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PENINIM ON THE TORAH PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARASHAT BESHALACH

*So G-d turned the People toward the way of the wilderness...Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him.
(13:18, 19)*

It seems strange that the Torah interrupts its narrative which describes Klal Yisrael's journey toward Eretz Yisrael via the wilderness, to reveal that Moshe had taken Yosef's bones with him. Is this fact sufficiently important to place it right in the middle of their trip? It actually belongs in the previous parsha, which relates the exodus from Egypt and the series of events surrounding this seminal experience. At the moment of their departure, the people left carrying bags on their shoulders with whatever garments they had. At that point, it would be appropriate to mention that Moshe Rabbeinu was carrying something of greater importance: Yosef HaTzaddik's mortal remains.

Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Shlita, cites the Yalkut that explains why Hashem did not lead the Jewish People to Eretz Yisrael through the shortest possible route. Hashem said, "If I bring them to the land in a straight- forward way, they will immediately take to the fields, each one setting up his orchard and vineyard, planting his grain - doing everything but studying Torah." The neglect of Torah study will be a result of the people's sudden exposure to a way of life which until now had been quite foreign and unrealistic. Slaves do not have fields. By taking the people on a circuitous course in the wilderness that was to last forty years, they would learn the meaning of bitachon, trust, in Hashem. For forty years, a diet of Torah and Heavenly manna sustained them. They learned that life is a constant sequence of miracles - blessings from the Almighty Who guards and sustains us. He sees to it that we receive whatever we need to live. Forty years of this learning experience inculcated this belief and trust into our psyche. Now, we were prepared to enter the land.

As the Torah relates how the Jewish People took a labyrinthine path to Eretz Yisrael, it adds that the moreh derech, guide, who served as their beacon of inspiration on this extended journey, consisted of the atzmos Yosef, bones of Yosef. They raised their eyes and saw Yosef's remains; and they were looking at what represented the banner of the Jewish People, the symbol of commitment-- despite adversity, pain and constant challenge. Yosef survived it all. From his early youth, he was reviled by his brothers, sold to the Yishmaelim, later sold as a slave to the Egyptians, condemned by his master's wife, and, despite all of this, he maintained his unequivocal faith in Hashem. He is the exemplar to follow into Eretz Yisrael. He will show us the way to survive. He will demonstrate that Torah study comes first, as spiritual endeavor is the primary vocation of a Jew. Then they will be able to enter the land with their priorities in place and their commitment in order.

Torah is much more than a vehicle for defining priorities. Torah is the reason that a Jew wants to be a Jew. In an inspirational discourse, Horav Simcha Wasserman, zl, delves into the Jew's motivation for developing a positive attitude about his Jewishness. If we peruse Jewish history, we find few encouraging moments. Between the blood libels, pogroms, racial incitements and holocausts, we have

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had little opportunity for positive reflection. Yet, we have remained unwaveringly committed and totally dedicated to our heritage. Why? Furthermore, does anybody feel less significant because the world is against us? If anything, we are proud of our status as heirs to Avraham HaIvri, the Patriarch who stood on one side, while the rest of the world stood on the other side. While there have been Jews throughout the millennia who have been consumed with self-loathing, theirs was a self-inflicted attitude. They should have realized that being Jewish is a consequence of birth. Since they have been compelled to pay the price, they might as well enjoy taking pride in who they are.

We return to the original question: What makes a Jew want to be a Jew? The answer is Torah. This feeling is not necessarily the result of the conscious knowledge that we amass. It is primarily the result of the subconscious influence which Torah has on one who studies it properly. In other words, imbibing Torah into our system has a positive, mind-altering effect on us. It is not the actual taste of Torah or the understanding of Torah; it is the inspiration that one receives by ingesting it into his system. When one studies Torah correctly, it enters his system and penetrates his subconscious. It makes a Jew into a Jew. Indeed, that is the reason Hashem gave it to us: to make a Jew into a Jew.

When there is Torah learning, there is continuity, inspiration and spiritual illumination. The study of Torah is the road marker which guides the Jew's return to his Maker. It is what connects us to the Almighty.

I recently read about a comment made by the Chafetz Chaim, zl which I feel encapsulates the concept of Torah and gives us an idea why those who do not study it remain uninspired and unmoved. In his book, "Warmed By His Fire," Rabbi Yisrael Besser, relates that when the Chafetz Chaim's granddaughter emigrated to Eretz Yisrael from Russia, the most distinguished Rosh Yeshivah greeted her with the hope of picking up a few morsels of eternal truths from her saintly grandfather. She was, lamentably, the victim of having been raised in a country which had long ago outlawed religion as being the opiate of the masses.

She recalled that as a young, idealistic student, beguiled by the allure of modernity, entranced by the vague promises of science and technology, she was in the process of shedding the shackles of "archaic beliefs" from her life. She had asked her saintly grandfather the following question, "Zeide, you know there is a new world out there, a world far-removed and advanced from your little shtetl. This world is filled with scientific discovery, modern technology, a world which is constantly changing. Why do you not come out of the darkness and limitations associated with your antiquated world?"

The sage looked into his granddaughter's eyes and firmly replied, "With their technology and sophistication, they will develop a bomb that will ultimately kill many people. It will bring death and destruction to the world." Then, in his weak voice, he whispered, "Ubber mir machen mentchen. But we are developing people! Do you hear? Mir machen mentchen."

Pharaoh will say of Bnei Yisrael, "They are locked in the land." (14:3)

Many of us go through life locked into a position, which we have either chosen for ourselves or others have chosen for us. We have fallen prey to the disease of complacency, and we refuse to change. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites Rabbi Akiva Eigar, zl, who questions the sequence of one of the tefillos which we recite on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: Adam, yesodo mei' afar, v'sofu le'afar, b'nafsho yavi lachmo. "Man, his foundation is from dust, and his end is dust, with his soul he brings his bread." The correct sequence should have been: first, man's origins; second, his livelihood; third, his

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passing and burial in the ground. Why is the "bread" he earns the last of the three defining moments in his life? It really should be the second one.

Rabbi Akiva Eigar explains that the middle passage is not related to physical bread or any form of material sustenance. Rather, it is a reference to the "bread" that is to sustain a person in Olam Haba, the World to Come. After one has passed from this world, he brings to the Eternal World of Truth the mitzvos and good deeds that he has been privileged to perform in this world. We now read this passage in the following manner: Man is created from dust, and he ends up as dust. Afterwards, he brings the bread that he has gathered in this world to the Olam Haba to sustain his soul in its repose. We pray that we do not have to be sustained from nahama d'kisufa, bread of shame, bread that is granted to us, even though we are not worthy of it. This is embarrassing. We pray that we should not feel as shnorrrers, beggars, in the World to Come, that we should be worthy of carrying out His word and His command in this world, and, thus, warrant bread of spiritual sustenance. We do not want to be "locked" into a position from which we cannot escape. We want to grow spiritually and benefit from the rewards of this growth.

Rav Zilberstein takes the idea of nevuchim heim, "they are locked in," a bit further. Each individual has his unique purpose in life for which Hashem created him. Some of us rise to that purpose, while others, regrettably, go through life doing well, succeeding at our chosen endeavor, but never fulfilling the purpose for which we have been created or achieving the status that the Almighty has destined for us. He gives us the choice, and it is up to us to make the correct decisions in life. Some of us make the right decision, while others have either fallen into the rut of complacency or have had the choice made for them when they were young, such that they just followed along, reading the script and acting the part that others have selected for them.

Perhaps the following narrative will give us insight into the choices that present themselves and what we can-- and should-- do about them. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, Rosh Hayeshivah of Beth Medrash Govohah and architect of Torah in America, came to Yeshivas Slobodka at the young age of fourteen. Orphaned at a young age, his extended family were his guardians. "Concerned" that such a brilliant boy would spend his life in a yeshivah with no "hope" of "succeeding" in the "real" world, they attempted to remove him from the yeshivah and, instead, send him to dental school. As a successful dentist, he could achieve prominence and support his family. While they had no problem with his observance and even his diligence in Torah study, they were concerned lest it become a lifelong endeavor.

The members of the family came to Slobodka and spoke to the Alter, Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl. He listened and replied, "I understand your concerns. Give me three weeks and then as far as I am concerned, you may do as you please."

When they left, the Rosh Yeshiva asked a number of his most distinguished students to take the young boy under their wing and give him a geshmak, good taste, in learning, so that he could sense first hand the effect that Torah study has on a person. Those three weeks in such an exceptional environment, under the tutelage of some of the most brilliant young Torah scholars in Europe, established the foundation of the man who would one day change the spiritual panorama of America.

Three weeks went by very quickly, and the family returned to pick up their young charge. They called him, and, in the presence of the Rosh Yeshivah, asked, "Would you like to leave here and go to school to become a dentist?"

(Rav) Aharon looked at them incredulously and exclaimed, "What? You have nothing to do with yourselves? I should leave the yeshivah? I have never had it so good. Why would I dream of leaving?"

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The case was closed, and we are the fortunate beneficiaries.

There are choices in life that we must make. We pray that they are the correct ones. We could live out our greatest dreams, or they could one day be the source of our most frightening nightmares.

Egypt was journeying after them, and they were frightened; Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem. They said to Moshe, "Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness?" (14:10, 11)

The Yalkut Shimoni comments that Klal Yisrael cried out to Hashem, and Moshe Rabbeinu stood in prayer on their behalf. Hashem told him, "Now is not the time to entreat a lengthy prayer. The Jewish People are in a moment of distress." Sforno contends that Moshe was included in the phrase, "Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem." The cry of Moshe, however, was not motivated by fear of Pharaoh and his army, for he had already told Klal Yisrael that the Egyptians would perish. His cry was a complaint against the arrogance of the Jewish leaders who had asked, "Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the wilderness?" Moshe thought that because of their defiance of him, the people would not listen to what he told them and would not enter the sea. Thus, Hashem told him, "Why do you cry out to Me? You err in not trusting the people. They will listen to you."

Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, derives an important lesson from here. There are moments in a leader's career that, despite his total dedication to his flock to the point of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, he feels at a loss. He senses that his influence on the people is waning. He hears them screaming, blaming him for their misery and problems. Therefore, he refrains from issuing a command or reproving their behavior. He certainly does not command them to risk their lives by jumping into a stormy sea. He senses such negativity that he feels uncomfortable in his position, and he refuses to take an aggressive stand. Hashem knows the truth: the Jewish people might complain; they might mumble, but they respect their spiritual leadership. Thus, if they are told to go forward, to jump into the sea - they will jump. The leader should command, and the people will listen. That is the nature of the Jewish People.

There is, however, another aspect to this relationship that we should address. If the people do not believe in their leader, then he will be ineffective in leading them. Choni Ha'maagal woke up after a seventy year sleep and returned to discover, to his chagrin, that nobody recognized him; nobody knew who he was. He prayed for death, and his wish was granted. This is enigmatic. All he needed to do was deliver a Torah discourse, give a lecture, and the people would recognize who he was. They would recognize the nuances, the novella, and the style of his lecture. They would know that it was truly Choni.

We see from here, notes Horav Michael Perets, Shlita, that if one's family and friends do not believe in him, he will simply not have the power to reveal his true self. Choni is Choni as a result of the people's belief in him. This motivates him to deliver a lecture of the caliber that only the original Choni could give. If the people no longer believe in him, then he has lost that hidden ability, the self-confidence necessary to teach as he had before.

People must believe. The sin of the meraglim, spies, was a result of a negative belief on the part of the Jewish People about their ability to conquer the land. Thus, they were punished with losing their rights to enter the land. If they did not think that they could make it, then they would not be able to make it.

This is what Moshe was saying to Hashem. The people did not have the self-confidence to enter the Red Sea. They did not believe that they would make it out of the water. With such a negative

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attitude, they would not be able to succeed. Hashem allayed Moshe's fears, telling him that the people did believe.

Yisrael saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt. (14:31)

The people complained against Moshe saying, "What shall we drink?" (15:24)

We are confronted with a striking paradox. The Revelation at the Red Sea was unprecedented and unparalleled in human experience. In fact, Chazal teach us that the simple maidservant at the Red Sea was privy to greater revelation than the great prophet Yechezkel. If so, how does the nation so quickly revert to complaining about a lack of water? After what they had experienced, they should have at least exhibited a bit of patience.

This question repeats itself following the Revelation at Har Sinai and the giving of the Torah. Surely, such an event should have inspired the Jewish People to the loftiest heights of spirituality. Yet, we see how quickly they fell from their high perch to the nadir of depravity when they made the Golden Calf. What happened to the inspiration? How did they fall so quickly from the zenith of spirituality to the rock bottom of idolatry?

The essence is the source of one's inspiration: Is it intrinsic, or extrinsic? Let us analyze these two discrepant approaches. Artificial stimulation, such as a seminar conference, Shabbaton, dancing, singing, are all inspirational, leaving the participant with a positive drive toward greater spiritual growth. He is excited, enthusiastic, ready to do anything, given the opportunity. Regrettably, this extrinsic infusion of spiritual proclivity does not last very long. Very soon, he returns to a life of complacency, a life of insipid observance, emotionless and even filled with negativity. The excitement has dissipated; the enthusiasm has waned. The reason for this quick reversion to his earlier self is that the inspiration was not from within. He did not toil at changing. It just happened; easy come, easy go. Once the music ends and the dancing stops, the feeling is gone, and he is back where he started: nowhere.

In contrast is the individual that responds to an internal stimulus to change. He begins with a simple turn to the right, a slight movement upward, accepting to daven better, longer, with greater devotion and sincerity. He makes a slight change in his Shabbos observance; his dedication to Torah study increases. In any of these situations, the motivation is authentic; it is from within. He works on himself; he makes the decision; he accepts the responsibility - nothing artificial - nothing external - only he, himself. A few weeks later, he takes another step forward and upward. After a few months, he is no longer the same person he once was. This time, his spiritual demeanor is real; it will endure.

Veritably, both approaches are important, playing a crucial role in one's spiritual ascendancy. The quick, artificial inspiration, the kumsitz, the inspiring story, the powerful speaker, the emotional singing, the lively dancing: it all works and inspires. It must, however, be followed up with practical commitment. Artificial stimuli spur growth and encourage reform, but it must immediately be concretized if it is to endure. One's personal impetus determines the longevity of his commitment.

Klal Yisrael reached incredible heights of spirituality, both during the Exodus and at the Revelation at Har Sinai. These experiences, however, were extrinsic occurrences, albeit spectacular, but, nonetheless, peripheral. Thus, the moment that they were in doubt about Moshe Rabbeinu's return, they reverted to sin. A maidservant remains a maidservant, despite the miracles of the Red Sea, unless she internally substantiates her experience. The maidservant saw, but she continued to be a maidservant; her spirituality remained unchanged. Seeing is not enough - unless one sees from the

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heart.

There is also the flip side: the individual who sees a miraculous occurrence, experiences a mind-blowing event that can only be interpreted as a miracle from G-d, yet chooses to ignore what he has experienced. The Torah tells us (ibid 14:31), "Yisrael saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem." What novel idea is the Torah teaching us? Certainly, if they saw Hashem's miracles, they would believe in Him. Seeing is believing. Is it not?

Horav Shlomo Twersky, zl, explains that it is not axiomatic. One who sees believes - only when he wants to see and wants to believe. There are those who see clearly, without any question, yet they impose blinders on their eyes to color what they see, to distort what they envision, to destroy the message which they perceive. The result is that they do not believe. One can look and not see, and, subsequently, not believe. Klal Yisrael saw and believed, because this is what they wanted. They wanted to believe in Hashem. What they perceived brought them closer to Him.

Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael chose to sing this song to Hashem. (15:1)

The Torah uses the word yashir, which is the future tense of the word shar and means will sing. The translation which follows Rashi's commentary is that when Moshe and Klal Yisrael experienced Krias Yam Suf, the Splitting of the Red Sea, they decided to sing a song of praise to the Almighty. From the use of the future tense, Chazal derive an allusion to the principle of Techiyas Ha'Meisim, the Resurrection of the dead. Hashem will one day bring the dead back to life, and they will sing His praises once again. Chazal are telling us that every song of praise which is sung in the present will once again have the opportunity to be sung when the dead arise and are brought back to life. On a deeper meaning, Horav Shabsi Yudelevitz, zl, suggests that while all songs of praise will be sung once again, the Shiras Ha'Yam, is a shirah nitzchis, eternal song that will be sung over and over again due to its eternal essence and profound value. In his inimitable manner, he explains this with a story.

The city of Slonim was a unique community known for the piety and scholarship of its citizens. Thus, it was no surprise that whoever assumed the position of chazzan, cantor, for the High Holy Days, must have been an individual of great piety who was endowed with a powerful and melodious voice. Regrettably, these criteria were detrimental to the community, since anyone who was able to achieve this lofty position was immediately propositioned by another city to accept the position of chazzan in that community. This was because the city of Slonim was distinguished in the piety of its citizenry - not in their financial portfolios. Alas, they had the finest chazanim every year, only to lose them for the following year.

One year, they were unable to locate a chazzan that was acceptable to them. Their criteria constituted a tall order, and that particular year no one was able to fill their needs. Yom Tov was just a few weeks away. What would they do? One of the elderly members of the community, who many years previously had an excellent voice, offered to be the chazzan for the current year. The lay leadership was inclined to accept, as long as the man agreed to sign a document promising to keep this position for a minimum of five years. Reb Yosha, as he was known, agreed and the contract was signed, sealed and presented to the Rav of Slonim, the distinguished Horav Aizil Slonimer, zl.

As the rav read the agreement, a small smile began to show on his face. Soon, it was a full-

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fledged laugh. The lay leaders were perturbed at their rav's reaction. He should be ecstatic. They were able to secure a chazzan for the next five years. "My friends," the rav began, "let me share a story with you. Many years ago, when I first took the position of Rav of Slonim, the community had established a new cemetery. The old one was just about filled, and the members needed a new place to inter their dead. Unfortunately, no one wanted his loved one to be the first corpse to be buried in the new cemetery. The Chevra Kadisha, sacred burial society, decided to offer an incentive to the person who agreed to be buried in the new cemetery. They hung signs throughout the city, declaring that they were offering a sizable sum of money to the family of anyone who was buried in the new cemetery. All they could do now was to wait for someone to accept their offer. There was a man in the city who, besides being very poor, was also somewhat of a clever joker. Indeed, his ability to make light of everything helped maintain his sanity concerning his financial status. Pesach was quickly approaching, and his wife notified him that the proverbial cupboard was beyond bare. They had no money whatsoever with which to buy food to celebrate the festival. Ever the optimist, he told his wife to be patient. He would come up with something. He went out of his daily "route" from shul to shul, begging for alms. When he saw the signs offering an incentive to whomever was buried at the new cemetery, he thought of an idea.

Rushing home to his wife, he said, "Quick, I have a way to get out of debt and help us start a new life. As soon as I finish speaking, call the Chevra Kadisha and notify them that I have suddenly died. Dress me in the traditional tachrichim, shrouds, and cover me with a sheet. Tell them that I am all prepared for burial in the new cemetery. Explain to them that you are so poor that you are unable to pay for any of the incidental expenses resulting from my sudden passing. You, therefore, ask to obtain the "incentive" money immediately. Go out and purchase whatever we need for Pesach and leave the rest to me."

The wife had no recourse but to listen to her husband. The Chevra Kadisha felt bad for the new widow, but were overjoyed with the prospect of finally having someone buried in the new cemetery. Everything went along as planned. The funeral procession took a little longer, since the distance to the new cemetery was quite a bit further. Along the way, the members of the Chevra Kadisha decided to stop at an inn and get a drink. After all, it was not easy carrying a coffin for such a distance. As soon as they left the coffin, the poor man jumped out, and together with his wife, fled the scene, never to be heard from again.

When the Chevra Kadisha discovered what had happened, they realized they had been taken for fools. This would never happen to them again. Thus, when the next person died and his family was willing to have him buried in the new cemetery, his body was tied down to the coffin, so that he could not "escape."

Rav Aizil concluded his story, saying to the lay leadership, "You should have made a contract years ago with the young, healthy chazzanim. Our Reb Yosha is not going anywhere. He is too old. He does not need ropes to hold him here!"

Rav Shabsi explains that this idea applies equally to Shiras HaYam. Everything that is presented before our eyes is nothing more than an illusion. We see a corpse wrapped up in tachrichim. We hear the wailing sound of his bereaved widow, but, in reality, it is all a fa?ade. The corpse is not a corpse. The shrouds are not real. Everything is a mirage played out before our eyes.

We see the chazzan standing at the lectern. We hear him chanting the service and singing his melodious songs, but, in truth, the songs are not songs, the singing is not singing. Nothing is real, because nothing is permanent. The chazzan that sings before us today might not be here tomorrow. Nothing in this world is real, because it does not last. Everything is of a temporary nature.

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When Hashem attests in the Torah, however, that the Egyptians have drowned, and the Jewish People no longer have anything to fear, it is real, it is true, it is forever. Therefore, the Shirah which Klal Yisrael sings in recognition of the destruction of their enemies is an enduring praise, an eternal song, a song that spans the generations. This is why the Shiras HaYam, the song of praise and gratitude sung by Moshe Rabbeinu and Klal Yisrael, lasts forever. A song which is sung to the Borei Olam, Creator of the world, Whose benevolence is true and absolute, whose goodness is real and complete, is something that is eternal. Eternity is measured by the barometer of absolute truth, reality and endurance.

This is my G-d and I will glorify Him. (15:2)

Chazal explain how we, as mere mortals, can glorify Hashem. Anveihu b'mitzvos, glorify Him through religious observances, making them as beautiful as possible. This indicates that one should have a beautiful sukkah, a beautiful esrog, a beautiful Shofar, a beautiful Tallis, and beautiful Tefillin. When a Torah is written, one should use the best materials, the best craftsmen, and adorn it with a beautiful mantle. This does not mean that one is to break the bank in order to purchase a beautiful esrog or any other object used for a mitzvah. Rather, the idea focuses on one's attitude toward the mitzvah; to realize before Whom and to Whom he is performing this mitzvah; to be meticulous in his observance and to take great pains to see to it that the ultimate priority in his life is mitzvah observance. A mitzvah should not take second place to any other endeavor, nor should one treat a mitzvah in a manner unbecoming its stature in Jewish life. The way one dresses and acts in a shul or when he is carrying out a mitzvah is another aspect of this far-reaching obligation of v'anveihu, "I will glorify Him."

I recently came across an interesting article about a secular ceremony that is performed regularly in Washington, D.C. by the military honor guard that I would like to share with the readers. Although it is from a secular source and practice, I feel that it imparts a powerful and compelling lesson to us concerning our attitude towards mitzvos. The following are the criteria which the honor guard that salutes the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier must follow. In his walk across the tomb, the guard takes exactly twenty-one steps, which allude to the twenty-one gun salute which is the highest honor given any military or foreign dignitary. He then makes an about-face, hesitating for exactly twenty-one seconds before commencing his return walk. His gloves are moistened to prevent him from losing his grip on his rifle, which he carries on his shoulder. After his march across the path, he executes an about-face and transfers the rifle to the outside shoulder.

The guards are changed every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be between 5'10" and 6'2" tall, and his waist size may not exceed 30". He must commit two years of his life to guard the tomb and live in a barracks beneath the tomb. He may not drink any alcohol on or off-duty for the rest of his life. He may not publicly use foul language of any sort for the rest of his life and he may not disgrace the uniform he wears or the tomb that he guards in any way. After two years, the guard is given a wreath pin that is worn on his lapel, signifying that he has served as a guard. Presently, only 400 pins are worn. The guard must adhere to these rules or forfeit the pin.

The shoes he wears are made with thick soles to protect his feet from heat or cold. There are metal heel plates that extend to the top of the shoe, so that a loud click may be heard as he comes to a halt. His uniform may not have any wrinkles, folds or lint on it. Indeed, guards dress for duty in front of a full-length mirror.

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During his first six months of duty, he may neither talk to anyone nor watch television. All of his off-duty time is spent studying the 175 notable people that are interred in Arlington National Cemetery. He must memorize who they are and where each one is buried. Every guard spends five hours each day preparing his uniform for guard duty.

An added vignette: In 2003, as Hurricane Isabelle was approaching Washington, D.C., the United States Congress and Senate took two days off in anticipation of the storm. Due to the apparent danger, the military members assigned the duty of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were given permission to suspend their assignment. They respectfully declined the offer, declaring, "No way, sir!" Soaked to the skin, marching in the pelting rain of a tropical storm, they asserted that guarding the Tomb was not simply an assignment, it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a serviceman. The Tomb has been patrolled continuously for the last seventy-six years.

The lesson for us is simple. If secular soldiers guarding a national shrine understand the significance of their role to the point that they consider their endeavor not to be an assignment, but rather, an honor and a privilege, what should be the attitude of a Jew who is given the opportunity and the mandate to serve the Almighty? Zeh Keli v'anveihu. "I will glorify Him." This is my honor and my privilege. That should be the prevalent attitude.

And in the morning, you will see the glory of Hashem. (16:7)

Klal Yisrael experienced many miracles during their forty-year trek in the wilderness. One of the greatest miracles that accompanied them daily throughout this journey was the manna, Heavenly bread, that sustained them. After the people voiced their complaint about a lack of food, Hashem provided them with two forms of food: manna in the morning; and slav, quail, in the evening. Interestingly, the manna fell in the morning, because their request for bread was an appropriate one. Man needs bread to survive. He does not require meat. Their demand for meat was, therefore, improper. They did, after all, have abundant flocks of cattle which were available for slaughtering. Yet, they complained. Hashem provided them with meat, but He did not send it in the same loving manner as He sent the manna.

The presentation of the manna is worthy of note. As Horav Avraham Pam, zl, said in the second volume of Ateres Avraham, an anthology of his discourses prepared by Rabbi Sholom Smith: The packaging was distinctive and indicative of Hashem's love for His nation. Packaging is important with any product. One can give an expensive gift that immediately loses its meaning and value if the packaging is inappropriate and demeaning. One who takes the time and makes the effort to package his gift properly demonstrates his feelings of love.

Horav Yerucham Levovitz, zl, derives an important lesson from the disparity between the manner in which Hashem sent the manna and the way in which He delivered the slav. This should teach us to distinguish between the various ways that Hashem grants us our needs. One who turns to Hashem to entreat Him for something which he feels he needs should analyze the manner in which Hashem has granted his request. Did it come easily, in a dignified manner, or was it accomplished amidst hardship and toil? The manner in which Hashem executes our request is a barometer for measuring Hashem's pleasure with our request. Did He fulfill our request because we deserved it, or did Hashem just simply fulfill our request because we prayed hard and, so to speak, "pushed" for it?

Rav Pam applies this idea to the manner in which a person earns a living. When Adam

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HaRishon sinned, Hashem cursed him and his descendants with, B'zeyas apecha tochal lechem, "By the sweat of your brow, shall you eat your bread." (Bereishis 3:19) This is an inescapable part of the human experience. Hashem, however, sends us our parnassah, livelihood, in different ways. One can earn his daily bread easily, in a respectable manner, so he has time at the end of the day to devote himself to Torah study. Another individual can labor long hours under difficult conditions to eke out his meager living, and is so exhausted that he can barely make it home to get enough rest before he begins the next day. It is all part of zechusim, merit. One either merits to be sustained easily, or one is relegated to difficulty. Clearly, one who receives his parnassah in an easy manner should recognize his good fortune and offer his gratitude to Hashem.

The Rosh HaYeshivah adds that, since we are commanded to emulate Hashem, the way we carry out mitzvos bein adam l'chaveiro, between man and his fellow man, is also relevant. As Hashem delivers His bounty with a bright countenance, so too, should we fulfill our obligations to each other with a smile, good cheer and joy.

While, undoubtedly, even the individual who gives has things on his mind, because he is fortunate to be able to give to others, everything in his life is not necessarily all positive. He might also be beset with troubles. Illness can also strike a wealthy person. His business could be in trouble, and his income may not be going as well as people imagine. Nonetheless, we must understand that the poor man who stands by the door seeking alms is unaware of this turn of events, so he does not deserve to be greeted in a begrudging manner. Some people present their entire life story on their faces. The poor man does not deserve such a countenance when he asks for alms. Life is difficult enough for him. He does not need more. Rav Pam cites the Chofetz Chaim, who says that a major component in the mitzvah of acting benevolently towards others is the countenance we show them. The shine of our face; the smile that accompanies the check, makes a world of difference and plays a crucial role in the fulfillment of the mitzvah. Perhaps, if we smile at others, we will merit that Hashem will smile at us.

For G-d said, "Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt..." Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him. (13:17,19)

This pasuk, which informs us that Moshe Rabbeinu took Yosef's remains along with him when Klal Yisrael left Egypt, seems to be misplaced. It should have been placed earlier, in Parashas Bo, when the Torah relates the actual exodus from Egypt.

Furthermore, the Torah mentions that Yosef had extracted an oath from Klal Yisrael that they would remove his remains when they left Egypt. Why did he find it more necessary to make them take an oath than any of the other brothers did? The remains of the other brothers were also removed from Egypt - without an oath. Why was Yosef different?

Horav Yosef Konvitz, zl, takes a homiletic approach towards explaining the sequence of the text. When Moshe noted that Hashem changed course instead of taking the Jews to Eretz Yisrael directly through Plishtim, he was surprised. Why did He deviate from the straight and easy path? After some contemplation, Moshe came to the realization that, the miracles and wonders notwithstanding, Klal Yisrael was not yet fully committed to belief in Hashem. He had no clear indication that they would not bolt back to Egypt as soon as they were challenged. These thoughts evoked in Moshe questions concerning his role as leader. If Hashem was concerned regarding the people's ability to

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withstand the pressure of challenge, what should he say? Moshe had second thoughts about leading a people who were not prepared to be led.

Moshe, however, would not permit his questions concerning Klal Yisrael to impact his overwhelming love for them. Thus, in order to allay any questions, he decided to focus on Yosef's "remains," a metaphor for observing how Yosef, the Jewish leader who had preceded him, acted with regard to the people. He noted that Yosef made the people promise to remove his bones from Egypt when they left. This perturbed him. Was Yosef not the one who had sustained his family in Egypt? Did he not provide them with food and shelter? Why would they be *kefuyei tov*, ingrates, and not accede to his last request of them? Was a promise really necessary?

After much thought Moshe concluded, that despite everything that Yosef had done for his family, he was concerned that, due to the many years of suffering, pain and deprivation, which resulted in deep emotional bitterness, they would place the onus of guilt concerning their present miserable state on him. After all, he had brought them down to Egypt. Who had asked him to bring them to Egypt? He could have sent them the food. They would even the score by refusing to take his remains along with them to Eretz Yisrael. This scenario went through Yosef's mind when he asked them to take an oath.

This oath indicated to Moshe that the previous leadership also had concerns. They were acutely aware that the moment things were not going just right, the people would immediately blame their leadership. Nonetheless, Yosef took it upon himself to serve the nation. He did not care if they would turn against him at the first challenge. They needed him, and, as a true leader, he would be there for them. Moshe took the lesson and moved on, regardless of the consequences. He would be there for Klal Yisrael, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the attitude of the people. That is the function of a Torah leader.

It happened when Pharaoh sent out the People that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines. (13:17)

Once, the king's son, the crown prince, heir to the royal throne, was taken captive by a band of ruthless pirates. The young prince was starved and beaten. He had no day; he had no night. Suffering and persecution were his pastimes. After discovering where his son was being held captive, the king gathered together his bravest and strongest soldiers and set out on a mission to rescue him. A vicious battle ensued, and the pirate band suffered overwhelming casualties. The king was not taking any captives. Relentless in his punishment of the pirates for their brutal treatment of his son, the king did not stop until his son was safely ensconced in his protective custody.

The prince put his arms around his father's neck and cried bitterly, reliving to him the terrible terror and pain that he had sustained in captivity. The king soothed his son as they prepared for the return trip to the capital, where the entire city waited anxiously for their return. After traveling a few miles, the king suddenly ordered an about-face. They were returning towards the pirates' hideout. Upon seeing this, the prince began to tremble with fear. His nerves were already taut from his captivity and affliction, and he started screaming, "No! No!"

The prince saw that they were rapidly approaching the pirates' camp, and he felt faint. The mere thought of another confrontation with his captives was too much for him. As soon as they saw pirates coming out, they quickly turned around and ran. It seemed as if the king was teasing the pirates. As soon as the pirates came close to the king's soldiers, the bridge that they were about to traverse to safety

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- snapped. The prince could no longer take the pressure; he fainted. To anyone witnessing this ordeal, the question was obvious: Why did the king return to the pirate's camp? He was safe, and he had no reason to go back, but he did. Why?

This question applies to our parsha as well. Klal Yisrael had been in Egypt for 210 years. They sustained cruel persecution, pain and suffering. Hashem finally liberated them from bondage, but, on the way to freedom, He had them return. Why? Chazal ask this question in the Midrash. They respond with a mashal, parable. A young king went out with a small group of followers to hunt. While they were in the forest tracking their intended prey, they heard a cry for help. The king immediately ran towards the sound and discovered a young woman being attacked by robbers. The king raised his sword into the air, and the robbers ran away. The young woman was saved by the king, and he brought her back home. When the king discovered that this woman was herself a princess, he sought her hand in matrimony. The young woman's parents were overwhelmed with joy. It was beyond their greatest dreams. Their daughter's safe return, accompanied by her marriage to the young king, was beyond their wildest imagination.

The princess, however, did not have the same positive reaction as her parents did. She was certainly happy to be safely back home, but she was not yet ready to commit herself for life to her rescuer. So, she remained silent. She conformed with whatever her husband requested, but she continued to remain silent. The king was happy to be married to the princess, but he had imagined a wife who spoke, who did more than nod her head in obedience. The king decided that perhaps a change of scenery might be beneficial. He announced to his father-in-law that he was returning home with his bride.

When the king notified his young wife of his plans, her response was as usual: silence. If she was going to remain silent, the king figured that he would let her travel in her own coach. There was no reason for him to travel with a wife who refused to talk. The king's party left for the royal palace, the king in one coach and his queen in another coach. Suddenly, a band of highwaymen attacked the queen's coach. "Help me! Help me!" the queen screamed. "Please save me! Please."

Like an arrow bursting forth from the bow, the king came to her rescue. He chased away the robbers, who were actually men that he had hired to frighten the queen. He turned to his wife and said, "I have waited for this moment for some time. I just wanted to hear the sound of your voice once again. When you were attacked in the forest, you screamed for help. I saved you. Then silence. I have never heard from you again. I now know that when you are in pain, you cry out. This is what I was waiting for."

The lesson is obvious. When Klal Yisrael was in Egypt, beaten daily, persecuted and miserable - they cried out to Hashem. He responded and liberated them. The reaction: silence. Hashem had to break their silence to take them out of their reverie. He returned them towards Egypt. They reacted. They broke their silence.

The lesson for us is also obvious. We cry out to Hashem when we hurt. Otherwise, we are silent. That is not the way to treat our Protector. He wants to hear our voices on a regular basis, not only when it hurts.

Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him. (13:19)

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In the Talmud Sotah 13a, Chazal note that Moshe Rabbeinu was the only one who took the time and trouble to gather Yosef's remains, to fulfill the oath that Yosef had extracted from the original tribes that had come down to Egypt. The rest of the people were busy carrying out another mitzvah: requesting the valuables of Egypt. While Moshe understood this was also a mitzvah, his sights were set on a different goal. This is what Shlomo HaMelech meant when he said in Mishlei 10:8, Chacham lev yikach mitzvos, "The wise of heart takes (the performance of) mitzvos." It does not refer to Moshe as a righteous man, but as a wise man. Why? How was Moshe's greater acuity demonstrated by his actions? If anything, he displayed greater piety, a higher level of devotion, but not necessarily wisdom.

Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl, explains that the key word to understanding the depth of Moshe's actions is imo, with him. Both Klal Yisrael and Moshe "took." Klal Yisrael took the valuables which they had collected. This was definitely a considerable deed. In addition to acquiring great wealth, they also fulfilled a mitzvah. What they "took," however, was a temporary appropriation. They could use it right here and now, as long as they walked the earth. They could not take it "with them." No one takes his material wealth with him when he leaves this world. Moshe, on the other hand, took the remains of Yosef "with him." This was a mitzvah that he was taking "with him" to his eternal resting place. It would never leave him. It was a mitzvah, and mitzvos are eternal acquisitions.

He took six hundred elite chariots and all the chariots of Egypt, and officers on them all. (14:7)

From where did Pharaoh obtain the horses to pull the chariots? He could not have gotten them from the Egyptians, since their animals died during the plagues. Certainly it was not from the Jews, who were leaving with whatever animals they had. Rashi explains that it was the kasher she'b'Mitzrim, "G-d-fearing" Egyptians, that contributed animals to the cause. This demonstrates for us exactly how kosher, good, these Egyptians really were. When they were being plagued and the danger was imminent, they suddenly became righteous believers and took their animals into the barn according to Moshe Rabbeinu's instructions. When Pharaoh needed animals for his chariots so that he could pursue the Jews, however, these "righteous" Egyptians came forward and displayed their true colors. This is why Rabbi Shimon says, "The kasher she'b'Mitzrim should be killed. The best of snakes deserve the same fate."

While Rashi's statement is clear, we wonder what happened to transform these Egyptians overnight from righteous men to collaborators with the enemy? If they were no longer G-d-fearing, why were they referred to as "good" Egyptians? Furthermore, what connection is there between the "good" Egyptians and the good snake? Evidently, the Egyptians who pursued the Jews had a dual personality: They were G-d-fearing Egyptians, yet they could simultaneously pursue Jews with the intent to kill them. How?

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, posits that the answer lies in Rashi's commentary to 14:5, "And the heart of Pharaoh and the people became transformed regarding the people." Rashi adds that the motivating factor which catalyzed this about-face in attitude was "because of the money they had lent the Jews." In other words, the G-d-fearing Egyptians' "fear" extended only as far as their wallets - no further. They had limits to their belief. Money was the transcendent power in their lives: it transcended everything. Money was the defining factor in their lives. It also comprised their greatest hypocrisy.

The same love of money that compelled them to protect their animals originally, demonstrating their fear of G-d's awesome power, was what motivated them to risk their lives in pursuit of the Jews,

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even if it meant chasing them into the Red Sea. Indeed, the same sign that indicated the Egyptians' G-d-fearing quality also demonstrated how far and how low they would sink in pursuit of money. This is why Rabbi Shimon suggests that the best Egyptians should be killed: what makes them kosher also renders them pasul, invalidates them. You never know when the fine, upstanding, kind, G-d-fearing Egyptians will turn against you. They are just like the snakes. They may appear to be innocent, but there lurks a powerful, poisonous venom beneath their benevolent veneer, and one never knows when they will bite.

For the Hand is on the Throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation. (17:16)

Hashem takes an oath, by placing His Hand on the Heavenly Throne, that He will continue to wage war with Amalek until the memory of that nation has been expunged. This is the only time that Hashem's animus toward anything is expressed in such strong terms. Much has been written defining Amalek's sin, his unprecedented and all-encompassing hatred of the Jewish People. In truth, when we delve into the roots of his hatred, we see that it is not necessarily the Jewish People whom he hates, but it is Hashem with which Amalek contends. As foolish as it may seem, how could a mere mortal battle Hashem? Therefore, Amalek has refocused his hatred onto Hashem's nation: Klal Yisrael. Furthermore, as the Chafetz Chaim, zl, writes, Amalek is primarily a symbol denoting an individual or nation whose hatred for Hashem and His dictates is so intense that he seeks to eradicate His name, His laws, and His People completely. As Amalek's hatred does not rest, neither should ours. We must forever be vigilant against those who seek to undermine the Torah way of life, who throughout history have fought us every step of the way with their scheming machinations to destroy the Torah and its eternal message, to sever our bond with the Almighty.

The Ozrover Rebbe, zl, infers that the root of Amalek's evil is alluded to in the above pasuk. Throughout the generations, we have been plagued with the harangue that "times have changed," "tradition is something of the past," "it is time to get out of the ghetto." The well-known slogan, "Let Israel be a nation like all others," has been the battering ram used to break down the walls of tradition and belief that have protected us from the rest of society. For hundreds of years, there have been those who attempted to "cleanse" themselves of any constraints that might impede their acceptance into the gentile society. The Jewish community has been fraught with the confusion caused by those elements who have sought to destroy Judaism. It always boiled down to a "war" between the generations. The elders who have fought to preserve the hallowed traditions of our People, who have defended with all their might the religious principles of the Torah, who have stood firm against the onslaught of the "enlightened" youth who lash out mercilessly against anyone who even exhibits a vestige of Jewish life. Ritual is "outdated"; religion is not in vogue. Jewish ritual is no longer edifying; it does not provide spiritual fulfillment. The Torah is ancient and no longer acceptable in a progressive society.

This is the meaning of milchamah l'Hashem b'Amalek, Hashem maintains a war with Amalek - midor dor - (because he seeks to create a separation) "from generation to generation."

Hashem says to Moshe Rabbeinu, K'sov zos zikaron ba'Sefer. "Write this as a remembrance in the Book," v'sim b'aznei Yehoshua, "and recite it in the ears of Yehoshua." What is the meaning of the word zos, "this"? The Rebbe explains that the word zos, is b'gematria, numerically, 408. Likewise, the words dor dor, has the numerical equivalent of 408. Hashem was telling Moshe: "Write 'this' Torah," this immutable unalterable Torah, should be written in a Book, which is a reference to the Torah

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she'B'ksav, Written Law, and place it in the "ears" of Yehoshua, alluding to the Torah She'Baal Peh, Oral Law, which was transmitted from Moshe to Yehoshua, down through the generations: Both of these Toros - Written and Oral - are considered zos, the Holy Torah. This is the battle Hashem wages with the forces of Amalek, who attempts to establish a rift between the dor/dor, generations. This is a war that will regrettably go on until that glorious day that Eliyahu HaNavi will V'heishiv lev avos al banim, v'lev banim al avosam, "Return the heart of fathers to their sons and the heart of sons to their fathers." He will close the generation gap that Amalek has set into motion.

You shall not cause pain to any widow or orphan. (22:21)

The Torah focuses its prohibition against taking advantage of the weak and helpless specifically with reference to the widow, orphan and convert, because they are the most susceptible to such treatment. But, clearly this admonition applies to anyone who is weak. Now, let us ask ourselves a question: do we know who is really weak, and who puts on a show that he is strong and filled with self-confidence? Do we have a clue as to "who" stands before us? How often do we attempt to excuse our behavior towards another Jew by saying, "I did not know that he had a problem. I did not know that there are issues at home." Everybody who stands before us is a potential orphan or widow. This means that the loneliness and helplessness that is so much a part of the lives of the widow and orphan might very well also be their companion. They, too, suffer but do not necessarily show it. There is only one option: we must view everybody who stands before us as having a potential problem and deal with them accordingly.

We have no idea how the way we act might affect another person in need. Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, cites the following episode from the Mechilta. Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon, two of the greatest Tannaim, were being led to their execution. Rabbi Shimon turned to Rabbi Yishmael and said, "My heart troubles me, for I know not for what sin I am being killed." Rabbi Yishmael replied, "Did it ever occur that a person came to you to have a judgment rendered concerning a halachic question and you asked him to wait until you finished your drink, or tie your shoe? The Torah says that you are not to cause another person anguish - regardless of the intensity of the pain." When Rabbi Shimon heard this, he said, "You have comforted me."

What Chazal are telling us is that we never know how what we might consider a simple delay, could be a major infringement on someone else's emotions. We must think before we act - and then think again, because it is so easy to hurt someone whose emotions are already frayed.

You shall not cause pain to any widow or orphan. (22:21)

People think that capital punishment is meted out only to one who sins with any of the three cardinal sins of murder, adultery, or idol worship. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites a compelling incident from the Sefer Chasidim that teaches us otherwise. Indeed, if the person in question were alive today, we would probably speak of him in exalted terms and crown him with distinction. Nonetheless, he suffered a terrible and tragic punishment for his lack of empathy for a widow. The Sefer Chasidim relates a story about a man who tragically buried a number of his sons and those who survived did not have children to carry on their father's name. This individual was not a sinner; in fact, he was a Rosh

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Yeshivah who had over the years inspired many talmidim, students. Yet, prior to his death, the man confirmed that he had one sin that catalyzed all of these tragic occurrences. It seems that he had a younger sister who had been widowed and wanted to remarry. She was ashamed to articulate her feelings to her brother, who could have arranged a suitable match for her. The brother, who was presently speaking, said, "I could have helped her, but did not, because I wanted her property to revert to me."

One sin - a sin of omission - because he wanted to benefit from her possessions, was the cause of all this man's anguish. Certainly, one could find a rationale for justifying his non-action. She never asked for a husband! Should he be blamed for taking advantage of an awkward situation? Indeed, this was a man of distinction, a Torah scholar of reknown, who, quite possibly, wanted to use the money he would gain to sustain the students of his yeshivah. For this sin, his sons should die and he should never see grandchildren?

Apparently, Hashem views this incident from a different perspective. The Chida explains that this man was punished because his inaction caused this widow great pain. She could have had children but because of him, she was left childless. He caused a widow to suffer and that is something which Hashem does not overlook. How careful should we be in our inter-relationship with others - especially those who are helpless.

Distance yourself from a false word. (23:7)

There is no other transgression in the Torah whereby the Torah itself demands that we distance ourselves from it. Hashem is the essence of truth and He absolutely abhors falsehood. The Bais Halevi was well-known for his incredible integrity. Every word that left his mouth was the height of veracity. When he was rav in the city of Slutsk prior to accepting the rabbanus in Brisk, the beginnings of the Haskalah, Enlightenment, were taking root in the community. One day, a group of communal leaders came to him lamenting the fact that apostasy was beginning to seize the community. Heresy was rearing its ugly head and its tentacles were reaching into all areas of Jewish spectrum.

Rav Yoshe Ber looked at them with serious eyes and said, "What do you expect? Truth always wins out."

"What is the rav saying?" they asked incredulously. "How can the rav give credibility to kefirah, heresy?"

The rav looked them straight in the eyes and said, "I never said that they were correct. No! They are absolutely wrong in their beliefs, but they are sincere and truly believe in what they expound. Their heresy is founded in truth. They are true apostates! Therefore, they are successful. Regrettably, many of those among us are not really true yirei Shomayim, G-d-fearing. They are only acting outwardly as devout and pious Jews, but internally they do not really believe."

While most of us would never blatantly tell an untruth, at times we stretch the truth because we do not want to hurt someone. For instance, someone approaches us for a loan, which we suspect he is incapable of paying back. What do I do; tell him the truth? That will make him feel bad. Lend him the money; I will lose it. So, the natural response is to lie and say, "I do not have any extra money right now." The Sefer Chasidim categorically forbids such behavior, claiming that a lie is a lie and the heter, dispensation, of darkei shalom, maintaining peaceful co-existence with a non-Jew does not apply even

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here, before the fact. It is only after an incident has occurred and nothing can be rectified, that Chazal have allowed one to be meshaneh b'diburo, change his words a bit, in order not to make a gentile upset and thereby instigate strife.

Now we come to the one place that most people have a difficult time maintaining their integrity: Shidduchim, information with regard to a potential matrimonial match. No one wants to utter a word of lashon hora, slanderous speech, and to say the truth might awaken some skeletons that have been buried deep in the proverbial closet. Some will say nothing, which, in effect, conveys a negative connotation. Others will openly prevaricate, an action which will only cause grief later on. The truth is probably the best route one should take, since this way the individual has the opportunity to explain whatever extenuating circumstances prevailed in causing whatever problem may exist within the family, or the prospective mate.

In the event one cannot tell the truth, either because it is too slanderous, or he fears repercussions, he should say nothing, by avoiding the issue or getting onto another subject. The option of lying should not exist. Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, was wont to say, "One should not articulate with his mouth something that his heart cannot attest to its veracity. Horav Pinchas Koritzer, zl, said it differently, "When the sin of speaking an untruth will be as serious as the three cardinal sins of murder, adultery and idol-worship, Moshiach will come."

You shall worship Hashem, your G-d, and He shall bless your bread and your water, and I shall remove illness from your midst. (23:25)

Hashem is a personal G-d, Who can be reached directly, without having to go through intermediaries. In prayer, we speak directly to Hashem, a worship which results in our receipt of His blessings. The effect of Tefillah is even more compelling when prayed b'tzibbur, in a public forum of ten or more men. The Ma'or Va'shemesh derives the significance of Tefillah b'tzibbur from the above pasuk. He notes that the pasuk begins in the plural, va'avaditem, "and you shall worship", and ends with a blessing to the individual in the singular, lachmecha, meimecha, mikirbecha, "your bread, your water, your midst." Why the change? He explains that if one prays in a communal forum, the effect will be so powerful that the individual will be blessed with parnassah, a livelihood that is easy to come by, and good health. Alternatively, "your bread and your water" are a reference to spiritual achievements which will be gained only by he who prays to Hashem b'tzibbur.

The Ma'or Va'shemesh adds that one who prays b'tzibbur will have access to spiritual opportunities that are beyond the purview of the average person. Indeed, he interprets this into the meaning of the pasuk in Mishlei 14:28, B'rov am hadras melech, "A multitude of people is a kings glory." The word hadras, which is translated as glory/beauty can also be translated as being derived from hadar, as in hadarna bi, "I changed my mind," remorse, or a reversal of one's earlier decision or opinion. We thus praise Hashem, that He reverses His decision, so to speak, in favor of those who pray to Him, b'rov am, in a large communal forum.

The early commentators distinguish between Tefillah b'kavanah, prayer amid concentration and devotion, and Tefillah without kavanah. They compare the Tefillah without kavanah to a guf b'li neshamah, a body without a soul, which obviously has no sustaining life force. Likewise, without concentration, the prayer has no life to it. Individual prayer can easily fall into the category of Tefillah without kavanah, because one who prays alone is usually in a hurry, swallowing his words and

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certainly giving very little thought to them. The feeling of exaltation that one has upon praying with a large group, the enthusiasm, the excitement and fervor is overwhelming and inspiring. The words take on new meaning as one concentrates on their inner meaning, bringing one closer to Hashem.

The Ramban in his commentary to Shir HaShirim writes that one who prays b'tzibbur will have his prayer accepted by Hashem, even if he did not concentrate on every word. So great is the power of the tzibbur.

The significance of Tefillah b'tzibbur was recognized by the gedolei Yisrael throughout the millennia. Many stories are told of their overriding mesiras nefesh, devotion to the point of self-sacrifice, to be able to pray with a minyan. Rabbi Paysach Krohn in Reflections of the Maggid cites the Talmud in Berachos 47b that teaches us: "A person should always rise early (to go) to the synagogue, so that he should merit to be counted among the first ten." Chazal explain that the first ten to arrive receive a reward equivalent to all those who came afterwards. The Maharasha explains, that the Shechinah, Divine Presence, graces a place where people pray only after there is a minyan in attendance. Therefore, it is only the first ten who receive credit for "bringing" the Shechinah to their place of prayer. Those who come later certainly receive reward for praying in a place where the Shechinah's Presence is manifest, but it is the first ten who get the credit for availing them the opportunity. Chazal are telling us that the initial reward for those first ten is equal to what everyone else receives for praying in the presence of the Shechinah.

Rabbi Krohn tells an intriguing story that should inspire us. There was a young man who owned a furniture store in a small community. One morning he noticed smoke rising up between the slats of his parquet floor. He quickly ran to the basement to see what was wrong, and soon had his worst fears realized. A fierce fire was raging in the basement. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to extinguish the fire with a portable extinguisher. By the time he ran upstairs, the fire had already spread to the first floor. The furniture was all aflame. He ran to the phone to call the fire department and then returned to his store, to watch helplessly as it burned to the ground.

The fire department finally arrived, but, alas, all they could do was water down the adjacent store to make sure the fire did not spread. His business was gutted. It would be months before he could even dream of opening up again. A few days after the fire, this young man came to shul and remarked to a friend, "You know, a few days prior to the fire, a fellow came over to me and commented about my late arrival to Minyan. 'You come to shul everyday,' he said, 'but why do you always come so late? You are never there at the beginning of davening.'"

I replied to him, "What difference does it make when I come? The main thing is that in the end I am there!" 'Now I realize that the fire department also came - in the end - when my store had already been turned to rubble. It was too late. Hashem showed me that coming in the end is not good enough. It is no different than the fire department. It was too late.'"

While this may address those who are not there at the beginning of davening, there is another group that is equally disdainful - those who leave early. There are Kaddeishim which are recited at the end of davening for a reason. Apparently, they must be important since it is a point when the yasom, orphan, or one who is reciting Kaddish for the deceased, says Kaddish. There are those of us who feel that this portion of davening is not pertinent to us. We leave at will, or we justify our absence with some form of contrived need. Regrettably, those who must stay for that part of davening are those who say Kaddish. Let us not act in a manner that Heaven has reason for criticizing our behavior. The alternative to leaving at will is being compelled to staying for reasons beyond our control.

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Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will obey. (24:7)

Chazal teach us that when Hashem heard Klal Yisrael proclaim, "We will do and we will obey," He exclaimed, "Who revealed this secret to My children, the secret that the ministering angels use for themselves?" This is a reference to the fact that only angels have the same order of priorities; they obey Hashem's word without waiting for any explanation. Klal Yisrael's willingness to accept Hashem's command at face value, to be willing to act before they comprehended the command, elevated their status before the Almighty. What is the actual meaning of Naase v'nishmah, we will do and we will obey? Were they prepared to follow blindly and act without any clue as to what they were doing and why they were doing it?

The commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, explain this. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, explains that Klal Yisrael were saying, "We will do - and we will understand after we carry out the mitzvah what is the rationale behind the command. Indeed, we realize that unless one performs the mitzvah, he is missing a sensitivity to it. We can attempt to explain the beauty of Shabbos to someone, but until he experiences it, he will not truly comprehend its unique character. This applies to all mitzvos. One must live it in order to feel an appreciation and understanding of it.

Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him. (13:19)

Chazal emphasize Moshe Rabbeinu's great love for mitzvos in the Talmud Sotah 13a, "Come and see how beloved mitzvos were to Moshe." When all of Klal Yisrael were involved with gathering the Egyptian booty, Moshe occupied himself with the mitzvah of retrieving Yosef's coffin. He epitomized the pasuk in Mishlei 10:8, Chacham lev yikach mitzvos, "The wise of heart will seize mitzvos." The Mechilta adds, "Moshe's act of accessing Yosef's coffin demonstrated his wisdom and piety. When all of the Jews were busy with collecting the Egyptian spoils, Moshe was occupied with carrying out Yosef's bones." Why do both Midrashim place emphasis not only on Moshe's piety, but also on his wisdom? First of all, the people of Klal Yisrael were also involved in performing a mitzvah. Hashem instructed them to empty out Egypt. This was a command; even though it was enjoyable, it was a command no less. Moshe Rabbeinu was also involved in carrying out a command. Perhaps his command was not as geshmack, pleasant, as gathering the Egyptian wealth, but it does not indicate his great wisdom.

Although he evidenced great piety and devotion, his actions do not seem to exhibit wisdom. Furthermore, relinquishing great wealth in order to perform an act of chesed shel emes, true kindness, is an act of great piety, but one can hardly refer to it as wisdom. Indeed, one who is pious is not necessarily one who is "street-smart." The two do not necessarily accompany one another.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, gives us a practical answer and teaches us an important lesson in life and its priorities. Chazal teach us that at first, when the sea saw the Jewish People coming towards it pursued by the Egyptians, it did not want to split. Hashem instructed Moshe to lift up his hand. The sea still did not split until it saw the Arono shel Yosef, the coffin of Yosef. Then it split. While the commentators offer a number of possibilities to explain why the sea split in response to Yosef's coffin, one thing is clear: the coffin motivated the sea to split. If Moshe had occupied himself with the Egyptian booty in the same manner as his fellow coreligionists, then they would have spent all of their

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wealth at the bottom of the sea! It would not have split. It was Moshe's foresight, his act of piety, that represented incredibly practical wisdom. The coffin of Yosef catalyzed the splitting of the red sea. Was Moshe a tzaddik or a chacham? Moshe's practical wisdom, coupled with his piety, made the difference that day, but he was no less wise than he was pious.

Rav Pam suggests that this concept has significant practical application. Let us take a moment to focus on that wonderful, sought after vocation - Torah chinuch, Jewish education. While many people agree that those who devote their lives to Torah dissemination - to assuring that our heritage is transmitted to our children in its pristine, unadulterated form, in an environment of sanctity and morality - exemplify piety, are they chachamim?

Does a career choice in Jewish education indicate one's wisdom, or inability to do anything else? After all, one who is talented, whose incisive mind can plumb the depths of the intricacies of Talmud and Jewish law is certainly capable of rising to the apex of the fields of medicine, law or commerce. Therefore, an individual who abdicates the opportunity for a financially lucrative career to become an educator, is to be viewed as pious. Is such a choice, however, to be viewed from a practical sense as sound? Does such a decision indicate practical wisdom, when one takes into account the modest financial remuneration?

Rav Pam emphatically responds in the affirmative. While it is certainly true that a professional secular career will reap greater financial gain, should this be the only barometer for determining success? There is more to life than making money. There is sipuk hanefesh, self-satisfaction, knowing that one is molding and shaping the future of Klal Yisrael, realizing that his toil will be recognized for generations to come. A Torah educator spends his work day in an atmosphere that is wholesome, unsullied, ethical and moral, among highly idealistic people with lofty spiritual goals in life, a reality that cannot necessarily be asserted for any other profession. It goes without saying that the spiritual rewards for this endeavor far overshadow anything else that one may do.

I must add that this thesis in no way is meant to undermine the wonderful efforts of those who devote themselves to the service of humanity, such as the fields of medicine, sciences and social services. It is only to underscore the significance of the much-maligned field of Torah chinuch. A career in Torah chinuch is a career in the service of the Almighty. It is the ultimate implementation of practical wisdom and piety. It is not simply a career; it is a noble calling!

In way of a postscript, I must add that chinuch is not for everyone. Those that are not appropriate for it - or for whatever reason are unqualified - should stay away. They will do more harm than good. Not every ben Torah will make a suitable rebbe. However, many wonderful and talented bnei Torah shun the field due to reasons that are, at best, nonsensical. The loss to Klal Yisrael of this wonderful reservoir of talent is inestimable. Imagine, if our rebbeim would have felt this way, where would we be today?

Pharaoh will say of Bnei Yisrael, "They are locked in the land, the Wilderness has locked them in. (14:3)

The prefix "l" before Bnei Yisrael, l'Bnei Yisrael, usually means to Bnei Yisrael, which, of course, is not textually correct. Rashi, therefore, interprets the prefix to mean "al" about Bnei Yisrael. The Targum Yonasan, however, contends that Pharaoh did speak to two members of Bnei Yisrael, Dassan and Aviram, Moshe Rabbeinu's nemeses throughout his reign as leader. It was to them that

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Pharaoh commented about the Jewish People's seeming inability to escape the wilderness. This evokes a glaring question. We are aware that during the three days of the plague of darkness, all of those Jews who were evil - those who refused to leave Egypt and be liberated from its bondage and decadent culture - died. Why did not these two rogues also perish? Why were they allowed to continue to remain with the nation throughout the wilderness only to do nothing but undermine Moshe at every juncture, to disparage the Almighty and to sabotage every spiritual inspiration with their negativity and evil?

The Marahil Diskin, zl, explains that they had one great merit which protected them: they were shotrim, foremen, who oversaw the Jewish labor crews in Egypt. They were among those who saw to it that the workload was not overwhelming. When the quota was not met, they were the ones who were beaten by the Egyptian taskmasters. The beatings and consequent wounds caused their bodies to emit an offensive odor. No one can harm any Jewish person who suffers for another Jew and empathizes with his pain and anguish, not even - the Angel of Death or the Red Sea! In Hashem's eyes one who suffers for another Jew will merit the greatest reward, even if he himself is an intrinsically evil person.

In the hesped, eulogy, rendered by Horav Shmuel Auerbach, Shlita, for his father, Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl, he emphasized his father's overwhelming compassion and empathy for his fellow man. He related that his father would often recount an incident concerning the saintly Horav Baruch Frankel Teumim, zl, the Baruch Taam, whose son entered into a shidduch, matrimonial match, with the daughter of a well-known wealthy man. It happened that during that time the town's water-carrier became ill. The Baruch Taam was distraught over the man's illness. He could not eat. He prayed incessantly for him to return to good health. He was so overcome with concern for this man's welfare that he personally became visibly transformed. His mechutanim, parents of his future daughter-in-law, came to town for a visit and were taken aback by his changed appearance. The first thing that came to their mind was that he had regrets regarding the shidduch, match. The parents of the girl asked, "Perhaps the rav is unhappy with the shidduch and would like to retract?"

The family responded that this was not the case. The distress was the result of his concern for the water-carrier. When the girl's mother heard this, she approached the Baruch Taam and said, "I can understand that the rav is concerned about the water-carrier, but is this not a bit too much? It is hurting the rav's health."

When the Baruch Taam heard these words, he immediately nullified the shidduch saying, "If this woman has no compassion and does not empathize with another Jew's pain, then it is not a suitable family with which to make a shidduch."

Rav Shlomo Zalmen exemplified empathy for all Jews. He once heard that a young woman in the United States was widowed and left with six young orphans. Bereft of her husband, the woman was broken-hearted and left to fend for herself, to be mother and father to her children. Rav Shlomo Zalmen called her up, and after introducing himself, comforted her in her grief and then asked to speak to each of her children. Indeed, every Erev Yom Tov, he would call a number of widows and wish them Gut Yom Tov.

I recently read an incredible story about empathy for another Jew in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's book, Touched by a Story. Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, was the preeminent Torah leader of pre-World War II Europe. As rav of the prestigious city of Vilna, he had his hand on the pulse of European Jewry. His shiurim, lectures, which enthralled his students, were brilliant masterpieces which covered the breadth of the sea of Talmud and penetrated its depth. He would customarily walk home from the yeshivah accompanied by a throng of students, eager to hear his every word.

It was a bitter winter day, a blustery arctic wind exacerbated the already sub-zero temperatures.

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The old Rosh Hayeshivah was trudging along the streets of Vilna, accompanied by his students. A young man approached Rav Chaim Ozer and waited to ask a question. Rav Chaim Ozer turned to the young man, whom he did not recognize, and asked him, "How can I help you?"

The young man, not more than fifteen years old, answered with a terrible stutter that he sought a certain street. The young man's speech defect was magnified by nervousness in the presence of the rav. Although Rav Chaim Ozer was practically home already, he turned around and, together with his students, walked the young man to his destination.

Twenty-five minutes later, frozen with cold, Rav Chaim Ozer and his students turned around and began the trek home. The students could not figure out their rebbe. This was a man that never wasted a moment. His poor health and advanced age did not permit him to be out in the cold longer than was absolutely necessary. Yet, he walked the young man to his destination when he could have simply given him verbal directions. Why? The worst that would have happened is that the young man would have had to ask someone else along the way to confirm the directions.

Sensing his students' query, the Rosh Hayeshivah looked at them and said, "This boy clearly had a stuttering problem. He was obviously embarrassed by his impediment. If I had simply given him directions, he would have had to ask others along the way to confirm the directions to the obscure street. I did not want to cause a Jew further humiliation. Therefore, I walked him to his destination to spare him the discomfort. Is that so bad?" This is a paradigm of empathy for another Jew.

Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Rephidim. (17:8)

Rashi cites a fascinating Midrash that behooves each of us to stop and ask ourselves whether we are guilty of this oversight. Chazal tell us that the pasuk which deals with Amalek's attacking Klal Yisrael is juxtaposed upon the previous pasuk in which the Jews tested Hashem, asking, "Is Hashem in our midst?" Hashem responded, "I am always in your midst. I never leave your side. Yet, you ask such a question! I swear by your lives that as a lesson, the dog, Amalek, will come and bite you. Then you will cry out to Me and realize where I am."

Chazal compare this to a man who placed his son upon his shoulder and set forth on a journey. Whenever the boy would see an object that caught his fancy, he would ask his father for it, and the father would oblige. This happened a number of times. They later encountered a man, at which point the son asked the man, "Have you seen my father?" Hearing this, the father said to his son, "Do you not know where I am?" He immediately cast his son off his shoulders, and a dog came and bit him.

The analogy is very apropos to us. Hashem is there for us all of the time. Whenever we ask, He responds. The answer may not always appeal to us, but there is always a response. Do we thank Him when we are happy with the response, or do we just complain when things do not go our way? Regrettably, some of us wait until the dog bites us before we look up to acknowledge Hashem.

Moshe said to Yehoshua, "Choose men from us and go out, do battle with Amalek. (17:9)

Why was Yehoshua selected to lead Klal Yisrael into battle against Amalek? The Midrash explains that Moshe told Yehoshua, "Your grandfather [Yosef Hatzaddik] said, [to Potiphar's wife], 'I fear G-d,' (Bereishis 42:48), and concerning this one [Amalek] it is written (Devarim 25:18), 'And (he) did not fear G-d.'" Let the grandson of he who said he fears Hashem come and punish the one about whom it is said that he does not fear Hashem. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, derives a noteworthy lesson

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from Chazal. The agent that Hashem selects to bring about salvation must personally be undefiled and faultless of any taint of impropriety with regard to the sin which catalyzed the punishment. During every generation, Hashem has prepared a tzaddik, righteous Torah leader, through whom the salvation will be realized. He has the power to battle against the Amalek of every generation, because he is inculpable and free of any vestige of the sin that characterizes the enemy of Torah and the Jewish People. To triumph, one must know his enemy, recognize his shortcomings and understand who is best suited for vanquishing him.

Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand. (17:9)

Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl, explains that Amalek's objective in battling with Klal Yisrael was to undermine the concepts of mitzvah, command, and chovah, obligation. He sought to destroy the Jew's enthusiasm and passion to perform a mitzvah, transforming mitzvah and chovah into reshus, a discretionary endeavor. These three concepts are represented by the letters mem, ches, and raish, which spell machar. Moshe Rabbeinu was intimating to the people that machar he would stand on the top of the hill, meaning that he would address the incursion into the spiritual fabric of Klal Yisrael that Amalek was bent on destroying. He would save the machar and see to it that the people would maintain their obligatory allegiance to Hashem.

Pinchas was the antithesis of Amalek. The Torah tells us that he took a romach, spear - which also contains the letters raish, mem, and ches - and zealously defended Hashem's honor. He accomplished the opposite of Amalek by transforming the reshus, discretionary endeavor, into a mitzvah and the mitzvah into a chovah, obligation.

Let the people go out and pick each day's portion on its day, so that I can test them, whether they will follow My teaching or not. (16:4)

The daily gift of manna, Klal Yisrael's Heavenly food, was actually a lesson in Jewish spiritual survival. The Jewish People had witnessed incredible miracles leading up to, and including, the exodus from Egypt. Life is all one miracle: an important lesson that so many of us tend to ignore. Many of us go through life with the notion that we are in charge, we make decisions, and we carry out what we have determined is the correct course to follow. It is always "we" or "I". Whatever happened to Hashem? Why do we always impose upon Him a reason to remind us that He is there - always, constantly and in every aspect of our lives?

In the Talmud Sotah 48b, Chazal remark regarding the above pasuk: "Whoever has enough to eat today and says, 'What will I eat tomorrow?' has little faith." Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, submits that by limiting the manna to a daily allocation, Hashem showed Klal Yisrael that He was their Provider at all times. Furthermore, by providing a double portion for Shabbos, He demonstrated that Shabbos observance would never impede one's livelihood. We are taught that it was necessary for the generation that accepted the Torah to have first proven their faith and trust in Hashem through the vehicle of manna. Only a nation that has been taught to rely upon the kindness and consistency of Hashem could receive His Torah.

Faith is not a simple attribute to develop. Indeed, in our sophisticated society, faith is sorely deficient. In today's culture, some view the faithful Jew, the one whose fidelity to Hashem never wanes,

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as somewhat simpleminded. In the Torah world, however, the Torah scholar who has been endowed with a brilliant and erudite mind also possesses a soul that is committed unconditionally to Hashem. Many narratives portray the unequivocal faith of both the scholar, and simple, common Jew. I have selected two stories which demonstrate this commitment and also convey an important lesson to us.

There was a Rosh Yeshivah in Europe whose dedication to his students was legendary. The yeshivah regrettably had no money and was, consequently, often forced to miss providing meals. Yet, the students reciprocated with devotion to their rebbe. Often they went to bed satiated spiritually, but physically starved. One day the Rosh Yeshivah heard that in a neighboring community a wealthy philanthropist, who was very generous to yeshivos, lived. The Rosh Yeshivah decided that he had no alternative but to go to the philanthropist and appeal for his assistance. He bade farewell to his students and left for the train station. While he was waiting for the train, one of the town's outspoken skeptics appeared.

"Rebbe," he asked, "what brings you out of the yeshivah into the 'real' world?"

The Rosh Yeshivah ignored the derogatory stab and responded, ""I am going to the next town in an attempt to raise money for the yeshivah."

"Have you purchased your ticket?"

"No," replied the Rosh Yeshivah.

"What do you mean? You do not have a ticket? The train will arrive any minute, and you will be left here!"

"I have no money for a ticket but I am not concerned - Gut vet helfen"(G-d will help).

Hearing this, the skeptic shook his head, muttering under his breath, "These frum, observant, Jews are out of their minds." He decided to hang around the station to see what would occur. Would G-d really help the Rosh Yeshivah?

Five minutes later, the train whistle sounded and the train pulled into the station.

"Tickets, tickets," the conductor called out. "Have your tickets ready."

To the man's bewilderment, the Rosh Yeshivah proceeded to get into the line.

"Rabbi, are you out of your mind? How do you get into line without a ticket?"

"Do not worry," answered the Rosh Yeshivah. "G-t vet helfen."

The skeptic scratched his head in amazement. "I cannot figure out the rabbi. He has no money to buy a ticket. Yet, he gets into line to board the train." As he got closer to the train, he said, "Ok, Rabbi, I am going to give you the money for the trip now, but do not rely on me again. How could you be so naive as to think that G-d will help?"

Here we have a case of a believer and a non-believer. The believer had no doubt that he would get on the train. The non-believer was so obsessed with his heresy that he never realized that he was the medium through which Hashem helped the Rosh Yeshivah - to sustain his entire yeshivah. His bias prevented him from believing that "G-t vet helfen."

The second narrative demonstrates how deeply committed one can be in his belief and to what extent this faith will carry him. It is a story about two chassidim who visited their Rebbe annually on Succos. Each year, they would stop overnight at the same inn. One year, the innkeeper approached them humbly and said, "You know, I am neither a chasid nor a disciple of your Rebbe, but I have a

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great favor to ask of you. My wife and I have been married for ten years, and, unfortunately, we have not yet been blessed with a child. Please ask the Rebbe to pray for us." The chassidim agreed to do so.

The very next morning, the innkeeper's wife began parading around the neighborhood with an expensive baby carriage. When her friends came over to wish her mazel tov, she explained that while she did not yet have a child, she soon would, since the Rebbe was going to pray for her. Hearing this, the two chassidim were somewhat embarrassed, because they knew that prayers did not always produce the desired result. They said nothing and continued on with their journey, faithfully carrying out their mission when they arrived at the Rebbe's court.

When the two chassidim returned the following year to the inn, the baby's Bris, circumcision, was in progress. The innkeeper understandably was quite elated and thankful to have them, treating them as guests of honor. Later on, when they arrived at the Rebbe's home, one of the chasidim entered the Rebbe's office and complained, "Rebbe, you do not even know the innkeeper. Yet, you prayed for him - successfully. I have been your trusted disciple since I was a child. I visit you every year just as my father did before me. Yet, I am married for twenty years, and I have made the exact same request of you - and my wife has still not conceived. Rebbe, is it fair?" The Rebbe took his trusted chassid's hands and looked deeply into his eyes, asking, "During all those twenty years, did you ever go and buy a baby carriage? How great was your faith in comparison to that of the innkeeper's wife?"

Bitachon, trust in Hashem, has to be unequivocal. We either believe, or we do not. To believe when it is convenient, to trust when there is no other alternative, is not trust. It is self-serving and hypocritical. When we say we believe, when we express our trust, we have to be prepared to purchase that baby carriage.

The people contended with Moshe, and they said, "Give us water that we may drink!" Moshe said to them, "Why do you test Hashem?"...Moshe cried out to Hashem saying, "What shall I do for this people? A bit more, and they will stone me!" (17:2,4)

The Torah says that the People "tested" Hashem. Where is this written? We only find that they asked for water. What really is wrong with asking for water when one is thirsty? Is this not the purpose of prayer: to supplicate Hashem for our needs? Furthermore, we find nowhere that Moshe Rabbeinu prayed to Hashem on behalf of the Jews. We find him saying that he felt threatened by them. Why did he not entreat Hashem for water?

Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, explains this with a parable. A student once came to a yeshivah for an entrance bechinah, exam, to ascertain his knowledge and ability, so that the Rosh Yeshivah could determine to which shiur, level, he should be admitted. The Rosh Yeshivah asked him a number of questions, to which he received satisfactory responses. The Rosh Yeshivah said, "You have done well and will be placed in shiur bais. Now, I would like to ask you a few more questions that are more difficult." The student was able to master these, as well. "Excellent," exclaimed the Rosh Yeshivah. "You have been able to go up to shiur gimmel. However, I am not quite finished. I have a few more questions, even more penetrating than the previous ones." The Rosh Yeshivah asked a few more questions. Once again, he was extremely pleased with the student's responses. "I am very impressed with your ability," said the Rosh Yeshivah. "You have once again been able to elevate your position to a higher class. We are prepared to accept you into shiur daled. I would, however, like to ask you a few more questions that are extremely difficult. These will determine for me your ability to be placed in yet a higher class."

This was too much for the young student's patience. He lost it and told the Rosh Yeshivah, "Perhaps the Rosh Yeshivah should attempt to answer the next few questions."

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Hearing this, the Rosh Yeshivah said to the student, "Why did you lose your patience? Do you think that I am asking you these questions because I do not know the answers? Trust me, I know the answers. I am doing this for you, to see if we might be able to elevate you to yet a higher class."

This is a simple enough analogy, one which should enlighten us. Hashem tested Klal Yisrael for one purpose - so that they should demonstrate their spiritual ability. Could they be raised to a higher class? Klal Yisrael were acutely aware of Hashem's ability to provide for them. The lack of water at this juncture served one purpose: to see if they were able to achieve even greater spiritual status.

Regrettably, they lost patience and said, "Where is our water?" This is similar to the student who challenged the Rosh Yeshivah and demanded that he respond by answering the questions. They tested Hashem. They should have realized that Hashem truly has all the answers. He was testing them for their sake. We now understand why Moshe did not pray to Hashem on their behalf. He knew that Hashem had water available for the Jews. He was only testing their ability to withstand even greater and more difficult spiritual tests.

Moshe said to Yehoshua, "Choose people for us and go do battle with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill". (17:9)

In the Talmud Yoma 52b, Chazal say that the word machar, tomorrow, which is found in the above pasuk, can be interpreted as belonging to the previous phrase: "Choose people for us and go to do battle with Amalek tomorrow. Alternatively, it can refer to the second half of the pasuk: "Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill." We wonder what is the significance of the word, "tomorrow." What message regarding the war with Amalek is being taught to us via the word "tomorrow"? Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, explains that the concept of "tomorrow" plays a crucial role in Amalek's fight against Klal Yisrael. Amalek denotes evil. He represents the forces of evil within a human being - the yetzer hora, evil inclination, whose function it is to ensnare a person and lead him to sin. Outright incitement does not work. The yetzer hora has to use guile to convince a person that the sin is really not so bad; in fact, it might even be the right thing to do. It is very sinister in its methods to convince a person to renege against the Torah, to abrogate mitzvah observance and to perform outright transgressions.

In order for the yetzer hora to convince an observant Jew to act against the Torah, it must apply patience and discretion. One of its most potent tools is that of "tomorrow." It assures its victim, "Yes, of course, you should act appropriately. Very definitely, you must perform this mitzvah. Do not do it today, however; start tomorrow. Study Torah - tomorrow. Give tzedakah - tomorrow. Do whatever good you plan on doing, but do it tomorrow. Thus, the yetzer hora grabs hold of a person and leads him to neglect the mitzvos and eventually to become an all out baal aveirah, sinner.

This is the disease called Amaleikism that the Torah instructs us to expunge from our midst. When the opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself, one should not dawdle, but he should take immediate action and carry out his responsibility. One who slacks off in the area of positive mitzvah performance, will soon end up taking initiative in a sinful manner.

This, says Rav Yosef Chaim, is the idea behind Moshe Rabbeinu's "lifting his hands," an action that catalyzed Klal Yisrael's victory, as opposed to his lowering his hands, which gave strength to Amalek. Raising his hands symbolizes action, our way of defeating the yetzer hora and its personification in this world - Amalek. Allowing our hands to drop sustains the evil of Amalek, who

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takes his strength from our weakness.

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"What do you mean? You do not have a ticket? The train will arrive any minute, and you will be left here!"

"I have no money for a ticket but I am not concerned - Gut vet helfen"(G-d will help).

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Hearing this, the skeptic shook his head, muttering under his breath, "These frum, observant, Jews are out of their minds." He decided to hang around the station to see what would occur. Would G-d really help the Rosh Yeshivah?

Five minutes later, the train whistle sounded and the train pulled into the station.

"Tickets, tickets," the conductor called out. "Have your tickets ready."

To the man's bewilderment, the Rosh Yeshivah proceeded to get into the line.

"Rabbi, are you out of your mind? How do you get into line without a ticket?"

"Do not worry," answered the Rosh Yeshivah. "G-t vet helfen."

The skeptic scratched his head in amazement. "I cannot figure out the rabbi. He has no money to buy a ticket. Yet, he gets into line to board the train." As he got closer to the train, he said, "Ok, Rabbi, I am going to give you the money for the trip now, but do not rely on me again. How could you be so naive as to think that G-d will help?"

Here we have a case of a believer and a non-believer. The believer had no doubt that he would get on the train. The non-believer was so obsessed with his heresy that he never realized that he was the medium through which Hashem helped the Rosh Yeshivah - to sustain his entire yeshivah. His bias prevented him from believing that "G-t vet helfen."

The second narrative demonstrates how deeply committed one can be in his belief and to what extent this faith will carry him. It is a story about two chassidim who visited their Rebbe annually on Succos. Each year, they would stop overnight at the same inn. One year, the innkeeper approached them humbly and said, "You know, I am neither a chasid nor a disciple of your Rebbe, but I have a great favor to ask of you. My wife and I have been married for ten years, and, unfortunately, we have not yet been blessed with a child. Please ask the Rebbe to pray for us." The chassidim agreed to do so.

The very next morning, the innkeeper's wife began parading around the neighborhood with an expensive baby carriage. When her friends came over to wish her mazel tov, she explained that while she did not yet have a child, she soon would, since the Rebbe was going to pray for her. Hearing this, the two chassidim were somewhat embarrassed, because they knew that prayers did not always produce the desired result. They said nothing and continued on with their journey, faithfully carrying out their mission when they arrived at the Rebbe's court.

When the two chassidim returned the following year to the inn, the baby's Bris, circumcision, was in progress. The innkeeper understandably was quite elated and thankful to have them, treating them as guests of honor. Later on, when they arrived at the Rebbe's home, one of the chassidim entered the Rebbe's office and complained, "Rebbe, you do not even know the innkeeper. Yet, you prayed for him - successfully. I have been your trusted disciple since I was a child. I visit you every year just as my father did before me. Yet, I am married for twenty years, and I have made the exact same request of you - and my wife has still not conceived. Rebbe, is it fair?" The Rebbe took his trusted chassid's hands and looked deeply into his eyes, asking, "During all those twenty years, did you ever go and buy a baby carriage? How great was your faith in comparison to that of the innkeeper's wife?"

Bitachon, trust in Hashem, has to be unequivocal. We either believe, or we do not. To believe when it is convenient, to trust when there is no other alternative, is not trust. It is self-serving and hypocritical. When we say we believe, when we express our trust, we have to be prepared to purchase that baby carriage.

The people contended with Moshe, and they said, "Give us water that we may drink!" Moshe

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said to them, "Why do you test Hashem?"...Moshe cried out to Hashem saying, "What shall I do for this people? A bit more, and they will stone me!" (17:2,4)

The Torah says that the People "tested" Hashem. Where is this written? We only find that they asked for water. What really is wrong with asking for water when one is thirsty? Is this not the purpose of prayer: to supplicate Hashem for our needs? Furthermore, we find nowhere that Moshe Rabbeinu prayed to Hashem on behalf of the Jews. We find him saying that he felt threatened by them. Why did he not entreat Hashem for water?

Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, explains this with a parable. A student once came to a yeshivah for an entrance bechinah, exam, to ascertain his knowledge and ability, so that the Rosh Yeshivah could determine to which shiur, level, he should be admitted. The Rosh Yeshivah asked him a number of questions, to which he received satisfactory responses. The Rosh Yeshivah said, "You have done well and will be placed in shiur bais. Now, I would like to ask you a few more questions that are more difficult." The student was able to master these, as well. "Excellent," exclaimed the Rosh Yeshivah. "You have been able to go up to shiur gimmel. However, I am not quite finished. I have a few more questions, even more penetrating than the previous ones." The Rosh Yeshivah asked a few more questions. Once again, he was extremely pleased with the student's responses. "I am very impressed with your ability," said the Rosh Yeshivah. "You have once again been able to elevate your position to a higher class. We are prepared to accept you into shiur daled. I would, however, like to ask you a few more questions that are extremely difficult. These will determine for me your ability to be placed in yet a higher class."

This was too much for the young student's patience. He lost it and told the Rosh Yeshivah, "Perhaps the Rosh Yeshivah should attempt to answer the next few questions."

Hearing this, the Rosh Yeshivah said to the student, "Why did you lose your patience? Do you think that I am asking you these questions because I do not know the answers? Trust me, I know the answers. I am doing this for you, to see if we might be able to elevate you to yet a higher class."

This is a simple enough analogy, one which should enlighten us. Hashem tested Klal Yisrael for one purpose - so that they should demonstrate their spiritual ability. Could they be raised to a higher class? Klal Yisrael were acutely aware of Hashem's ability to provide for them. The lack of water at this juncture served one purpose: to see if they were able to achieve even greater spiritual status.

Regrettably, they lost patience and said, "Where is our water?" This is similar to the student who challenged the Rosh Yeshivah and demanded that he respond by answering the questions. They tested Hashem. They should have realized that Hashem truly has all the answers. He was testing them for their sake. We now understand why Moshe did not pray to Hashem on their behalf. He knew that Hashem had water available for the Jews. He was only testing their ability to withstand even greater and more difficult spiritual tests.

Moshe said to Yehoshua, "Choose people for us and go do battle with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill". (17:9)

In the Talmud Yoma 52b, Chazal say that the word machar, tomorrow, which is found in the above pasuk, can be interpreted as belonging to the previous phrase: "Choose people for us and go to do battle with Amalek tomorrow. Alternatively, it can refer to the second half of the pasuk: "Tomorrow

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I will stand on top of the hill." We wonder what is the significance of the word, "tomorrow." What message regarding the war with Amalek is being taught to us via the word "tomorrow"? Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, explains that the concept of "tomorrow" plays a crucial role in Amalek's fight against Klal Yisrael. Amalek denotes evil. He represents the forces of evil within a human being - the yetzer hora, evil inclination, whose function it is to ensnare a person and lead him to sin. Outright incitement does not work. The yetzer hora has to use guile to convince a person that the sin is really not so bad; in fact, it might even be the right thing to do. It is very sinister in its methods to convince a person to renege against the Torah, to abrogate mitzvah observance and to perform outright transgressions.

In order for the yetzer hora to convince an observant Jew to act against the Torah, it must apply patience and discretion. One of its most potent tools is that of "tomorrow." It assures its victim, "Yes, of course, you should act appropriately. Very definitely, you must perform this mitzvah. Do not do it today, however; start tomorrow. Study Torah - tomorrow. Give tzedakah - tomorrow. Do whatever good you plan on doing, but do it tomorrow. Thus, the yetzer hora grabs hold of a person and leads him to neglect the mitzvos and eventually to become an all out baal aveirah, sinner.

This is the disease called Amaleikism that the Torah instructs us to expunge from our midst. When the opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself, one should not dawdle, but he should take immediate action and carry out his responsibility. One who slacks off in the area of positive mitzvah performance, will soon end up taking initiative in a sinful manner.

This, says Rav Yosef Chaim, is the idea behind Moshe Rabbeinu's "lifting his hands," an action that catalyzed Klal Yisrael's victory, as opposed to his lowering his hands, which gave strength to Amalek. Raising his hands symbolizes action, our way of defeating the yetzer hora and its personification in this world - Amalek. Allowing our hands to drop sustains the evil of Amalek, who takes his strength from our weakness.

"It happened when Pharaoh sent out the People." (13:17)

The Midrash says that the word "beshalach," whose root is shaloch, to send, means more than just "sending away"; it means to accompany. In other words, Pharaoh accompanied the Jewish People out of Egypt. The Midrash continues by saying that Pharaoh received a reward for this accompaniment - we are admonished not to hate an Egyptian. Let us for a moment analyze this statement. Did Pharaoh want to send us out? Absolutely not! It was only after he had been smitten with ten plagues that he acquiesced to releasing us from bondage. Is this the kind of person we must not hate? Do we owe him so much after all he had done to us for 210 years? Moreover, he was not acting of his own free-will. He had no choice. So, why owe him anything?

Horav Elazar Menachem Man Schach, z.l., explains that regardless of Pharaoh's evil history and the fact that he was forced to send us out, he, nonetheless, escorted Klal Yisrael out of Egypt. For that act, he deserves a reward. Hashem does not ignore the slightest act of kindness to others. If we behave benevolently to others, we will be rewarded - regardless of our other negative traits and actions. Pharaoh was evil; yet, he acted humanely, this one time. He will be reimbursed. We should give this some thought. If Hashem seeks and does not ignore the slightest good manifested by a person, how much more so should we go out of our way to look for the good in all people. If we only look, we will certainly discover that every person has a redeeming value.

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"Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him." (13:19)

Before Yosef left this world, he asked his family to see to it that he would be reinterred in Eretz Yisrael after the Exodus. Chazal note that it was only Moshe Rabbeinu who took Yosef's remains. Klal Yisrael were occupied with another mitzvah, that of "relieving" the Egyptians of their valuables. Moshe, applying the sage advice of Shlomo Ha'melech in Mishlei 10:8, Chacham lev yikach mitzvos, "The wise of heart takes (the performance of) mitzvos" took Yosef's remains -both were mitzvos. But as Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, z.l., explained, a wise man knows which mitzvah to "take". While gathering money might be more glamorous than carrying a coffin, it is the underlying motive and ensuing reward that determine the mitzvah's spiritual plateau. Moshe, who was wise and discerning, understood with which mitzvah to occupy himself.

Moshe received a very special reward for personally caring for Yosef's remains. When Moshe passed away, Hashem Himself buried him. Moshe received the ultimate repayment. Veritably, no righteous act; no act of chesed, loving kindness; no act of compassion or philanthropy goes uncompensated. I recently came across a powerful story that conveys this message. The story takes place in Yerushalayim, outside a yeshivah gedolah where a group of yeshivah bachurim, students, were gathered during their bein ha'sedarim, break time. They stood talking; some in learning, others were discussing the current Israeli political scene; while yet others were just enjoying the invigorating air. Absorbed by conversation and friendly camaraderie, few paid attention to the unfolding scene on the street.

One sharp-eyed young man, however, noticed something approaching them, growing in the distance, as it came closer and closer. He stiffened and motioned to his friends, "Look at that!" he said, pointing at the object rapidly advancing towards them.

"How sad," murmured several of the bachurim, transfixed as they observed the scene and absorbed its implication. One lone Jewish hearse - unaccompanied by the usual mourners, no long procession, no entourage - just a single solitary hearse, was moving slowly down the street. The young men were riveted by this sad scene. It evoked a profound sense of poignancy within them. Imagine, a person so alone that no one attends his funeral. How could someone die alone without family, without friends or neighbors? Did not anyone care? Was it possible that the deceased was so detached from society that no one knew or cared if he or she lived or died? If this was true, it was a great tragedy. They must do something about it - now.

These young men had no idea what the word loneliness meant. Most came from large families, had a multitude of friends and acquaintances, and had gregarious personalities. The word "alone" was not in their lexicon.

Indeed, it is a word that should not be in the Jewish lexicon. The experience of the Jewish community is one of unity, solidarity, friendship and support. This stark demonstration of the lonely life was too much for them to accept.

"This is just heartbreaking," said one. "It is a terrible tragedy," said another. "We must do something about it," said a third. The fourth bachur had the most practical idea, "Let us follow the hearse and be its entourage. We will participate in the funeral and burial. That is the right thing to do." The fifth student made a bolder suggestion, "Let us call the rest of the students. It is bein ha'sedarim. We will all attend the funeral." And off they went.

Shortly thereafter, the hearse was accompanied by an impressive column of hundreds of

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yeshivah students, who followed it slowly and solemnly to the cemetery. It was only when the hearse came to rest at an open gravesite and a lone rabbi emerged from the hearse that they discovered the identity of the deceased.

"This is so appropriate!" exclaimed the rabbi when he learned who they were and which yeshivah they attended. "How did you learn about her death? She was a total recluse, living like a hermit for the last fifty years. She would have nothing to do with people, rebuffing everyone's efforts to reach out to her. I am shocked that anyone knew that she died."

The bachurim looked at the rabbi and said, "Really, we have no idea who the deceased is. We never knew her, nor is she connected to any of us in any way."

"If you do not know whose funeral you are attending, then why are you here?" the rabbi asked incredulously.

"Well, it is a long story," and they began to explain how one thing led to another and before they knew it, the entire yeshivah was involved in the special mitzvah of halvoyas ha'mes, accompanying and seeing to the needs of the deceased.

The rabbi listened to the story and began to cry. After a while, he calmed himself and explained his behavior. "My dear bachurim," he said softly, "Your presence here today, escorting this lonely woman to her final resting place, is Divinely ordained. Let me tell you a story. Seventy years ago, a wealthy Jewish businessman donated an expensive piece of real estate to the Jewish community for the explicit purpose of building a yeshivah - your yeshivah.

"But, that was not all that he contributed. Beyond the initial donation of the land and the building, during his lifetime he made every effort to support the fledgling yeshivah with large sums of money, nurturing it and helping it flourish into one of the premier institutions of Torah.

"As he aged, on several occasions, the yeshivah tried to show its gratitude and bestow honor on him. But his exceptional humility and private nature did not allow for it.

"He had an only child - a daughter, who was the apple of his eye, the pride and joy of his life. When the rabbis would approach him wondering what they could do for him, how to repay his magnanimity, he would respond, 'Thank G-d, I am a wealthy and happy man. I really need nothing. But, maybe one day you can be of service to my beloved daughter. Maybe one day she will be in need of your help.' The rabbis, of course, gave their solemn word that they would never forsake his daughter.

"After a long and productive life, the philanthropist left this world. His daughter, sad to say, became distanced from the religion of her youth and abandoned it. She slowly severed her relationship with the Jewish community altogether. As time went on, her mind began to show signs of serious psychological trauma. She was in and out of psychiatric institutions for the rest of her life.

"The rabbis who remembered their promise to her father tried desperately to keep in touch with her, following her from one incident to another, from one home to the next. They offered her support and encouragement. She rebuffed their overtures and continued to live like an eccentric hermit. No one lives forever, and the original rabbis who had founded the school passed on. With their death, the pledge made to the woman's father was forgotten. The daughter was neglected and lived out her remaining days in depression and seclusion.

"My dear bachurim, it is to this woman's funeral that you "coincidentally" come today; she is the daughter of the major benefactor of your yeshivah. With your presence here today, you have fulfilled your Rosh Ha'Yeshivah's pledge many years ago - never to neglect the benefactor's daughter.

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You have repaid his largesse by performing this final act of chesed."

Another aspect makes this incident even more startling. The bachurim later learned that the hearse was not supposed to travel on the small, obscure street where the yeshivah is located. The driver for "some reason" became lost and drove down the wrong street. This is but one more episode in the unfolding saga of Divine Providence, of how Hashem repays everyone for their good deeds.

"For G-d said, 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt'... Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him." (13:17,19)

Two questions that confront the commentators are: Why does the Torah record the fact that Moshe took Yosef's remains from Egypt, at this point, when they are nearing the Yam Suf? Why is it not mentioned previously in Parashas Bo, which details the exodus from Egypt? Secondly, why did Yosef have to enjoin his descendants to see to it that his remains are taken from Egypt? Was he any different than his brothers whose remains were also carried out - without any special request?

Horav Yosef Konvitz, z.l., responds to these questions with a homiletic rendering of the text. He explains that when Moshe observed that Hashem was leading Klal Yisrael in a roundabout path he was concerned. Why waste time with a circuitous route - go by the straightest and shortest route. After much thought and reflection, Moshe came to the realization that Hashem knew that Klal Yisrael might not yet be ready to break their ties with the past. Moshe confronted the fact that despite all the miracles and wonders, the nascent Jewish nation was spiritually weak. They were insecure and, at the first sign of trouble, would quickly make an about-face and return to Egypt. He wondered, was it really worth leading these people? Would they listen to him when they were challenged with tribulations?

Moshe's love for his brethren overcame any fear he had concerning their shortcomings. He decided that he would stand by them regardless of the vicissitudes that would challenge them. To buttress his decision he looked to Yosef, the leader who preceded him, for guidance. Yosef made his descendants swear that they would take his remains from Egypt. Why? Could he not just as well have simply asked them? Why make them swear? After all Yosef had done for his family, was there any question in his mind concerning their gratitude? Did he think that they might turn their back on the hand that nourished them?

Moshe plumbed the depths of Yosef's actions until he determined a cause for his concern. Yosef thought that after years of exile, suffering and deprivation the Jewish People would become so disheartened that they would forget Yosef the benefactor and, instead, view him as the cause of all their problems. Notwithstanding his beneficence, Yosef was the one who initially brought Yaakov and his family down to Egypt. They would forget that it was all part of a Divine plan. They would need a scapegoat and Yosef would be the most convenient choice. Out of vengeance for catalyzing their predicament in Egypt, they would not take his remains with them to Eretz Yisrael. Consequently, Yosef made them promise that they would take his remains when they left Egypt.

The oath Yosef extracted from Klal Yisrael indicated to Moshe that these people had a history of disrespect for their leadership. They were prepared to blame their leaders for whatever problems they faced. Yet, Moshe observed that Klal Yisrael's objectionable attitude did not deter Yosef from being their benefactor and leader. He did what had to be done on their behalf, regardless of their ingratitude. Moshe decided to follow in Yosef's footsteps. He accepted the mantle of leadership over the Jewish People despite their shortcomings. How fortunate are we that he did.

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"So that they will see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness when I took you out of Egypt." (16:32)

The Meshech Chochmah has a fascinating insight into the parshas ha'manna. One might think that in order to merit the Heavenly bread, the miraculous manna, one must be on high spiritual plateau. We assume that Divine assistance is not doled out to the average Jew, that one must be a sage, a scholar, a devout and pious Jew to be worthy of such a gift. Rav Meir Simcha says this is not true. The only prerequisite necessary to merit this Heavenly gift is desire - desire to climb the ladder of Torah, to plumb its depths and delve into its profundities. One can be an am ha'aretz, ignorant of even the basics, but, if he seriously wants to study, he will be Divinely assisted.

This statement is substantiated conclusively from Klal Yisrael themselves. The manna began to appear, according to Rashi, on the fifteenth day of Iyar. There are other commentators who disagree and opine that it fell a day later. In any event, at that point Klal Yisrael had only been enjoined to observe just a few mitzvos, such as Shabbos, Para Adumah, the Red Heifer, and dinnim, monetary laws. They did not receive the remainder of the mitzvos until some three weeks later, when they stood at Har Sinai. Accordingly, as far as mitzvos were concerned, Klal Yisrael was basically ignorant. They knew nothing, because as of yet, the mitzvos had not been given to them. Nevertheless, they still merited to eat the manna. This indicated that Divine assistance is determined by the desire one has for ascending the spiritual ladder of Torah and avodah, service to the Almighty. Klal Yisrael uttered two words which were, and will always be, the catchwords of our belief, the hallmark of our conviction - "Naaseh v'Nishma," "We will do and we will listen." Our desire and determination to "do" made us worthy of receiving Divine assistance in the guise of manna.

Horav Avraham Pam, z.l., says that this can be an excellent source of inspiration and encouragement for the struggling ben Torah or yeshivah student, who is having a difficult time "making it" in the Torah world. One does not have to be a gadol b'Yisrael, Torah leader, to receive manna. One must have the will, the burning desire to study, to excel and grow in Torah, and he, too, will be included among those who are sustained by manna. Regrettably, there is a misconception "out there" that only those who are serious talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars, should be deserving of stipends and other forms of financial assistance. The one who is spending his days and nights engrossed in Torah study, but just does not have the acumen or in some circumstances the pedigree, is relegated to a distant second place. We must remember that if Klal Yisrael was worthy of receiving the manna when they were still in their spiritual infancy, then we should give assistance to all those who study Torah in earnest and with conviction.

Hashem said to Moshe, "Why do you cry out to Me?" (14:15)

More than once in his lifetime, a man becomes involved in a situation from which he has no escape. He is up against the wall. Anxiety, fear and trepidation set in. What does he do? To whom does he turn? Horav David Bliacher, zl, one of the preeminent disciples of the Alter m'Novardok, cites this above pasuk in his response to the problems that so many of us face during the course of a lifetime. Klal Yisrael was up against the proverbial wall. In front of them, they face the Red Sea; behind them were the cruel Egyptians, intent on "recovering" their slaves. Their alternatives were truly bleak. They

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cried out in fear. Hashem criticized Moshe Rabbeinu for the fact that Klal Yisrael cried out to Him. Why? What else should they have done? Horav Bliacher gives an insightful response. Undoubtedly, Klal Yisrael had no other alternative but to turn to the Almighty and supplicate Him with emotion-filled prayer to save them. Had the time for this arrived? They were not yet at the shore. The water was not yet enveloping them. Hashem was saying to Moshe: Why are they crying-now? The situation is not yet hopeless. They still have a few more steps before they arrive at the water. Then they should cry-not before. With this idea in mind, we can understand a difficulty in the parsha of Shemittah. The Torah states in Vayikra 25:20 that the people will ask "Mah no'chal?" "What will we eat?" Chazal consider this to be an admission of a lack of faith on their part. They should have trusted in Hashem to provide for them. When should they have asked this question? Obviously, not during the seventh year, since Hashem has assured us that there will be an increase of grain output during the sixth year that will suffice for the seventh year. We must, therefore, say that the question is to be asked during the beginning of the seven-year cycle, in the first or second year. The critique of the question is that they were bothered by what might or might not happen in the future. One should not worry prematurely. There will be enough time to worry about the lack of food when the seventh year arrives..

The lesson is clear and simple. Even during a period of concern some time remains, an avenue of relief and cure is available, Do not despair as long as there is an opportunity for salvation. Hashem has His own timetable for granting us deliverance from misfortune. It does not necessarily coincide with our own.

The water came back and covered the chariots and the horsemen.....there remained not a one of them. (14:28)

The Daas Zekeinim derives from the words "ad echad", "not a one", that one person did survive, namely Pharaoh. Yalkut Shimoni says that Pharaoh repented at the last minute. His teshuvah was accepted, and he eventually became the king of Ninveh. The Alshich Hakadosh writes that Pharaoh was enveloped in a large wave, and as he was about to succumb, he uttered the words "Mi chamocha ba'elim Hashem", "Who is like You, among the Heavenly powers?" He was so weak that the sound was barely heard. Consequently, the "chaf" of "kamocha" is "weak" written without the "dagesh," dot in the consonant, and pronounced, chamocha, instead of kamocha.

We must endeavor to understand this. Pharaoh was the symbol of apostacy and defiance. He held himself to be a god. Nothing could affect him. Indeed, he repented at the very last minute right before he was to follow his soldiers into oblivion. Yet, not only did Hashem accept his teshuvah but, He granted him another royal position as monarch of Ninveh. Is this the way teshuvah is performed and accepted? Is a teshuvah that is offered as a result of fear of death an acceptable form of teshuvah? Apparently, it is. Why?

In the ethical discourses of Yeshivas Bais Shalom Mordechai, it is explained that to concede guilt, to confess a wrong, takes extraordinary courage and strength, for which one is rewarded. Regardless of the timing or the reason, it takes a special person to perform teshuvah. Many have gone to their deaths knowing the error of their ways, refusing to acknowledge their sins. The Navi in Melachim 1 16:34 details how Chiel of the House of Eili built Yericho in defiance of Hashem. He was punished by witnessing all of his sons die during a short period of time. When he made the foundation, he buried his eldest. When he hung the doors, his final act of obstinacy, he buried his youngest. There can be no greater message to convey the verity that Hashem is G-d, and we must listen to Him. Pharaoh

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was impressed with the truth; Chiel apparently was not. The sons of Korach, as they were being swallowed into the ground, repented. Their teshuvah, albeit long overdue, was accepted. To concede that one has traveled through life on the wrong road is a difficult idea to accept. To change an entire life's "weltanschauung," to recast one's beliefs, takes herculean efforts on the part of a person. Many have failed the test. The ones that have triumphed are, according to Chazal, on a higher spiritual plane than tzaddikim gemurim, those who are wholly righteous.

This is my G-d, and I will beautify Him; the G-d of my father, and I will exalt him. (15:2)

Rashi explains that a person's spiritual position is his legacy, transmitted to him from his ancestors: "I am not the genesis of my holiness. Rather, it is bequeathed to me from my forefathers in whom it was firmly entrenched." Rashi's explanation does not seem to coincide with the text. If our spiritual stature has its roots in our forebears, it should have first stated, "the G-d of my father," and then, "my G-d".

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains that avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty, demands both of these perspectives. To serve Hashem, one must serve as an individual, using his own unique abilities. Only by doing so can he attain true spiritual growth. Yet, we are also blessed with a mesorah, tradition/heritage. We are part of a mesorah, handed down throughout the generations. We may not deviate one iota from this chain of transmission.

From a tangential perspective, it seems that these two vehicles for serving Hashem are conflicting. This is, however, not the case. Mesorah is an intrinsic component in avodas Hashem. It is one of the most basic and vital foundations of our faith. Yet, one who does not incorporate his own abilities within the parameters of mesorah cannot achieve growth. In other words, our avodas Hashem must consist of a synthesis of individualism and mesorah. One must sense that he is serving "my G-d," employing his own uniqueness, his own kochos ha'nefesh, abilities and expertise, in serving Hashem. At the same time, he must remain acutely aware that G-d is "the G-d of our forefathers". His individuality must coincide with the ways of his forebears. We travel on our own road, each individual in accordance with his own path of spiritual ascendancy. We must be extremely vigilant that we are expressing our own individuality and that we do not become carried away forgetting about the G-d of our forefathers. Hashem is "my G-d," and I will serve Him to the best of my abilities. Yet, I must remember that He is the "G-d of my forefathers," and I must continue to serve Him in the manner conveyed to me by my forebears.

Hashem shall reign for all eternity. (15:18)

In the Aleinu prayer, which we recite thrice daily, we implore Hashem "that You may reign over them soon and eternally." The Meshech Chochmah explains the concept of "soon" in regard to Hashem's reign over the world. A person carries out his mind's commands in a form of electrical impulse. The brain decides to act. It sends a message via the heart to the specific organs or limbs involved, and the person acts. This is not the case in the event that the mind sends a command that is contrary to the well-being of the organ. It will not respond immediately. Indeed, it will conjure up every reason for not accepting the command. We ask Hashem that His command should receive an immediate

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response from us. Nothing should stand in our way to serve Him.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, supplements this further. He compares this to an individual who is walking in the street and notices a bag with thousands of dollars in it. He will not need to be prodded or encouraged to stick out his hand to lift this bag. On the other hand, if he is about to take a blood test, his arm will not extend as readily as if it was reaching out to the money. We pray to Hashem that our limbs and organs should respond to His command instantaneously without any hesitation whatsoever. Our limbs and organs should stand in readiness, pre-disposed to carry out Hashem's mitzvos and maasim tovim, good deeds.

One whose limbs and organs are totally devoted to Hashem immediately reacts to sanctify Hashem's Name when the opportunity arises. The following story concerning a baal teshuvah, one who returned to observance, demonstrates this idea. An individual was once asked what catalyzed his return. Was it an incident or an individual? At first, he refused to reveal his "secret." After a while, he shared an incredible story with his friends. One morning, as he was driving to work he had the terrible misfortune of seeing a young, observant Jewish child run in front of his car. It was a serious accident, and the child sustained a grave injury. He was not held responsible for the accident since he had been traveling at the appropriate speed. The child, unfortunately, ran out in front of his car. Yet, the verdict of innocence did not remove the crushing feeling of guilt that continued to haunt him.

The depression that resulted from his part in the accident was overwhelming. He could not eat or sleep. He walked around in total despair. One day, he conjured up the courage to go to the hospital and visit the child and his family. Perhaps, this would serve as some form of penance to give him some peace of mind. He went to the hospital, knocked on the door of the boy's room, and was greeted by the little boy's mother. After exchanging the usual pleasantries, he blurted out to the mother, "what can I do to atone for my sin?" The mother looked at him. Without skipping a beat, she said, "Accept upon yourself to become a shomer Shabbos!" He was shocked. Here, he thought that the mother would give him a bill for the medical expenses and cost of aftercare. No, she was concerned with one thing: his Shabbos observance. She cared only that another Jew was not yet observant. It was as if she was "programmed" that she should seize any opportunity to bring a Jew closer to observance.

This woman exemplifies the concept of "v'simloch aleihem meheirah", "that You may reign over them soon." She accepted every chance to sanctify Hashem's Name. There is a postscript to the story. The driver became observant and married a young woman from an observant home. The guests of honor at the wedding were the young boy, who had recuperated from his injuries, and his parents, who had succeeded in changing the life of a Yiddishe neshamah.

He said, If you will listen diligently to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, and you will do what is just in His eyes, and you will give ear to His commandments and observe all His statutes, then any of the diseases that I have placed upon Egypt, I will not place upon you. (15:27)

Life on this world, albeit temporal, grants one incredible opportunity to achieve immense spiritual reward. Chazal teach us that this world is only a vestibule, a passageway to the real world. If we only begin to realize the tremendous opportunity we have for spiritual accomplishment, we would never waste a moment's time. Indeed, a simple act of kindness, a moment of spiritual endeavor performed here during one's lifetime, can never be recaptured after one is gone. All Hashem asks of us is to do, to act, to perform. He will remunerate us beyond our wildest dreams when the appropriate time

arrives.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates a story that occurred which should sensitize us to the power of a mitzvah and its effect. The story is about a mashgiach, kosher supervisor, at a large meat plant in Eretz Yisrael. Everyday he organized a minyan at the factory to daven Minchah. It happened one day that he was missing a "tzenter," tenth man, to complete the required quorum. He went outside looking for a Jew to complete the minyan. After a short while, he met a farmer dressed in short pants and tee-shirt who gave the appearance of being a simple, unschooled Jew. He asked the farmer to join them for a minyan for Minchah. The Jew had no idea what the mashgiach was talking about. After a few moments, however, he succeeded in convincing the farmer of the importance of tefillah b'tzibur, praying with a minyan, and the importance of saying Kaddish in memory of the departed. He emphasized that today he was saying Kaddish in memory of his father, whose yartzheit it was.

The farmer joined the minyan until a few moments later, when another Jew entered, thereby enabling the farmer to leave. The farmer did not remain long enough to daven with the minyan. Ten years passed; the mashgiach had assumed a new position elsewhere and moved to Bnei Brak. One night, as the mashgiach was sleeping, he had a dream. In the dream, the farmer who had completed the minyan appeared to him with a shining countenance. He explained that he had been called from this world during the previous month. He said that the reward that he received for joining the minyan that one time was overwhelming. Furthermore, in recompense for the mitzvah that he performed, he was granted the opportunity to appear to the mashgiach and ask for a favor. It seems that he had a totally non-observant son who lived in Yerushalayim. Could the mashgiach please go to his son's home and implore him to say Kaddish for his late father. The mashgiach took note of the address and went the next day to locate the son. After some persuasion, the son acquiesced to say Kaddish. All of this occurred because a Jew who was himself not observant was willing to be the tenth man in a minyan, so that another Jew could say Kaddish on his father's yartzheit. Can we even begin to imagine the awesome reward awaiting for he who performs mitzvos all of the time?

The Bnei Yisrael were armed when they went up from the land of Egypt. (13:18) The simple translation of "chamushim" is armed. Klal Yisrael were prepared for the possibility of attack. Targum Yonasan ben Uziel says the root of chamushim is chamesh, five. Consequently, he asserts that each family went out with five children. Targum Yerushalmi suggests that chamushim means armed, but this is not a reference to war. Rather, it alludes to being armed with mitzvos. Klal Yisrael feared no enemy. They had the ultimate protection - mitzvos. Lastly, Rashi cites Chazal who maintain that chamushim is derived from the word "chamesh," five, meaning that only one-fifth of Klal Yisrael left Egypt. The other four-fifths were Jews who were enamored with Egyptian culture, who had regrettably acculturated. For some reason, they thought that they would eventually be accepted as Egyptians. They did not want to leave. They all perished, however, during the three days of makas choshech, the plague of darkness.

Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, zl, suggests that all three expositions complement one another. He questions Targum Yonasan who contends that each family left with five children. Is it possible that each family had only five children? No source supports this idea. Furthermore, how is it that previously they had had no mitzvos? They had been considered naked/bereft of zechusim, merits, that would warrant and support their redemption. Indeed, Hashem "gave" them the mitzvos of Korban Pesach and Bris Milah, so that they would have something "to show" for themselves. Yet, the Targum relates that they left Egypt armed with merits. What were these newly discovered merits?

The Torah is, therefore, suggesting that while four-fifths of the Jews died, their children remained alive and well - orphans with nowhere to go, no one to care for them. We may conjecture that

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since everyone left Egypt, it must have been the remaining one-fifth, the righteous Jews who were left, that cared for these orphans. Targum Yonasan means that each of the surviving families who left Egypt cared for four families of orphans. In other words, each family had five families of children: its own, and four families of orphans. The Torah lauds these virtuous Jews for their magnanimous support of the many orphans. They cared for them, took them into a wilderness, even though they knew not from where the food for their own children would come. These are the good deeds, the wonderful merits, to which the Targum Yerushalmi refers.

We still must understand why the Torah chooses this juncture to tell us that these good deeds helped to catalyze Klal Yisrael's release from Egypt. Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, explains that specifically at this point -- when Klal Yisrael stood at the threshold of the wilderness, a place infested with dangerous creatures, with no food or water, surrounded by menacing nations bent on destroying them -- they needed special zechusim, merits. They had to rely solely upon their Father in Heaven, the Almighty Who protects them from danger. Hashem Yisborach, the Avi Yesomim, Father of Orphans, looked at Klal Yisrael, at a People who had opened their hearts and homes to thousands of orphans. They had committed to caring for Hashem's yesomim; He would, in turn, care for them. There is no greater zechus than that of caring for someone who has been left bereft of his parents.

There is an incredible story that demonstrates this idea: The Yid Ha'Kodesh of Peshischa was once studying an intricate passage in the Talmud with his students. One of the students asked a profound question that literally stumped everyone - including the Rebbe. He became so totally engrossed in the subject that he lost perception of where he was. One of his metzuyanim, prized students, was an orphan who had lost his father. Food was a problem for most people in those days, and it certainly was an issue for a family who did not have a father to supply material support. This student was starved, not having eaten all day. Suspecting that the Rebbe would be involved in deep thought for some time, he decided that he would quickly run home to grab something to eat, so that he could better concentrate on his studies.

He ran home, ate quickly, and was almost out the door when his mother called him to give her a hand for a moment. If he could only climb up to the attic to bring down a sack of straw. Surprisingly, the young man turned to his mother and said, "I am late for shiur, I am afraid the Rebbe is ready to explain the answer. I cannot afford to be late." Recognizing her son's concern, the mother sighed and said to herself, "Fine, my son, go back to your learning. I really should not have asked your help. But what can I do? I am a widow who has no one at home but you."

The student ran back to the shiur. Suddenly it dawned on him that he had been neglectful of derech ertz, respect, for his mother. Learning Torah is all-important, but it is also all encompassing. What benefit was his Torah learning if it did not bring to action? He quickly ran back home and apologized to his mother. After he brought down the sack of straw, he left. His mother called out to him, "I hope you did not miss your shiur."

As he walked through the door of his Rebbe's home, the Rebbe picked up his head and smiled at him, "What great mitzvah did you perform that you are worthy of such a dignified escort? Do you know who accompanied you here?" The young man, not knowing to what the Rebbe was referring, just stood there, shamefaced, wondering what it was that the Rebbe saw that he could not. The Rebbe continued speaking, "When you entered the room I noticed the great amora Abaye escorting you. He enlightened me by clarifying the Talmudic passage that had us stumped. Tell me, what is it that you did that made you worthy of such a distinguished escort?"

Apparently ashamed, the young man related to the Rebbe all that had occurred, how he had left

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shiu, refused to help his mother, and ultimately had returned because of his responsibility as a son. Hearing this, the holy Rebbe patted his student on the shoulder as he explained the following: "Abaye was an orphan from both his father and his mother. His tragic circumstance led to his being named Abaye, which is an abbreviation of asher b'cha yerucham yasom, for it is with You (Hashem) that an orphan finds pity (Hoshea 14:4). Abaye never had the opportunity to honor his parents. The beautiful mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Eim was taken from him. Since he died, his spirit pays tribute to those who go out of their way to fulfill the mitzvah that eluded him during his lifetime. It was Abaye who clarified the Talmudic passage to me." How much more meaning does this story give to the mitzvah of honoring our parents!

Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him. (13:19)

Chazal note that only Moshe Rabbeinu took the responsibility for Yosef's remains. The rest of Klal Yisrael was occupied in "fulfilling" the injunction to relieve the Egyptians of their valuables. In doing so, Moshe exemplified Shlomo Ha'melech's dictum, "Chacham lev yikach mitzvos," "The wise of heart takes mitzvos." (Mishlei 10:8) In other words, a wise person devotes himself to the performance of mitzvos. Although requesting the Egyptian valuables was also a mitzvah, a wise man is able to distinguish between mitzvos. To paraphrase Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, "A wise person knows which mitzvah to take." While engaging in transporting Yosef's remains may not have manifest the same material advantage as collecting the Egyptian valuables, its spiritual benefit certainly was greater.

Nachlas Tzvi notes that if all of Klal Yisrael was occupied in executing a single mitzvah, then Yosef became a "meis mitzvah," a corpse who had no one to care for him. Attending to this corpse's burial had the highest priority. Indeed, the care of a meis mitzvah precedes the mitzvah of Talmud Torah. He cites a powerful story which demonstrates the reward for one who is oseik, occupies himself, in the burial of a meis mitzvah.

A Jewish businessman was once returning to Brooklyn, New York, from a business trip to Albany. Having been delayed, he left at nightfall for what should have been a routine trip. In addition to already being fatigued, he drove into a torrential downpour that delayed him even more. Realizing that it was probably too dangerous for him to continue his trip to Brooklyn, he began looking for a motel to spend the night.

At the next tollbooth, he questioned the attendant for directions to the nearest motel. He was told that the closest motel was at least twenty-five miles away. There was, however, a geriatric center where he might conceivably find a place to sleep. Upon arriving at the home, he asked the head nurse if they had an "extra bed" for the night. He was told that while this was highly irregular, they would help him - just until the morning. It seems that a patient had just expired and his bed was available until the morning, when they would clean up the room in preparation for the next patient. Having no recourse, he took the bed and immediately fell asleep.

Morning came very quickly, as an attendant came and woke him, explaining that he was here to clean up the room. Curiosity overtook the person, and he decided to find out in whose bed he had slept. Looking through the effects of the deceased, he saw a wallet with an identification card in the name of "David Almoni." He was shocked that a Jew had spent his last months in a Catholic nursing home. He questioned the attendant regarding the release of the remains. He was told that if there was no family to claim the body, he was to be buried in a private cemetery owned by the diocese, sort of a private

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"Potters field." Incidentally, "David Almoni" had no family and would be buried in the Catholic tradition in their cemetery.

Sensing that there was a providential factor in his spending the night in this home, the businessman offered to claim the body and bury it in a Jewish cemetery. The administrator of the home was certainly no friend of the Jews and did not expend any extra effort to accommodate his request. Stubbornness gave way to the businessman's persistence. After signing the necessary papers, the businessman was able to claim "David Almoni's" body. With the help of a few of the home's workers, he was able to place the casket with the body into his van. He left for Brooklyn on a mission to see to it that this niftar, deceased, would be availed a Jewish burial.

He came to his shul and asked the president how to go about burying a meis mitzvah. The president told him that he was aware that the Chevrah Kadisha of Washington Heights had access to a small plot of land in which ten gravesites were designated for such a need. He immediately called the Chevrah Kadisha in Washington Heights and related to them the entire story. They, of course, did their own checking to confirm the source of this body. After a short while, they agreed to prepare the corpse ritually in accordance with Jewish law and bury him in the special cemetery.

The chevrah took the body to the taharah, ritual purification room, along with his "sponsor," and they prepared to begin the process of taharah. No sooner had the sheet covering the face been removed than the leaders' face turned white, and he almost fell over in a dead faint. They brought him a chair to sit down and gave him a glass of water to drink until he finally calmed down. After awhile, those assembled asked the leader of the chevrah what was it that caused this terrible reaction on his part. He related the following story.

"I recognize the deceased," he began. "He came to our community about twenty years ago, lonely and homeless. He, more or less, made his home in the shul, eating and sleeping there. He spent most of the day studying in the bais ha'medrash. He would go around from home to home asking for alms, being invited to many members of the community for Shabbos and Yom Tov meals. He became a member of the community.

"One day, he approached me and asked, "What happens if a member of the community dies and leaves no relatives? Who takes care of his burial?" I responded that it was truly a problem. We would have to make a collection to purchase a gravesite and all particulars needed for a funeral and burial. Indeed, if we fail to raise the necessary sum, we have a serious problem.

"The man looked at me and said, "I would like to purchase a plot of land specifically for those people who leave this world 'alone,' without anyone to care for them or who have no money to bequeath to others to care for them. I am giving money to the Chevrah Kadisha to provide for ten mesei mitzvah."

"Do you know who our deceased is? He is that individual! That man's name was David Almoni! Hashem repaid his kindness. He will be buried in the cemetery that he created for others like him."

He called the place Masa U'Merivah...and because of their test of Hashem, Saying, "Is Hashem among us or not?" ...Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Rephidim...that I shall surely erase the memory of Amalek from beneath the heavens. (17:7,8,14)

Amalek's appearance and his ensuing confrontation with Klal Yisrael are not happenstance.

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Amalek's role is a response to Klal Yisrael's sudden spiritual relapse. They asked, "Ha'yeish Hashem b'kirbeinu?" "Is Hashem among us?" The response was immediate. The Midrash likens them to a youngster whose father is carrying him from place to place upon his shoulder, lovingly fulfilling his every request. Suddenly, the child asks someone on the street, "Have you seen my father?" Obviously annoyed, the father asks, "Don't you know where I am?" He lowers his son down to the ground where a dog bites him. Likewise, after all of the miracles and wonders that Klal Yisrael enjoyed throughout their liberation from Egypt, they had no right to question Hashem's presence. Thus, he cast them off, leaving them unprotected from the "dogs." Furthermore, Amalek stands as a constant reminder to us of the effects of questioning Hashem's presence. As Chazal aptly define the word Rephidim, "Sherafu yideihem min haTorah," "They loosened their grip on the Torah." Whenever we manifest either the contention of Merivah, the testing of Masah, or the decrease of Torah study as in Rephidim, we will be subject to the "motivation" engendered by the Amalek's endemic to each generation.

Amalek stands constantly ready to remind us of our obligation to Hashem. This may be the meaning of the injunction to "surely erase the memory of Amalek." Why are we adjured to see to it that the "memory" of Amalek be erased? We suggest that Amalek is always prepared to remind us of what could happen if we do not maintain our devotion to Hashem. When we place greater emphasis upon our Torah study and reflect upon Hashem's constant Providence over us, we ensure that Amalek will not need to be used as a reminder of our spiritual deficiency. We are to erase the "memory" of Amalek, eliminate his function as our "reminder." Amalek is the sword hanging over our heads; our goal is to attain that level of spiritual ascendance that this portent will no longer be necessary.

Pharaoh approached; the Bnei Yisrael raised up their eyes and behold - Egypt was journeying after them. (14:10)

Rashi notes that the word "nosea," journeying, is written in the singular. It should be written as "nosim", in the plural, which would be the appropriate term for describing an entire army. He explains that the Egyptians were all united in heart and mind, committed to pursuing and destroying the Jews. Everyone amassed into a united front with the singular goal of destruction. The Avnei Nezer notes a similar syntax for describing the Jewish camp at Har Sinai immediately preceding the Giving of the Torah. The Torah states (Shemos 19:2), "Vayichan ha'am neged ha'har," "and the nation camped before the mountain." The word "vayichan," and they camped, is singular -- as opposed to "vayachanu". In response, Rashi notes that Klal Yisrael lived in total harmony, united like "one person, with one mind." Why does Rashi change the sequence describing their achdus, unity? Regarding the Egyptian unity he says, "of one mind, like one person." In contrast, referring to the Jews, he says, "one person with one mind."

The Avnei Nezer teaches us a timely lesson in his explanation for the disparity between these two types of unity. Uniting against a common enemy is not only commonplace, it is practical. How else is one to survive? This occurs not only among intelligent humans, it is a common phenomenon among all creations, even animals. For example, we note that a herd unites against a common enemy. The common denominator in this form of unity is the "one mind," the shared objective for survival that melds the group into one unit. Hence, the "one mind" precedes the "one person."

With Klal Yisrael, however, the common denominator was ideological unity, their commitment to receive the Torah, to observe its mitzvos and to serve the Almighty. No one threatened them; no enemy was breathing down their necks, dedicated to destroying them. They were united as "one person

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and, therefore, one mind."

The Jewish People have united under specific situations. Regrettably, the motivation for this shared unity was tzaros, persecution, affliction, anti-semitism. Rarely was it ideological in nature. If our unity is to be binding, it has to be the type of togetherness that we experienced at Har Sinai, an awareness that "Yisrael, v'oraisa, u'Kudsha Brich Hu chad hu" -- "Yisrael, and the Torah, and Hashem Yisborach are One."

Moshe said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem...for as you have seen Egypt today, you shall not see them ever again...Hashem shall do battle for you, and you shall remain silent. Hashem said to Moshe, "Why do you cry out to Me?" (14:13, 14,15)

Chazal teach us that four distinct groups confronted Moshe. The first group were the fatalists, who felt the end was near, no vestige of hope remained. They might as well walk into the sea and die, rather than fall into Pharaoh's hands. The second group consisted of the pacifists, who felt that the only way out of their present predicament was to return to Egypt and adopt the Egyptian culture. Their motto was: If you cannot fight them - join them. These people were scared of their own shadow, submitting before they ever had a chance to fight. The third group were the warriors who would fight to their last drop of blood for the preservation of their freedom. Either it was to be a life of freedom or it was to be death. There were no gray areas. Last was the group that protested - and protested. They challenged the Egyptians politically. How could the Egyptians dare to chase after them and retract their freedom? Just a few days previously they had let them leave Egypt. What justification did they have for renegeing on their word.

Horav Y.A. Hirshovitz, zl, notes that times have not changed. We are still plagued by these four types who, each in his own way, feels he knows it all. Each group has its own way of responding to crisis, regardless of how it might affect the rest of the community. We tell all of them what Moshe told their predecessors: To the fatalists, who were passively ready to accept their future, Moshe said, "Do not fear, stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem." The only way out of this challenge is through yeshuas Hashem, salvation from the Almighty. Trust in Him and you will see His redemption. To the pacifists, who were prepared to discard their religion, to cower and assimilate, to return to Egypt, Moshe said, "You shall not see them ever again." You cannot return to Egypt and become one of them. Once you leave - you are gone. Moshe told the warriors, who were willing to fight to the end, "Hashem will battle for you." Do you think that you could triumph in battle without Hashem? He fights for you. Let Him fight for you - but you must turn to Him in prayer and implore His salvation. Last, to the group that thought that the solution was protest, Moshe said, "And you shall remain silent." Screaming at the Egyptians, protesting with outrage, is an exercise in futility. You will get nowhere by raising your fist at the enemy. If you raise your voice, raise it to Hashem. Pray to Him to save you.

While these four groups were taking turns negotiating the right course of action for Klal Yisrael, what was the majority of Klal Yisrael doing? All of Klal Yisrael were not included in these four groups. Not everybody acquiesced to their line of thinking. Horav Hirshovitz claims that others took the appropriate action: They prayed to Hashem. They shut their ears to the warriors and to the spineless, to the assimilationists and the politicians. When Moshe turned to Hashem and asked Him what to do, Hashem said, "Why do you cry out to Me? Klal Yisrael has already cried out to Me." The majority of Klal Yisrael knows what to do. Hopefully, this concept has not changed even though, regrettably, the four divisive groups still exist in our midst.

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Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael chose to sing this song to Hashem. (15:1)

Klal Yisrael praised Hashem for the miracle of Krias Yam Suf, the splitting of the Red Sea, through a shirah, a song of praise. This rare, sublime expression of gratitude to Hashem is unique in its form and meaning. We should address a pressing question regarding the shirah. Krias Yam Suf was not the first miracle that Klal Yisrael had experienced. Many miraculous occurrences had preceded it. There were the Ten Plagues that befell Egypt. Were they so "natural" that they paled in comparison to the splitting of the Red Sea? Why did Klal Yisrael wait so long to sing shirah to Hashem?

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, distinguishes between the miracle of Krias Yam Suf and the other miracles. The miracles of the Ten Plagues and their accompanying miracles were all the handiwork of Hashem - with no accompanying participation from Klal Yisrael. Hashem performed, and Klal Yisrael were the fortunate recipients of His beneficence. Krias Yam Suf was a different phenomenon. There, Klal Yisrael engaged in prayer and mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, which earned them the splitting of the sea. They acted, and Hashem responded to their action. Their actions and belief in the Almighty sustained the miracle. This is the underlying motif behind the phrase, "Zeh Keili v'anveihu," "This is my G-d, and I will beautify Him." This is my G-d whom I have sanctified in the world. I am an active participant in the miracle.

Horav Alpert applies this idea to explain the noted Midrash that relates that the angels sought to sing shirah. Hashem told them, "My handiwork/creations are drowning in the sea, and you want to sing shirah!" Why did Klal Yisrael say shirah? If it was inappropriate for the angels, should it not also have been inappropriate for Klal Yisrael? According to the above thesis, we can understand the distinction. The angels did nothing to efficate the miracles - neither in Egypt nor at the Red Sea. The only difference between the miracles that occurred in Egypt and those which occurred at the Red Sea is in their definitiveness and finality - the Egyptians died.

Consequently, the shirah which the angels would have sung would have been in praise of Hashem for killing the Egyptians. That would be callous. Klal Yisrael, however, were expressing their gratitude at being able to withstand the trials of the Egyptian bondage. They were declaring their willingness to give up their lives for the sake of the Almighty.

With this in mind, we can also understand why we do not recite the complete Hallel on the seventh day of Pesach. In reality, the miracle of Krias Yam Suf should have occurred immediately when Klal Yisrael left Egypt. It was dependent only upon Klal Yisrael's withstanding the test of emunah, belief in the Almighty, when they "believed in Hashem" - "va'yaaminu b'Hashem u'v'Moshe avdo." For rising to the challenge of faith, one does not say Hallel; for everything is in the "hands of Heaven, except for yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven." We are given the opportunity to "make it" on our own. The miracles of the Exodus, on the other hand, were all clearly initiated by Shomayim. Consequently, we recite Hallel in gratitude.

According to the above, we postulate that Hallel is said only when the miracle that is commemorated is one that was initiated and engendered entirely by Hashem, exclusive of Klal Yisrael's participation. This is why the miracle of Chanukah, which is commemorated through Hallel, only became worthy of Hallel after they found the flask of oil that had miraculously burnt for eight days. That portion of the miracle was initiated by Hashem. Their triumph in battle over the forces of evil, in which "rabim," "many," fell into the hands of "me'atim," "few", however, was a miracle initiated by mesiras nefesh, personal sacrifice, in battle and prayer. Thus, this miracle does not warrant Hallel. This thesis gives us the opportunity to analyze the concept of which miracles warrant the recitation of Hallel

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by Klal Yisrael.

Moshe caused Bnei Yisrael to journey from the Yam Suf...they went for a three day period in the wilderness, but they did not find water. (15:22)

Moshe had to force the people to leave the Yam Suf. Had it been up to Klal Yisrael, they would have remained there gathering up the immense spoils of the Egyptian army. Chazal tell us that the Egyptians, assured of their impending victory over the Jews, bedecked their horses with every type of jewelry, gold and silver. After it was all over, the Jews had a "difficult" time coping with the enormous wealth that was now theirs for the taking. As a result, they refused to leave. Their behavior is mind-boggling! It is understandable that people seek wealth for a number of reasons. First, there is envy. It is difficult to tolerate your friends' wealth when you are just managing financially. Second, money gives one access to material pleasures that would otherwise be unattainable. No bills to pay, a beautiful home, a new car, expensive clothes and exotic trips, are but a few of the luxuries one can acquire with money. Certainly, this alone would be a reason for seeking wealth. While these reasons are not necessarily the Torah orientation, they at least give us some rationale for the behavior manifest by those that are driven towards material excess.

This brings us to Klal Yisrael at the shores of the Yam Suf. What provoked them to seek so much wealth? What drove them to resist leaving the area, to begin their ascent to Eretz Yisrael? Whom did they envy? All of them had come from the same place - with nothing. No individual was better off financially than the next one. Furthermore, what were they going to do with their money? Food came from Heaven, water from the well of Miriam; what would they have wanted to purchase in the desert? Their clothes remained the same for forty years. Why were they so obsessed with wealth?

Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, addresses these questions. He believes that there is no rationale for the behavior exhibited by Klal Yisrael. A willingness to denigrate oneself for the sake of money, especially when that money could not help them, did not apply at Krias Yam Suf. We must, therefore, suggest that there really is no rationalization that validates their behavior. A taavah, desire, for money under such circumstances is a form of machlas ha'nefesh, quasi-spiritual deficiency, that plagues people. It is irrational. Klal Yisrael's desire to gather riches transcended the rational. They had nothing to gain but money - which under their present conditions was totally superfluous. The fact that Moshe had to force Klal Yisrael to leave the area of the Yam Suf indicates how far this sickness had progressed.

After all is said and done, we derive from here that taavas ha'mamon, an irrational desire for money, is a sickness. This can explain the behavior of those who hoard their wealth, although they either have no one with whom to share it with, or an excess that will go around many times over. They literally refuse to benefit others. Only one who understands that our worldly goods do not leave with us -- that it is our good deeds that are our real possessions -- shares his wealth with those not as fortunate as he. Hopefully, this realization will come before it is too late.

The splitting of the Red Sea was a remarkable miracle; is there a parallel in Jewish history? Was it truly the only time that water "deferred" to man? Indeed, in the *Talmud Chullin 7a*, Chazal recount an incident in which R' Pinchas ben Yair was on his way to perform the *mitzvah* of *pidyon shevuyim*, redeeming Jewish captives. He came to a river that was impassable. He commanded the water to split, so that he could pass through. The river responded, "You are performing the command of your Master,

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and so am I. You might be successful in your efforts to rescue the hostage, while I am assured of success. What makes you think that your *mitzvah* takes precedence over mine?" R' Pinchas ben Yair, responded, "If you do not split immediately, I will decree upon you that all of your water should dry up!" The river split, and R' Pinchas ben Yair passed through. *Chazal* summarize the story with the observation that R' Pinchas ben Yair's power was equal to that of Moshe and all of *Klal Yisrael*.

Keeping this in mind, the **Sfas Emes** wonders how *Krias Yam Suf* demonstrates the singular greatness of *Klal Yisrael*. After all, did a similar miracle not occur for an individual? He offers a profound response. Certainly, Hashem can alter the course of nature for a single *tzaddik*. The righteous have extraordinary merits which grant them access to miracles. When, however, did Hashem alter nature for an entire nation? The *chidush*, novelty, of *Krias Yam Suf* was that an extraordinary miracle took place for an entire nation. This phenomenon demonstrated to the world the *kedushah*, holiness, of *Am Yisrael*--not just the individual Jew--but the totality of the nation!

Horav Tzadok Ha'kohen, z"l, M'Lublin supplements this thought. *Am Yisrael's* innate *kedushah* was exhibited to the world through the miracle of *Krias Yam Suf*. After all, what virtue did the Jews have that made them more worthy than the Egyptians to be spared? They had sunk to the nadir of depravity, to the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, spiritual impurity. What distinguishes one idol-worshipper from another? The answer is that while externally the Jews may not have displayed a spiritual demeanor that would merit *Krias Yam Suf*, their inner being, their *penimius*, was inherently holy.

On that day Hashem saved Yisrael from the hand of Egypt. And The Bnei Yisrael went on dry land in the midst of the sea.... (14:29, 30)

And Bnei Yisrael ate the manna for forty years, until their arrival in an inhabited land. (16:35)

One miraculous occurrence followed another; is there a relationship between the two? *Chazal* seem to think so. They say in the *Talmud Pesachim 118a*: "A man's sustenance is as difficult as the splitting of the Red Sea." Simply put, providing man with sustenance is as great a feat as *Krias Yam Suf*. The *Zohar Ha'kadosh* questions *Chazal's* statement. Is there any act that is difficult for Hashem to perform? Was *Krias Yam Suf* difficult for Hashem? Is it difficult for Hashem to sustain a person?

A number of explanations address this *Chazal*. The **Chozeh M'Lublin, z"l**, suggests a profound insight. *Chazal* are not focusing their observation upon Hashem. They are, rather, speaking to man concerning which path to take when life becomes more demanding. Earning a living is -- by any standard -- a complex endeavor. It demands great fortitude and commitment. It requires determination, resolution, and -- most importantly -- faith in the Almighty. What does one do when the situation is bleak, when prospects for success are -- at best -- limited, when every way one turns the door to success "seems" closed?

Chazal's message is to follow the lesson of *Krias Yam Suf*. The Jews were trapped. They could either look forward to dying at the hand of the Egyptians or to drowning in the Red Sea. What could they do? They had no other choice but to be *boteach* b'Hashem, trust in the Almighty. They turned to Him in the hope that He would spare them. With this hope and trust, they entered the threatening waters of the Red Sea to be saved by Hashem. Likewise, when we are faced with the challenge of *parnassah*, livelihood, trusting humans is ineffectual. Absorbing one's mind - and even soul - in the anxiety that accompanies the quest for *parnassah* is wasteful and detrimental to one's physical and spiritual health.

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Only one approach will achieve success -- *bitachon*, true trust in Hashem. If one truly believes that Hashem will help him, He will.

Horav Simcha Bunim, z"l, M'Peshischa gives a similar response with a slightly different twist. At the *Yam Suf*, the Jews had no idea how they would be rescued. In fact, the splitting of the Red Sea was probably the last thing they expected to happen. With regard to *parnassah*, Hashem sends salvation from a source that, for the most part, is unheralded. We have no idea from where Hashem will bring about our sustenance. We have only to trust that He will.

This is my G-d and I will glorify Him. (15:2)

The *Midrash* explains that *Klal Yisrael* were privy to remarkable spiritual revelations as they stood by the shores of the Red Sea. Indeed, *Chazal* tell us that a common maidservant was able to perceive greater revelations of the *Shechinah* than *Yechezkel Ha'navi*! This is derived from the word "zeh," "this," of the phrase "*Zeh Keli V'anveihu*," "*This is my G-d and I will beautify Him.*" The Jews were able to point with their finger to the awesome sights they were experiencing. Yet, as **Horav Shalom Shwadron, shlita**, notes, the maidservant remained a simple maidservant despite her exposure to such heightened spiritual vision. In contrast, the *navi* *Yechezkel*, despite the fact that he did not experience all there was to see, remained a *navi*. What happened? Why did so many, who saw so much, just relinquish their unparalleled experience?

Horav Schwadron recounted this *Chazal* in the presence of **Horav Meier Chadash, z"l**. He added his own inferences stating that, as life goes on, complacency takes hold of an individual- causing him to forget his extraordinary experience. *Horav* Chadash took issue with this statement. In order to impress his contention with what seemed to be the logical explanation of *Chazal*, he cited an incident that occurred in his own experience. When he was a young man in Russia, just before the first World War, he was caught by Russian soldiers without his required papers. This was a period in which the gentiles did whatever they chose, treating the Jew as some type of lowly parasite. The desire for Jewish blood was unleashed. Quickly, the soldiers determined that this young, Jewish man was guilty of treason and should be executed. They set up the firing-squad in preparation for carrying out their decision. Sensing the hopelessness of the situation, *Horav* Chadash nervously began reciting *Vidui* and *Krias Shma*.

The soldier in charge of the squad demanded that *Horav* Chadash stand erect and not fidget, since he was making it very difficult for the soldiers to aim well. Overcome with fear, the *rav* trembled, shaking back and forth. Once again, the soldier called out to him harshly to stand straight. This time, the soldier's scream awakened the Russian general who was taking his afternoon nap. He took one look outside and immediately scolded the soldiers for the terrible thing they were about to do. The soldiers quickly dispersed, and the *rav* was saved.

"One would think," continued *Horav* Chadash, "that after such an incredible experience, life would not be the same. After a little while, however, I began to notice the captivating power of complacency, and I realized that I was falling prey to this 'affliction'. It was causing me to lose sight and forget the amazing miracle that had saved me from certain death. Immediately, I made up my mind to grasp hold of the 'past' and transform it into the 'future,' forcing myself to remember the miracle. I made every effort to concretize in my mind my belief in Hashem, recognizing that if He desires that I remain alive, then nothing whatsoever will be an obstacle. I reviewed this notion constantly, never forgetting the past, seeking every opportunity to translate what had happened in the past into the present and future."

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And the Bnei Yisrael ate the manna for forty years, until their arrival in an inhabited land. (16:35)

Bnei Yisrael were privy to an unprecedented array of miracles, ranging from the ten plagues to the many miracles that occurred during the Exodus, and the splitting of the Red Sea. The Jews clearly saw that Hashem was with them during times of crises. Was this the most important lesson? Or is there another miracle which, although less profound in nature, is more significant in its message?

Horav S.R. Hirsch, z"l, observes that *Bnei Yisrael* were acutely aware that Hashem was close to them during the critical stages of their development. What about their recognition of Hashem's role in their everyday necessities? This was the lesson of the miracle of the *manna*. Hashem takes into account the needs of every human being. One can--and should-- rely on Hashem for his sustenance.

All the amazing supernatural phenomena that accompanied *Bnei Yisrael's* exodus from Egypt, even *Krias Yam Suf*, all faded in significance when *Bnei Yisrael* confronted the stark reality of the impending hunger menacing their families. *Horav* Hirsch declares that this concept is reflected in *Chazal's* dictum; "*It is as difficult to provide man's sustenance as it is to split the Red Sea.*" Regardless of its source, the threat of hunger looms over man, undermining every principal and abrogating every resolution. Indeed, as long as the overwhelming anxiety of *parnassah*, earning a living to support one's family, envelops a person, he cannot achieve his potential in *Torah* study.

How does one free himself from the tentacles of this tension? One must acquiesce to the belief that the concern for man's material needs does not rest on man alone. In fact, it does not depend upon him at all! Man must acknowledge the fact that he can do only his own part, but ultimately he must depend upon Hashem for success in his endeavors. It is his duty to endeavor to provide sustenance for his family, but he must be convinced that every single human being is ultimately sustained by the Almighty.

The one who does not "accept" Hashem as the sole provider is bound to toil away his days, laboring to ensure himself and his dependents material support. He will do anything to achieve his goal. He will compete ruthlessly; he will cheat, if necessary; he will fall prey to any scheme, regardless of its dubious nature, just to earn sufficient money. The pursuit of money can become an obsession, a demanding, unrelenting and ruthless contrivance that has the power to destroy so many and so much.

Hashem sought to cure the young nation of this malady. He led the people into a stark, barren desert where they would be made to feel the anxiety, where the material requirements of the present would be inaccessible, and where the prospects for the future were dubious. They saw for themselves what the obsession of earning a living can do to an individual. Until now, they did not worry about tomorrow--they were slaves for whom their masters provided daily sustenance.

Now Hashem set down the rules for gathering in one's sustenance. He would provide *Bnei Yisrael* with their daily bread, courtesy of Heaven. They should remember that whatever they needed would be provided; not more, not less. They did not have to worry about tomorrow, for Hashem would provide for them. They had only to trust Him. Only after they had exhibited unreserved confidence in Hashem, could they be assured that His *Torah* would be observed, His *mitzvos* adhered to, with no fear of unrealistic anxiety about material hardship interfering in their *avodas* Hashem. The individual whose overriding concern in life is, "What shall I have to eat tomorrow?" has no place in the panorama of Jewish belief. One's persistent concern for his material future will ultimately lead him astray from Hashem and His *Torah*. It would do us well to show more concern about our spiritual future and leave the material dimension to Hashem.

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