and soul. We are cold and distant in our avodas Hashem. Is there any wonder that the galus continues?

Our reality can be summarized by a single word: attitude. If our attitude changes, we may hope to have a positive response from the Almighty.

I will lay your cities in ruin, and I will make your sanctuaries desolate. (26:31) The Midrash on Megillas Eichah relates that Rabbi Yochanan was able to render sixty expositions on the pasuk, Eichah 2:1, "The Lord consumed without pity all the dwellings of Yaakov." Rabbi Yehudah Ha'Nasi, however, rendered only twenty-four expositions.

Rabbi Yochanan was not necessarily greater or more erudite by virtue of the fact that he was able to render more interpretations. It is just that Rabbi Yehudah Ha'Nasi lived in a time closer to the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash than Rabbi Yochanan did. Thus, when he began to speak he would remind himself of the Bais Hamikdash and begin to weep. After he wept, he was consoled. His emotional state limited his application of the pasuk which recounts the destruction.

We must endeavor to understand the consolation that Rabbi Yehudah Ha'Nasi had just because he lived prior to Rabbi Yochanan. One would think that the closer one is to the churban, destruction, the greater proximity he is to tragedy, the greater his reaction would be. Does an individual's sensitivity and emotion increase as he becomes more distant chronologically from the tragedy?

Horav E. M. Shach, Shlita, explains that both of these great Tannaim had one concern: that the terrible churban would not be forgotten. As long as one remembers the majesty of hashroas ha'Shechinah, the Shechinah's repose in the Bais Hamikdash, the impression that this repose engendered would remain imbedded in the Jew's psyche. When one becomes "accustomed" to the loss, when complacency and acceptance cool the effects of the tragedy, then there is a serious fear that the Bais Hamikdash will be forgotten. People learn to live without a Bais HaMikdash, without Kohanim performing the avodah, service, without the incredible revelation of Hashem's glory and the holiness this engendered. Time heals - it also dulls the sensitivity and tempers the emotion.

Rabbi Yehudah Ha'Nasi, who lived closer to the churban, saw that the people still remembered; the pain and sorrow were still vivid in their minds; the grief was yet fresh. He did not need more than twenty-four ways to describe the loss. Rabbi Yochanan, who lived in a later generation, was more removed from the churban. He needed greater stimulation to arouse his sense of mourning. The consolation for the destruction is commensurate with the degree of grief. The more one weeps, the greater is his nechamah, consolation. The more one acknowledges the loss, the greater is his awareness of the holiness and majesty that once was. This awareness is in itself a source of solace.

If a man articulates a vow to Hashem regarding a valuation of living beings. (27:2) The Torah addresses the concept of "arachin", valuations, this is a specific form of vow in which an individual may choose to contribute his value of himself or the value of another person to the Sanctuary. Interestingly, the laws of valuations are juxtaposed upon the Tochachah, Admonition. Is there some connection between the two: kelalos, curses, for negative behavior; the portent for what is to occur as a direct result of our negative attitude and lack of observance; and the positive message to be gleaned from the laws of valuations? Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, suggests a distinct relationship. When a Jew reads

the Tochachah and its various implications, he may become depressed. Realizing what his responsibilities are, and the punishment he may suffer for not adhering to Hashem's command, one can become dejected, develop a low sense of self-esteem. When confronted with the seriousness of their erroneous ways, people will often give up. The Torah immediately addresses this emotion with the parsha of valuations in which a person is taught that even the simplest Jew has a value. Indeed, Jews are not categorized according to scholarship or observance, but, rather, according to their nationhood. Being a Jew establishes one's value.

Guilt, which can be healthy since it motivates one to repent, can also be a source of depression. The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, was wont to say, "Whether one thinks of a sin longingly or reflects upon it with great remorse, his mind is preoccupied with sin. A sin is like mud: regardless of the way one handles it, he becomes muddy." After teshuvah, repentance, one must go on with life - with pride and dignity.

One who capitulates to the effects of guilt is falling prey to the yetzer hora, evil inclination, whose goal it is to destroy - regardless of the method. Depression is as much a conquest as joy in performing evil. If the yetzer hora compels us to ruminate over our past indiscretions to the point that we are saddened and dispirited, we cannot act constructively - and this is exactly what he wants. He has us doing teshuvah constantly in such a manner that he successfully prevents us from performing mitzvos. After all, how can someone so contaminated by sin act in a positive manner? This is the yetzer hora speaking to us, encouraging us to false piety. Indeed, such frumkeit can be self-defeating. Regardless of what one has done in the past, he must not despair. Rather, he should look to the future, taking into account what he can do, not what he has done. Indeed, it was the Baal Shem Tov who instituted the custom of serving "farfel," toasted barley/pasta, at the Friday night meal to emphasize that as Shabbos begins, we make closure to the events of the previous week. Everything is now "farfallen," bygone. In this manner, we begin the new week, fresh, unhampered by the errors of the past. May we all be worthy of this feeling.

If you will follow my decrees. (26:3)

Chazal tell us that to "follow/walk" in Hashem's decrees is to engage in intensive Torah study, to toil and labor in Torah. Horav Gedalyah Shorr, zl, explains this in the following manner: The distinction between a man and an angel is found in the fact that the malach, angel, is an omeid, stands still, while man is a mehaleich, moves/walks. The Torah reveals to us that man "moves" through ameilus, by toiling in Torah. He goes higher and higher, from strength to strength by toiling in Torah.

Horav Shorr cites the Rogatshover Gaon, zl, who adds that this "halichah," form of movement, is actually the maase ha'kinyan, act of acquisition, through which one acquires his portion in Torah. He cites the Rambam in his Pirush Ha'Mishnah, who claims that walking around a field is considered a kinyan. Regarding the acquisition of land, one must make a chazakah, a distinct act of ownership, such as repairing or building on the property. Concerning a field belonging to two partners, however, walking is sufficient, since one is only delineating his portion of the field. The same concept applies to Torah, which was given to all of Klal Yisrael. The ameilus of one, exerting himself in Torah study, is the halichah, walking, which acquires for him his portion in the Torah.

If you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments. (26:14)

Rashi explains that "not listening" to Hashem refers to an individual who studies Torah without *ameilus*, toil. One who does not labor in Torah, but rather takes a complacent, back-seat attitude, will eventually refrain from performing Hashem's mitzvos. Rashi adds that this is just the first step in a seven step chain-reaction of sin, in which one regresses from a lack of intensity in Torah study to the point that he denies the very existence of Hashem. This is a remarkable statement. To think that a lack of intensity, a weakening of one's resolve to toil in Torah study, leads to such a devastating end is amazing. Yet, it is unfortunately true.

Horav Gedalyah Shorr, zl, cites Sforno who predicts that one who does not "walk" in Hashem's statutes, who does not study Torah *b'ameilus*, will eventually fail to perform all the mitzvos; rather, he will become selective in his mitzvah performance. This will lead to his total rejection of mitzvos. This attitude prevailed in Europe during the Haskalah movement following the Emancipation. At first, people contended that one could be a good Jew even if he did not study all the time. One should supplement his intellectual development by studying secular pursuits, such as the arts and sciences. The next step was selective mitzvah observance. There were some mitzvos that should be observed, while others were labeled as archaic, not in vogue with progressive Judaism. The degeneration continued, as less observant Jews began to ridicule and deride those Jews who did observe Torah. The *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, became their next target of abuse. Shortly thereafter, their assimilation was completed as they apostatized themselves and intermarried with the gentiles.

This regression did not take long, beginning with a simple slowing down, a cooling off of their passion for Torah study. Children were not permitted to attend the "antiquated" *yeshivos* that taught only Torah. It was necessary that they be inculcated with the secular culture that was prevalent at the time. To be accepted in society, it was necessary to be like "them". The rest is history that has been coming back to haunt us generation after generation. People who refuse to learn from the past are relegated to relive it.

And you behave toward me with casualness. I will behave toward you with a fury of casualness.
(26:27, 28)

As Jews, we believe in *Hashgacha Pratis*, Divine Providence. This means that Hashem observes, is aware of and controls everything that occurs during our lives. Everything is totally inclusive to the point that Chazal teach us that "one does not stub his finger in this world unless it has been predecreeed from Above." To paraphrase Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, there is no concept of coincidence in Jewish theology. It is sinful for one to think or say "it just happened." Things do not "just happen." They are preordained by the Almighty. This is the meaning of the *pasuk*. If one does not reflect on the various punishments that "seem" to happen, if he just continues with business as usual as if nothing had happened -- or whatever did happen has no bearing or message for him -- he will answer to Hashem.

Instances in our lives do occur which are clearly "coincidental," even though they affect us directly. These constitute our "coincidences," or rather Hashem's Providence, specifically over us. It is the little events, like Rus coming to Eretz Yisrael and -- as she was about to go collect grain in one field -- something "happened" that caused her to go to Boaz's field instead. The rest is history. It was not a coincidence that caused her to go to another field; it was the hand of Hashem. The *Melech Ha'Moshiach* will descend from this "change" in plans! To the eye of an innocent observer, there appears to be an everyday occurrence affecting a single person - Rus. To the one who believes in

Divine Providence, it is clearly Hashem guiding the birth of Moshiach. Moreover, we see that what might seem to affect only one individual, in reality can affect and change a world!

They will stumble over one another. (26:37)

They will become so demoralized and fearful of the enemy that they will flee without seeing where they are going, stumbling over one another. Chazal add a new twist to the interpretation of this pasuk. They will stumble over each other's sins. Since all Jews are inherently responsible one for another, one Jew will be held liable for the transgression perpetrated by his fellow Jew. We are all components of a large unit called Klal Yisrael. We cannot ignore one another's shortcomings.

A visitor once came to the Volozhiner Yeshiva and noticed Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, delivering a shiur. As usual, the lecture was replete with brilliant themes and incredible logic. This person went over to Rav Chaim at the end of the shiur and said, "It is truly regrettable that you live in Volozhin. Your students will study regardless. Perhaps they might be missing one more pshat, exposition, on the Rambam - nu; it is not really such a terrible thing. If you would live in Paris or in Berlin, you would certainly be able to affect the spiritual lives of many Jews. Indeed, you might succeed in stemming the tide of assimilation. Rav Chaim looked at the visitor. In a strong, clear voice, he responded, "You are mistaken. In fact, my learning here in Volozhin prevents the Jews in Paris and Berlin from becoming meshumadim, apostates.

A similar story occurred concerning Rav Yisrael Salanter, zl when he heard that in a small town, far from his city of Kovno, home of his famous kollel, an individual Jew committed a blatant act of chillul Shabbos. He immediately convened his kollel fellows, which included some of the greatest Torah luminaries. He delivered a scathing lecture on the topic of Shabbos, its holiness and the gravity of its desecration. After the shiur one of the fellows questioned the reason for the reprimand. He responded that he had heard that Shabbos had been desecrated in a town far from them. "Rebbe, what does this have to do with us?" was the immediate retort. Rav Yisrael answered, "If your shemiras Shabbos would be more meticulous, if your observance of the holiness of Shabbos was stronger, there would not have occurred this instance of chillul Shabbos in that town. You must realize that you are responsible for all of Yahadus, Judaism. If someone in Paris becomes an apostate, it is because our spiritual level has waned somewhat. Every Jew has a direct influence upon all the Jews in the world - for the positive and the negative." These compelling words should serve for us, not only as a condemnation and demand, but also as a source of encouragement of our awesome responsibility to all of Klal Yisrael.

And five of you will pursue one hundred and one hundred will pursue ten thousand. (25:8)

Anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of mathematics understands that the ratio presented above is inconsistent. If five Jews can pursue a hundred enemies, then the ratio of one to twenty should translate into a hundred Jews pursuing two thousand. The pasuk, however, does not say that. It writes that one hundred Jews will pursue one thousand of the enemy! Rashi cites the Sifri that infers that when people work as a group, when more people are united in serving the Almighty, the consequences of their actions are much more significant.

A mitzvah, when performed by a large group, has a greater impact than one which is observed

by an individual. The Chofetz Chaim proves this from the mitzvah of zimun, the introductory blessing recited before Bircas HaMazon, grace after meals. When three men bentch together, they say, "Nevareich," "we will bless". When ten men bentch together, they say "Nevareich le'Elokeinu", "we will bless to our G-d." When one thousand bentch together, the blessing changes to "Nevareich l'Hashem Elokeinu Elokei Yisrael", " we will bless Hashem, Our G-d and the G-d of Yisrael." The aggregate power of a multitude of Jews is remarkable. There is no fixed ratio for correlating the effect of a few Jews who observe mitzvos to the combined effort of many. Consequently, one should always seek to include himself in the tzibbur, communal effort of mitzvah performance.

There is a story told about a scholarly meshulach, fund-raiser for the Sutzker Yeshivah, who came to the Chofetz Chaim regarding his desire to change vocations. It seems that his financial situation at home had improved. Now he wanted to retire and take a position as rav in a smaller community, enabling him to study Torah on a more consistent basis. He explained to the Chofetz Chaim that while he did find time to study Torah, because his mind was so involved in his overwhelming responsibility to the Yeshivah, he found it difficult to concentrate on his learning and even on his daily tefillos. Instead of concentrating on his prayers, he was thinking of the best manner in which to approach a specific wealthy donor. In a different setting, in a more relaxed atmosphere, he would be able to study Torah and daven to Hashem on a much loftier plane.

The Chofetz Chaim wished the fund-raiser success in his new endeavor and bid him farewell. Just as he reached the door, the Chofetz Chaim called to him, "Would you by chance know the price of a pair of shoes?" The man, taken aback, responded, "I really have not purchased a pair of shoes in quite some time, but I would venture that they are about ten rubles." Just before he opened the door to leave, the Chofetz Chaim asked him, "How much profit do you think the shoemaker makes on a pair of shoes?" Dumbfounded by the Chofetz Chaim's behavior, the meshulach responded, "I really do not know; I never was a shoemaker."

It was not over --- yet. "Let us attempt to calculate the shoemaker's profit." After factoring in the cost of leather, labor and various overhead expenses, they arrived at a handsome profit margin for the shoemaker. Just as the meshulach was about to leave for the third time, the Chofetz Chaim turned to him and asked, "Are these the only shoes available for the consumer, or are there other types of shoes?" "Well, there are custom made shoes and factory made shoes." "Which are more expensive?" "The custom made shoes are more expensive, since much more meticulous labor is involved in making them."

"If this is the case, the shoemaker must do quite well, even better than the owner of the factory." "No, rebbe, on the contrary," the fund-raiser responded, "it is the factory owner who is really wealthy. True, his profit margin is reduced in comparison to the shoemaker, but he produces thousands of shoes, many more times the amount made by the shoemaker."

The Chofetz Chaim now turned to the meshulach and said, "You would do well to heed your own words. You would like to retire from what truly is a demanding job, so that you will no longer be distracted from Torah study and tefillah. You are probably right in assuming that your personal growth will be enhanced. Your work on behalf of the Yeshivah benefits hundreds of young men who will be enabled to study and pray as a result of your efforts. Can you compare your personal achievement to the incredible benefit you avail Klal Yisrael?"

While this thesis in no way is meant to encourage one to sacrifice his personal learning for every communal endeavor, it simply demonstrates the extreme importance of communal work and the overwhelming benefit of koach ho'rabim, the power of a multitude of Jews.

But if you will not listen to Me.....and if you despise My laws (26:14,15)

Rashi explains the phrase, "and if you despise My laws," as meaning, "if you despise the performance by others of My laws." In his commentary on Rashi, the Mizrachi gives further meaning to this statement when he says this refers to one who, although performing mitzvos himself, resents others who do the same. This explanation is striking. It is also a condemnation of so many of us who do not tolerate the spiritual achievements of others, especially if we think they are plagurizing our own efforts. For instance, one organization has succeeded in building up a following. Suddenly, another well-meaning group attempts to do their own thing and also reach out to others. The reactions are regrettably the same throughout most of our community --- indignation, and resentment! Instantly, the righteous l'shem Shomayim attitude that seemed to have prevailed until now disappears.

This is the underlying meaning of the pasuk. If we are all working for the sake of Heaven to glorify Hashem's Name, can there be any reason for not encouraging others to follow suit?

And if you will not listen to Me....and I will set My face against you. And you shall be smitten before your enemies.....and I will bring a sword upon you executing the vengeance of the Covenant....and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. (29:14,17,25)

The main feature in Parashas Bechukosai is the Tochachah, admonition, the curses to befall Klal Yisrael as a result of their transgressions. The Torah speaks in a sharp tone as it describes in detail the terrible calamities to strike us for our iniquitous behavior. Destruction, havoc, terrible illness and devastation are the main topics of these curses. Did the Torah have to go into such detail? Could the punishments not have been tempered, expressed in milder language? Such strong words could really frighten someone!

Horav Moshe Swift, zl, feels that this specifically was the Torah's intention. Tell it like it is! Let the people see the results of their behavior. People always seem to find excuses for dismissing Shabbos, kashrus, taharas ha'mishpachah, purity of family life. It has almost become the battle cry of those who have chosen an alternative to the Torah way of life: "The Torah is archaic. Its laws and admonitions do not apply in today's progressive society." They have the audacity to dismiss the Torah.

To these skeptics, the Torah responds in a language that is not ancient, a language that everyone can understand. If you keep the Torah, if you choose mitzvos as a way of life -- you will be rewarded. If you choose to ignore the Torah, to desecrate its laws, to abolish its commandments, then you may expect the tochachah. You can look forward to the dreadful details, to the curses all described in detail. No cover up - just plain, simple terms. If you comply, then Hashem is near you. You will reap the benefits of your commitment. If you are determined to rebel--well; you may look forward to desolation, destruction and misery. Can it be stated any more simply?

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