

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

Rabbi H. Leib Scheinbaum

PARASHAT EIKEYV

Just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you. (8:5)

The whole idea of yissurim, troubles, is spelled out in the above pasuk: Yissurim symbolize a loving Father's chastisement. Considered in that light, they are no longer troubles; they are an act of love - tough love, perhaps, but love nonetheless. Yissurim are axioms of those actions that come from Hashem which defy human rationale. I think, however, that the mere thought that one is cognizant that his troubles are Heaven-sent render them that much more palatable, easier to accept. We also forget that yissurim not only expiate our sins, but they also generate s'char, reward, for us. The Ramban notes that Shevet Levi, comprised of 22,000 souls, was the smallest in number of all the tribes. He explains that this was due to the fact that Shevet Levi was not enslaved in Egypt, as were the other tribes. The other tribes suffered thus, they were rewarded with fertile childbearing, while the tribe of Levi did not enjoy this blessing. We see from here, explains the Ramban, that blessing is often commensurate with the ordeal one sustains.

"For six travails He will save you, and in the seventh no harm will reach you." In this pasuk, Sefer Iyov (5:19) expresses the concept that Hashem limits suffering. The numbers six and seven are symbolic. The Ramban explains that the number seven denotes totality, which alludes to the fact that Hashem will not permit us to be overwhelmed by evil. Six refers to limited punishment. Hashem punishes a person, at times even severely, but, if he is worthy, he will not receive a "seven," full measure of punishment.

The Metzudas David adds that Hashem often sends a small amount of suffering to people as an expiation for their sins, so that when a great calamity strikes the world, these people will not have to suffer along with others. An example of this would be someone who, due to illness or car trouble, misses being in a place where tragedy suddenly strikes. Here Iyov is reflecting that he is now receiving retribution for his sins, but this punishment will save him from the "seven," a more serious catastrophe later on.

Horav Moshe Cordovero, zl, writes that Hashem gives us the necessary strength to withstand the troubles which we experience. He substantiates this from the fact that Sarah Imeinu died when the Satan told her that Yitzchak had "almost" died. Had Yitzchak actually died, then Sarah would not have died. Hashem would have strengthened her and granted her the ability overcome the tragedy. Since

Yitzchak did not die, her reaction exceeded the decree.

Likewise, we find that Yaakov Avinu "refused" to be comforted concerning his loss of Yosef. Chazal teach us that there is a decree from Heaven that, after awhile, one forgets the deceased. What about Yosef? Why was Yaakov inconsolable? He explains that since Yosef was still alive, Hashem did not grant Yaakov the ability to withstand this trial.

There are those who will say, "We can do without the reward generated by yissurim, as long as we do not have to experience the yissurim. In other words, we do not want the pain or the gain. For some, this actually works, while most of us do not seem to have a choice in the matter. Why? Horav Nochum, zl, m'Horadna, relates the following story as means of an explanation. The Russian President once decided to visit the state prison to see how it was being run. Lo and behold, he was arriving at a time when no one was incarcerated! The jail was empty. In an effort to "alleviate" this problem, the warden approached a poor man and asked him if he would be willing to serve as "prisoner for a day." The poor man had a strong distaste for prisons, and, therefore, he refused to "accept" the offer. One year later, the poor man was regrettably caught in an act of petty theft. The judge was in the process of sending him to prison, when he turned to the warden and said, "I do not want to go. Imagine, just one year ago, I refused to go to the prison. Then, you were willing to pay me. Now, I will certainly not go."

The warden listened to him and laughed. "My friend, you do not have much of a choice in the matter. Now, you must go. You have 'earned' your sentence."

Likewise, those who are able to say we will do without the pain are individuals who are expiating the sins of the greater community. They themselves were so holy that they have extra "funds" in their account. Those of us who are receiving our due punishment, however, really do not have much of a choice. We receive what we have unfortunately "earned." There are instances when the troubles one experiences are not simply to pay for his past sins, but rather serve as a buffer for future generations when there will be a situation that a z'chus, merit, is needed. No pain is for naught. Hashem saves it all; He puts it away in an account to be used at a later date. The commentators compare this to the young son of a wealthy man who became ill. While the illness was not of a serious nature, the man, possessing great wealth, sought the finest and most talented physician to treat his son. After all, what else is money for? Surprisingly, however, while this distinguished doctor had been treating the boy for a short while, he became increasingly more ill. The father approached the doctor, "I do not understand. Just a few weeks ago, my son was diagnosed with a minor illness, and now his life is in danger. What has happened?"

"I am sorry to say that your son does have a serious life-threatening illness," the doctor replied. "During my initial checkup, I noticed early signs of a deadly disease that would probably have taken about five years to surface. At that time, it will be almost impossible to cure your son. In addition, I do not know if I will be available then. I, therefore, caused the illness to incubate more quickly, so that your son would become ill now. At this point, the illness is treatable. It might be painful, but your son will survive and live a full life. To have waited would have been to invite certain disaster."

Likewise, the yissurim sustained by individuals may quite possibly serve as a deposit to be placed in a spiritual bank, with one's descendants -- children, grandchildren, or even great-grandchildren - as the beneficiaries. The travails suffered by parents can mitigate some of the harsh decree that is to be issued to later generations, who do not have the necessary merits, to survive its painful consequences.

In conclusion, as the pasuk states, yissurim are a G-d-given manifestation of fatherly love. When one takes this into consideration, it makes the pain that much more bearable. Many stories relate

how great men and women came to terms with their suffering. There is one incident that I recently came across that fascinated me. It indicates a woman's pragmatic attitude toward her suffering, and it is an incident from which we can all learn.

There is a woman in Yerushalayim who exemplifies chesed, acts of lovingkindness, at its zenith. In fact, the girls' schools often bring their students to her to take note of her incredible and successful efforts on behalf of Yerushalayim's less fortunate. She has organized campaigns that have sustained thousands. How did it all begin?

Apparently, a while ago, she was seriously ill, almost at death's door. The medical community had given up hope of a recovery from her dread disease. The situation was very bleak. It was close to what should have been the "end." The doctors had just notified her to "put her affairs in order," because they could no longer offer her any hope. She gathered her strength and cried out to Hashem: "Ribono Shel Olam, who will benefit from my lying in the grave? You will derive nothing, because I will not be able to perform mitzvos. I will certainly gain nothing. I promise You that if You permit me to live, I will devote every minute of my time towards sanctifying Your Holy Name by performing acts of lovingkindness. I will dedicate my life, my entire being, towards the fulfillment of this mitzvah. Please Hashem, allow me to live!"

She continued to weep bitterly until she no longer had any more strength. Hashem listened, and she left the hospital cured of her disease. She kept her word and has devoted her life to carrying out acts of chesed, thereby sanctifying the Name of Hashem. She asked - Hashem listened - she acted. Our prayers are never wasted. We may never despair of hope.

Just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you. (8:5)

We translate the word, ish, as "a father," but it actually means "a man." The Torah should have used the word, av, father. Why does the Torah alter the wording? Horav Yosef Chaim, zl, the Ben Ish Chai, distinguishes between the love manifest by a biological father and that shown by a man who raises a child as a surrogate. The father certainly loves his child, and the discipline and punishment that he must mete out is rooted in love. However subtle it may be, there is a hidden agenda - one that the father may not even be aware of: He has a personal stake in his son's success, because it is a reflection on him.

The individual, who, out of the goodness of his heart, has raised someone else's son, is certainly proud of his son's achievements, but the failures are not necessarily attributed to him. This is why the Torah changes the text. Hashem chastises us as "a man" chastises his "son." It is purely for the sake of the child. Success and failure are not the result of his biological relationship. It is totally out of objective love for Klal Yisrael - a love that endures and will continue to do so for all time.

Take care of yourself...lest you eat to satiety...and your cattle and sheep grow many...and your heart become haughty, and you forget Hashem Your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt. (8:11, 12, 13, 14)

Chazal consider haughtiness to be a deplorable character trait from which one should distance himself to the extreme. The trait of self-conceit is one of the worst qualities one can possess. As Rabbeinu Yonah writes in Pirkei Avos 4:4, "It is a sin that makes one's heart forget his Creator, as the Torah says, 'Lest you become haughty and forget Hashem your G-d'" (Devarim 8:14.)

"Be very humble-spirited, for the hope of man is but worms" (Pirkei Avos 4:4). The Tanna could not paint a much clearer picture. We have nothing about which to be arrogant, because we all are destined to the same conclusion to our lives. When we keep this in mind, what do we have to be haughty about? In the Talmud Sanhedrin 88b, the statement is perhaps a bit more extreme: "Who is worthy of entering the World to Come? Whoever is humble, with bent knee, who comes and goes with bowed head, who regularly studies Torah and does not make much of himself (over it)."

The above is a powerful statement, but, it seems to contradict another well-known statement of Chazal: "All Yisrael have a share in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 90A)." Clearly, the statement that restricts entrance to the humble is referring to another point. Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, explains that Chazal are saying: Who, while still in this world, is worthy right now to enter the World to Come? Who is so completely divorced from sin that he stands pure and clean in the midst of a world filled with moral and spiritual pollution, with materialism and physicality, with the mundane, secular and profane, all prevailing over sanctity, purity and morality? The answer is: the individual who is self-effacing, who is unassuming, who thinks little of himself. Because of his infinitesimal self-view, he has risen above his peers and is worthy of entrance through the gates of Gan Eden.

Chazal are meticulous in informing us of the definition of unassuming: he who is with "bent knee, who comes with bowed head, who regularly studies Torah and does not call attention to himself over it." Do a "bent knee" and "bowed head" make such a difference in an individual's character? Is this "position" something physical, or is it meant in a spiritual sense?

Rav Bergman explains that in day-to-day life, one bends his knee or bows his head in order to avoid collision with the ceiling or doorway. It is pure practicality. Likewise, in the spiritual life, one "bends his knee" or "bows his head" to avoid "knocking his head" against the Shechinah. One who has a palpable sense of Hashem's Presence, who has a tactile feeling that Hashem is Master of the world, will "bow mentally" effacing himself before the Almighty. After all, Hashem is everywhere! He feels that by mentally raising himself up, he is shtupping, pushing up, against Hashem. Just as when the ceiling of a house is sagging, the tenant understands that for practical purposes, he must maintain a "low profile" and keep his head down, so, too, should every "tenant" in Hashem's world feel His all-present glory hovering all over and bow himself internally as a matter of course.

This constant feeling of Hashem's Presence is the greatest safeguard against sin. In contrast, the individual who is filled with himself, who is so wrapped up in his own glory, has a difficult time finding Hashem in his life. He simply has no room, because life is all about him - not Hashem. His arrogance and the consequence of forgetting about Hashem will surely lead him to sin.

That it is not your children who did not know and who did not see the chastisement of Hashem, your G-d. (11:2)

As Moshe Rabbeinu continues his admonishment of the Jewish People, he stresses their singular responsibility to maintain a strong fidelity to Hashem. They were the ones who saw firsthand Hashem's wonders and miracles. They were sustained through His mercy. While the Torah's commandments are no less obligatory to the future generations, they nonetheless do not have the personal experience of seeing what their parents saw. Their personal involvement was stronger. Hence, their commitment should be likewise. The Torah uses the word mussar, which is here translated as chastisement. The people should take a lesson from the punishment meted out to those who have

angered Hashem. Targum Onkeles defines mussar as ulpana, which means teaching. Hashem inflicts suffering for the constructive purpose of rectifying one's inappropriate behavior.

In any event, mussar is a lesson one should derive by taking note of what happens to him and around him. When one ignores his Heavenly messages, he makes a serious mistake, one that can - and usually does - lead to much more serious sins. A sobering example of this notion can be gleaned from the incident of the meraglim, the spies, all distinguished Jewish leaders, who, upon returning from their reconnaissance of Eretz Yisrael, relayed a negative report about the Land. The Mirrer Mashgiach, Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, notes that when we read through the passages describing the episode and we view the entire incident through the spectrum provided and elucidated by Chazal, we see that they committed a number of grievous sins. When they said, "The people of Canaan are stronger than we are, they were actually implying that the pagans were stronger than Hashem. This statement is at least heretical and certainly indicative of other fundamental problems in emunah, belief, in Hashem.

Rav Yeruchem wonders why after a thorough study of the parshah and a critical evaluation of the behavior of Klal Yisrael, which indicates a serious deficiency in their belief in G-d, all Chazal can "pin" on them is the sin of not taking the appropriate mussar lesson from the earlier incident in which Miriam spoke against Moshe. Such a statement is mind-boggling! Imagine someone steals a car, commits a homicide, and is finally caught with a trunk stuffed with hard drugs. Seems pretty bad! Would it not be ludicrous if he is only prosecuted for speeding through a school zone in the course of fleeing from the police? It might sound comical, but this seems to be the case concerning the spies. The Mashgiach explains that it is essentially the sin of not listening, not acknowledging that there is a problem, which leads to-- and is the catalyst for-- all of the other sins. We go through life hearing messages. If we take note of the message and acknowledge that we are its focus, we have the possibility of changing the negative course of our lives. If, however, we ignore the messages, we are likely to pay dearly.

The incident that occurred concerning Miriam was a defining moment in Jewish history, which should have had a definitive impact on the Jewish People. The nation should have derived the overriding significance of positive speech, as well as the damaging effects of negative, inappropriate speech. If the meraglim would only have taken a critical look at the lesson implied from the episode of Miriam, they would not have sinned, and today we would probably not be celebrating Tishah B'Av as our national day of mourning.

We must wake up and listen to our messages. There are occurrences every day of which we are aware, that take place for a reason. We must search for that reason, but this can occur only if we acknowledge the G-d factor in every incident. If we fail to react to the inferred messages, the next communication might not be quite as subtle.

And it will come to pass, because you will listen to these ordinances and observe and do them. (7:12)

The Torah has chosen an unusual word in the Hebrew text to convey the meaning of "because." The word eikev, which is used to convey this meaning, has other interpretations ascribed to it. Apparently, the Torah selected this word to teach us a lesson. Rashi notes that eikev also means "heel." The implication, therefore, is that the individual must be scrupulous in mitzvah observance especially with those mitzvos that one tends to "trod upon with his heel." In other words, there are no mitzvos that

are of lesser importance. They all come from the same source and are all equally important. Horav Moshe Leib Sasover, zl, offered another connotation for this word. With each eikev, step, that a Jew takes, he must pause to think: Is he acting in consonance with Divine dictate, or is he perhaps acting slightly outside of the boundaries of right and wrong? Is he following the rules, or is he bending them?

Observance leaves no room for leeway. One either is observant, or he is not. We are always "on call." The Bobover Rebbe, Horav Ben Zion Halberstam, zl, was once visited by the chief of the Polish gendarmes. The chief related to the Rebbe his many taxing duties and responsibilities, "But, Rabbi, when I return home at the end of my day's work, I take off my cap and I am off duty." The Rebbe replied, "I guess since we never remove our yarmulke, even when we sleep, it means that a Jew is never off duty."

While this is certainly true, we wonder why it is so. Should one not be allowed a little leeway? Veritably, to ask this question bespeaks a lack of comprehension concerning the very nature of Torah and mitzvos. It is almost as if we are doing Hashem a "favor" by observing mitzvos, an idea that could not be further from the truth. Let us go back to the history of our receiving the Torah, so that we can have a better understanding of the nature of this gift.

Chazal teach us that prior to giving us the Torah, Hashem first offered it to the other nations of the world. They inquired what was written in it. When they heard that theft, adultery and murder were prohibited, they replied with a resounding, "No thanks." These nations were bound by immorality and evil. It was their way of life. The Torah would only hamper their development as nations of the world community. It was not for them. Throughout the millennia, they have proven that immorality, theft and murder were criteria for their nationhood. Until this very day, society at large is guilty of these cardinal sins.

When Hashem approached the Jews with His request, they immediately declared, "Naaseh v'nishmah," "We will do, and we will listen." They had no questions. Their response was positive and unequivocal. Information concerning the Torah and its contents was not necessary. They were willing to accept and embrace the Torah - with no questions asked.

Chazal continue by describing Hashem's reaction to their response, "Who revealed to My children this secret response, used only by My Heavenly Angels?" In other words, "We will do and we will listen" was an expression reserved for the Heavenly Angels. It was not the type of reply that is expected of mere mortals. This question was purely rhetorical because no one but Hashem could have provided Klal Yisrael with information that is reserved only for angels. Hashem wants us to notice what the Jewish People said and to grasp the profundity of this incredible statement. After all is said and done, however, what inspired the nation to express itself in such an unprecedented manner, with a statement that took powerful faith and conviction?

Horav Noach Weinberg, Shlita, explains that prior to receiving the Torah, Hashem had shared, through Moshe Rabbeinu, four seminal lessons to be conveyed to the Jewish People. He said, "So shall you say to the Bais Yaakov and relate to Bnei Yisrael (Shemos 19:3)." Four lessons - no more, no less - in this special order. "You saw what I did to the Egyptians (Shemos 19:4)." Lesson one: Egypt had been worshipping idols for years, but I did not destroy them until after they hurt you. "Then I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you close to Me (Shemos 19:4)." Lesson two: "I cared about you, and I protected you. And now if you listen to My Torah, all will be good for you. (Shemos 19:5)." Lesson three: "You will be more precious to Me than any other nation. "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of Priests and a Holy nation. (Shemos 19:6)." Lesson four: Nationhood. The nation will not only protect you, it will make you a nation destined for greatness.

The significance of Hashem's message is quite important. By observing the Torah, the Jewish nation would become a holy nation connected with the Almighty. They had witnessed Hashem's love for them. Imagine the Creator and Ruler of the world loved them and was doing everything possible for them. They were receiving an offer that they could not refuse. Bearing all of this in mind, how would any sensible person with a modicum of intelligence in his brain respond to such an offer? Let us explain this question with the following analogy. A father comes to his son to offer him an incredible opportunity. First, he prefaces his offer, "Son, I love you. Furthermore, everything I have ever done for you was because of this powerful love I have for you. Whatever I do is for your benefit. I have arranged a deal for you that will bring you much happiness and joy." If the son were to respond by saying, "Dad, it seems like something I would like to think about for a few days. I will study it, and if it seems really worthwhile, I will accept it," we would seriously send the son to an analyst for an evaluation!

His immediate response should likely be, "Yes! I will grab it. Whatever you say. When can I start?" The son is acutely aware that every experience he has ever had with his father has always been positive. He has always benefited greatly. Why should this opportunity be any different?

This is why Klal Yisrael responded with a resounding, "We will do, and we will listen!" They understood the reality of Torah and its benefit. We do not do Hashem a favor by performing mitzvos. On the contrary, it is Hashem's greatest gift. It is the gift of a lifetime!

Returning to our original question: What about a little "room" to maneuver in mitzvah observance? The answer is that unless we value every minute, every opportunity, to connect with Hashem via Torah and mitzvos, then we do not really understand and appreciate the wonderful gift that Hashem has bestowed on us. When we take into consideration what Torah does for us and all the wonderful "baggage" that comes along with it, then we would seek to imbue Torah into "every step" of our lives. It is that precious.

For the people that you took out of Egypt has become corrupt; they have strayed quickly from the way that I commanded them. (9:12)

The Yalkut Shimoni records a fascinating conversation between Klal Yisrael and Hashem. It begins by citing the pasuk in Yeshayahu 49:15, "Can a woman forget her baby, or not feel compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, but I would not forget you." In other words, Hashem does not forget His children - Klal Yisrael. The people came before Hashem and asked, "Since Hashem does not forget, perhaps You will not forget the sin of the Golden Calf!" Hashem replied, "This too, I will forget." The people countered, "Ribono Shel Olam, since You do 'forget,' perhaps You will forget how we acted at Har Sinai (when we received the Torah)." Hashem replied, "I will not forget you."

Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, derives a powerful lesson from this pasuk concerning positive actions and negative actions. We believe that ultimately the world will achieve its ultimate purpose: good will prevail; and evil will disappear. How will this occur? After all, it is not as if things are getting better and people are acting more appropriately. Regrettably, they are not. Evil is rampant. Morality is bankrupt. Society is becoming increasingly base with each ensuing generation as we distance ourselves further from the Almighty. How will we live "happily ever after"?

Apparently, a positive act, a good deed, creates an indelible impression upon the cosmos. It is there forever. If a person sins, however, although it presently creates a spiritual blemish in the universe,

it can be removed via teshuvah, repentance. In other words, the spiritual consequences of a maaseh tov, good deed, endure forever, while the blemish created by a sin is temporary. This was the basis of the dialogue between K'nesses Yisrael and Hashem. The Jewish nation feared that the spiritual blemish engendered in the world as a result of their sin with the Golden Calf was eternal. After all, did Hashem not declare that every punishment that Klal Yisrael would experience would have included therein a fragment of the payback for the Golden Calf? Apparently, this is a sin that will not ever be forgotten. Hashem's response to them was: "Do not worry. Even a sin as egregious as the Golden Calf can be resolved. One can repent for and be cleared of the iniquity. Yes, the sin can be 'forgotten'.

When the people heard this they wondered: if a human being's action can be erased - regardless of its severity - this might apply as well to a mitzvah. Thus, the Jew's response to the Giving of the Torah, their famous Naaseh v'nishmah, "We will do and we will listen," will also be erased as a result of their current sinful behavior. Hashem assured them that a good deed is never forgotten. Its place in the universe is engraved forever.

Therefore, the world can achieve its perfection through our teshuvah, repentance, and maasim tovim, positive, good deeds. The bad will be abrogated, and the good will forever remain to our benefit.

At that time Hashem said to me, "Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones. (10:1)

The Yalkut Shimoni contends that Moshe Rabbeinu was severely criticized for breaking the Luchos. The pasuk in Koheles 3:5 states: "There is a time to throw stones." When Moshe flung down the Luchos, Hashem was "upset" with him. He said, "Had you been the creator of these Luchos; had you hollowed out the stone and engraved the Luchos; had you put in the effort and sustained the pain involved in preparing them, you would not have been so quick to break them. I prepared them, and you broke them. Now you will make the second set of Luchos." Clearly, Hashem was unhappy with Moshe's initiative in breaking the Luchos. This Yalkut is not consistent with the Talmud Shabbos 87A, cited by Rashi in his commentary to Devarim 34:10, where Chazal relate that Hashem told Moshe, "Yeyasher Koach she'shibarto," which basically is a display of Hashem's gratitude to Moshe for acting so decisively. How does Hashem's gratitude coincide with His critique of Moshe?

Horav Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, explains that due to the elevated spiritual plane that Moshe achieved, he had to answer for his actions. Moshe's decision to break the Luchos was mandated by the situation that confronted him. He had to make a public statement. Torah and idol worship cannot co-exist. The Torah's pristine essence must be a part of the very fiber of our People. Yet, taking into consideration the "pain" that the Giver of the Torah was presently sustaining, together with all of the incredible strength and courage that Moshe displayed, there had to be recognition that his act of necessity caused "pain" and "hurt" to Hashem Yisborach. Moshe did the right thing, but he did not go all of the way. He did not share in Hashem's "pain" over the loss of the Luchos.

In Heaven, "they" explained Moshe's inaction as the result of a lack of yegiah, toil, in preparing the Luchos. They were not his creation. He was only the agent for its transmittal. It was the Divine Author that created the Luchos. He "felt" the loss much more than Moshe who was just delivering their message. This is why Moshe was instructed to "carve for yourself;" let him see what is involved in preparing the Luchos. While nothing is difficult for Hashem, Moshe was compelled to acknowledge the amount of "toil" that went into the first Luchos.

There is a powerful lesson to be derived from the above concept. When we sin, the last thing

that we think about is what we are doing to Hashem. True, Hashem is not a human being with feelings, but would it be so bad to acknowledge the love and toil that He put into this world - which we do easily ignore? Perhaps if we would look at life from a more practical, human perspective, we would act differently and be more cognizant of our spiritual calling.

He is your praise and He is your G-d, Who did for you these great and awesome things. (10:21)

The Mezritcher Maggid, zl, used this pasuk as the basis for a compelling statement. He comments that if one wants to ascertain his personal level of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven; if he wants to determine his level of emunah, faith in Hashem; if he seeks to identify to what extent Hashem is his G-d, the best barometer for this evaluation is his tefillah, the manner in which he prays. See how your tefillah appears. Is it from the heart or is it by rote? Is there passion and enthusiasm, or is it insipid and sterile? This idea applies to every time one speaks with Hashem: during the three daily tefillos; during bentching, when he offers his gratitude to Hashem for sustaining him; during the Shabbos tefillos; and even the zemiros sung during the Shabbos meal. Hu tehillasecha v'Hu Elokecha - "He is your praise and He is your G-d." In the same manner that He is your praise, in the manner that you praise Him - you indicate exactly to what extent and to what level He is your G-d.

I recently saw an anecdotal story from the Maggid, zl, of Warsaw, that has practical meaning relative to this idea. In a small village, there lived a devout Jew who rented a parcel of land from a wealthy landowner. One morning, the landowner decided he wanted to speak with his Jewish tenant. He arrived at his home just as his Jewish tenant was in the midst of Shacharis, morning prayers. He watched in awe as the man, wrapped in his Tallis, swayed back and forth, pouring out his heart to the Almighty. After waiting respectfully for the Jew to conclude his prayers, the landowner said, "Moshe, I have a wonderful opportunity for you. You see, I own a dancing bear. This is a very talented dancing bear, but, to my chagrin, many of my friends also have dancing bears. I need to be different. I must have something which they do not have. While I was observing you during your prayers, I thought to myself, would it not be unique to have a bear that prays like Moshe? Therefore, my dear friend, I would like you to train my bear to pray like you do."

"But, my dear sir, it is very difficult. In fact, it is almost impossible to teach a bear to pray," the Jew practically begged.

"There is nothing to talk about," the landowner said. "In two weeks time, there will be a contest among all the bear owners. My bear will win! If you do not succeed, you have to pack your bags and leave my property!"

The Jew had no choice but to accede to the landowner's request. That afternoon the bear was delivered to the Jew's home - ready to learn how to daven! The Jew came up with an idea that might just work. He found an old book whose pages were very thick. After smearing each page with honey, he gave the "sweet" book to the bear to do his thing. The bear opened the book, licked the page and proceeded to the next page. After the entire book was licked, the Jew smeared the book with honey, once again. This went on for two weeks as the bear hungrily licked through his "siddur." Finally, the day of the great test arrived. The Jew arrived together with the bear, prepared to demonstrate his handiwork. He walked the bear up to the podium and wrapped a sheet around the bear to give the appearance of a Tallis and gave it a book. This book was unlike its predecessor. It had no honey. When the bear turned to the first page and discovered that his treat was not there, he immediately turned to the

next, and the next, until he had turned the pages of the entire book. In frustration, the bear slammed the book closed and proceeded to leave.

When the landowner saw this, he became indignant with rage. "I told you to teach my bear how to pray, and all you have accomplished is presenting me with a bear that merely turns pages!" the landowner screamed.

The Jew calmly looked at the landowner and said, "Sir, I can take you to a number of synagogues in the big city where that is all their worshippers do - just turn pages."

How true this is. If one were to enter any shul, he would see worshippers supposedly davening, when actually all they are really doing is turning the pages of their Siddur, in between taking breaks to talk. While this is a disease all year in every community, it is especially significant to us at this time of the year as we prepare to entreat Hashem on behalf of ourselves and our families. The manner in which we daven is the barometer for determining our level of yiraas Shomayim. Perhaps the time has come to elevate both - our davening and our yiraas Shomayim.

This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances. (7:12)

The word eikav can also be translated as heel, which the Midrash explains alludes to those mitzvos which man might view as insignificant. Thus, eikav refers to those commandments that one figuratively tends to "step on with his heels." The Torah, therefore, assures the people that if they observe all mitzvos, even those "eikav" mitzvos, the neglected mitzvos, they can be secure in the knowledge that Hashem will reward them. Horav Sholom Y. Elyashiv, Shlita, adds that there are also aveiros, sins, that one "treads upon with his heels," referring to those transgressions that one frequently overlooks or, even worse, justifies. This is why the Tanna in Pirkei Avos 2:1, declares, "Be just as careful in performing a mitzvah kalah, light, less stringent mitzvah or a mitzvah which you think is not that important, as you are in doing a mitzvah that is important, for you never know which mitzvah will earn you a greater reward."

Chazal teach us that when Yonah HaNavi ran to Tarshish, he was sitting on the boat, calm and collected during a major storm at sea. The boat was bouncing around in the raging waters like a toy. All of the sailors began to pray to their respective gods. Each person entreated his pagan god. Yonah sat there with total equanimity. He even went to sleep. If we analyze the situation, he was probably correct in his assumption that the storm was not occurring because of him. There were members of every nation in the world - an entire United Nations. Certainly, enough immoral, murderous, thieving miscreants were on board to speculate safely that Yonah was not the focus of the storm. Here was a man who was a kadosh v'tahor, holy and pure. What could he have done wrong? He refused to go to Nineveh for the purpose of rebuking the people out of a deep, abiding love for Klal Yisrael. How would it look if Nineveh had listened to him immediately, while Klal Yisrael ignored his prophecies on a regular basis? This would incur the Middas HaDin, Attribute of Strict Justice, against the Jewish People. Yonah acted l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, by refusing to go to Nineveh. Thus, he could be certain that the storm could not be attributed to him.

So they threw lots and, lo and behold, they fell on Yonah. He announced, "It is not because of you. It is because of me. My sin is causing this storm - not yours." Rav Elyashiv explains that one does not know the value of mitzvos - the reward for the positive commandments and, likewise, the

punishment for the prohibited commandments.

We never think to blame ourselves. It is always someone else who is to blame for the "storms." If we look around, there is such filth, such sin, such immorality. Certainly, the raging storms are because of these "others." The venerable sage of our generation posits that the storm might be because we have a moral obligation to convey a prophecy, to rebuke, to reproach, to reach out with care and love - but certainly not to ignore and be complacent, accepting the indiscretions of our alienated brethren. Yonah HaNavi validated his refusal to communicate a prophecy, thereby stifling a mitzvah. He felt he was acting justly and properly. Hashem says to be careful of every mitzvah. He determines their intrinsic value and reward; we do not.

You should know in your heart that just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you. (8:5)

The hardships that Klal Yisrael underwent in the wilderness were an integral part of their development. As a father chastises his son, thereby preparing him for the future, so, too, does Hashem bring upon us various degrees of suffering that will temper our faith and fortify our conviction. Everyone experiences some sort of affliction. It comes in all sizes and shapes - each Divinely suited for the individual. How we respond determines how we benefit from this experience. Much has been written concerning yissurim, pain/affliction/troubles, the need for it, the benefit that is derived, and the proper attitude one must maintain in accepting Hashem's decree. I take the opportunity to share some of these insights with the readers.

Yissurim bring about yeshuah, salvation. This salvation also comes in many shapes and forms, and, thus, has different connotations to various people, depending upon their circumstances and mindset. The following analogy cited by Horav Leib Pinter, Shlita, sheds light on this issue. A wise king who, unfortunately, had not been blessed with an heir to his throne sought to find an appropriate succession to his monarchy. He decided to make a test that would involve all of the young boys of his constituency. He handed out a packet of seeds to each boy and instructed him to plant his individual seeds in a flower pot. The one whose flowers bloomed the fullest would become his successor.

Each boy left with his seeds and planted and nurtured them. Everyone succeeded in producing an impressive array of foliage. There was one boy who, regardless of how hard he tried, just could not get his seeds to produce anything substantial. He changed the dirt, added various fertilizers, watered and nurtured the seeds - to no avail. Nothing grew. Despondent, he arrived together with the other boys at the palace to display their projects and to find out who would win the coveted prize.

Each boy came before the king and presented his blooming flowerpot. The king took a quick look and said, "Next!" Nothing seemed to impress the king. Hundreds, thousands, filed by the king and - nothing - the king was simply not impressed. When the king saw the young boy whose flowerpot was empty, standing by the side, he called him over and asked, "Why are you not displaying your flowers?"

"I have no flowers," the boy replied. "I did everything possible to generate some growth from the seeds, but nothing seemed to work." The boy began to cry, "I even prayed that the flowers should bloom, but I was not answered. The flowers were not destined to grow."

Suddenly, the king declared, "You will be my son. You will inherit my throne." Understandably, all of those assembled were in a state of shock. Why would the king select the one boy whose flowers

did not grow?

The king turned to the people to explain his choice, "All of the seeds that I handed out had been ripe, and ripe seeds cannot possibly produce anything. Therefore, all those boys who presented me with flowers cheated. They exchanged the seeds I had given them for other seeds. The one boy who maintained his veracity - who was not willing to lie just to win - was this boy, whose seeds did not grow. He has the seeds of truth! He will follow me as king! The individual for whom integrity guides his life and truth is the foundation of his every endeavor, he is fit to reign over the country."

The same idea applies with regard to yeshuah, salvation. We pray to Hashem. We entreat Him with all forms of supplication. It seems that He does not respond. Yet, we continue to pray, to believe, to hope. We continue with the conviction that salvation can only come from Hashem. As we persist in our devotion to Hashem, never ceasing to implore His positive response, our faith becomes tempered and resolute. With every tear, our commitment is nurtured; with every sigh, our fidelity and trust become stronger and unequivocal. Ultimately, our tears and prayers will bring about salvation. It may not necessarily be the one for which we have been waiting, but it will be salvation nonetheless.

We have to know where to look, and we have to continue believing. Rav Pinter presents an inspiring thought. After Klal Yisrael passed through the Red Sea, they traveled for three days in the wilderness without water. They were thirsty. Finally, they saw a source of water in the distance. Understandably, they ran and "attacked" the water. Their joy was short-lived, for they soon discovered that the water was bitter. Can one imagine their emotions at that time? To have sustained so much suffering; to have been finally liberated, only to have their road to freedom blocked by the Red Sea. To have the Red Sea miraculously split before their very eyes; to see their Egyptian pursuers perish in the sea; to trudge three days without water, famished and broken, only to discover that the water which they had sought was bitter! When would it end?

They turned to Moshe Rabbeinu and asked, "Why? Why does Hashem not give us water? Were we taken out of Egypt only to die of thirst in the wilderness?" Hashem responded by showing Moshe a tree which was to be thrown into the water - and the water became sweet.

Klal Yisrael was to derive a lesson from this experience. When life throws you a curve, when the water that you are drinking suddenly turns bitter, know that nearby there is growing a tree that can sweeten the water. The question is where is this tree? How will we know which one is the tree that will save us? This is where tefillah, prayer, makes its entrance. Cry to Hashem. Ask Him to show you where the tree is located.

Let me add that, at times, the road to salvation and the actual key, the tree of salvation, is very bitter. The Mechilta says that the tree which sweetened the water was nes b'soch nes, a miracle within a miracle. The tree was bitter like the water, yet it made the water sweet. Hashem has His ways for carrying out the Divine Plan, but the tree is always there. We have to seek it out.

Oftentimes, we get carried away and overreact prematurely to a tzarah, troubling situation. Horav Shlomo Margolis, Shlita, relates that he once heard the following thought from Horav David Bliacher, zl, one of the foremost students of the Alter, zl, m'Novordhok. When Klal Yisrael neared the Red Sea, they began to cry out in fear. Hashem said to Moshe, "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to Bnei Yisrael and let them journey forth" (Shemos 14:15). Why was Hashem upset with Moshe? Klal Yisrael was in a grave situation: the Egyptians were pursuing them from one side, and the Red Sea was on the other. What else should they have done? Why should they not have cried? Moshe, their leader, was justified in turning to Hashem for assistance. What else should he have done?

Rav David explained that there were still a few steps before they reached the shore of the Red Sea. The situation was not yet hopeless. There was still time. Hashem's critique was: Why are you crying now? There is still time. The lesson is clear. A person must go on. He must tread forth, regardless of the situation, because salvation can come in the next few steps - just as it did for our ancestors at the shores of the Red Sea. One must be patient and trust in the Almighty. The miracle of Chanukah teaches us that when we least expect it, when everything seems so bleak, when everything around us seems to have crumbled - there is still hope. We must persevere by maintaining the belief that as long as we can go on, the opportunity for salvation is still open to us. May Hashem grant us the ability to see through the clouds of ambiguity that veil His salvation.

Now, O Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d. (10:12)

A rav, who was not a chassid of any particular Rebbe, arrived at the Seudas Rosh Chodesh, festive meal in honor of Rosh Chodesh, of Horav Yissachar Dov, zl, m'Radushitz. He sat down at the Rebbe's table to observe the proceedings. After a few moments, the Rebbe asked him, "Why is it that misnagdim, those who are not necessarily pro-chassidus, do not celebrate with a meal in honor of Rosh Chodesh? After all, it is clearly stated in the Shulchan Aruch that one should participate in a Seudas Rosh Chodesh?"

When the Rebbe saw that no response was forthcoming, he continued, "Let me explain the reason. There is a difference between one who is a chassid and one who is not a chassid. If one who is not a chassid performs a mitzvah, he places it "on account" in his "bag" of mitzvos for safekeeping. If he transgresses a negative commandment, he is upset, and he places it in his 'bag' of sins. One who is a chassid however, has a totally different approach concerning his avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. He is always concerned, lest he has not carried out his service to Hashem on the optimum level. He is always afraid that he might sin. Furthermore, even when he performs a mitzvah, he does not place it in his 'bag' of mitzvos, because he fears that he has not applied himself properly at the time of its performance, and perhaps it is not worthy of being included as a mitzvah.

"Chazal teach us that during the time of the Bais Hamikdash, the Mizbayach, Altar, served as atonement for man's sins. Now that we no longer have these Batei Mikdash, this atonement is achieved through man's table. In other words, when a person prepares and eats a meal with the proper intentions and devotions, it will effect atonement for him. The korban of Rosh Chodesh would be mechaper, atone, for a sin committed unknowingly. For instance, if one were to eat kodoshim, sacrificial flesh, while he was tamei, ritually contaminated; if he were unaware of his state of tumah throughout his entire meal, the korban Rosh Chodesh would serve as atonement.

"This type of sin, in which one does not know throughout the entire performance of an activity whether it has been carried out properly, is something to which chassidim are acutely sensitive. They are never sure if the mitzvah that they have performed was carried out to the optimum requirements. They are always troubled, lest they missed something or have not had the perfect kavanah, intention. Thus, they participate in the Seudas Rosh Chodesh. This traditional meal serves as a penance to atone for their 'mitzvos.' This is their way of seeing to it that their mitzvos achieve the proper standing." This is the meaning of yiraas Shomayim: Maintaining a constant concern that we are not serving Hashem properly. This attitude is the precursor to - and foundation of all - mitzvah performance, for if one succeeds in maintaining such a standard in his avodas Hashem, then he will see to it not to fail in any mitzvah. The key to all mitzvos is fear of Hashem and the attitude this fear engenders. This will

generate a feeling and desire to follow in Hashem's ways and perform His mitzvos to the fullest extent.

This, explains the Sfas Emes, is the underlying meaning of the pasuk. First, the pasuk begins by saying that Hashem asks only one thing of us: yiraah, fear. It then goes on to exhort us to follow in His ways, to love Him and serve Him with all our heart and soul. Is it one thing or many? Apparently, all Hashem asks is for us to fear Him. It is just that through a sense of fear that is based on integrity, one merits the other attributes as well.

The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh explains that this is the meaning of the word v'atah, (and) now. The Torah is telling us that for "now" all Hashem asks is yiraah, but after one has acquired the attribute of fear of Hashem, he will merit to go further and higher in his service of the Almighty.

*Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve gods of others.
(11:16)*

Rashi explains v'sartem, and you turn astray, to be a reference to one's departure from Torah study. This will result in his capitulation to idol worship. One who leaves the Torah turns to idols. It seems a bit of an extreme statement. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, has been very successful in its function of leading man to sin. It has followed a tried and proven method of slowly and patiently leading man to sin, until one day, it is able to convince him of the clincher - idol worship. That is certainly, however, not the first step. Why, with regard to Torah study, does one turn to idol worship almost immediately? What happened to the "process"?

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains this with a powerful analogy. Two nations are at war with each other. Even when one seems to have triumphed, his success is not assured until he has taken away his enemies' weapons. As long as his enemy has access to his munitions, he can rebuild his army and return to battle. However, if the victor relieves the vanquished of his weapons, he has no means of returning to the battlefield. Without weapons one cannot fight. Under such circumstances, victory is complete.

A parallel exists in our constant battle with the yetzer hora. While the evil inclination sways and causes us to sin, the insubordination is not equivocal. We have not yet severed our relationship with Hashem. Through teshuvah, repentance, one can return and be accepted. The door is still open. The yetzer hora's success is short-lived. If, however, the yetzer hora has succeeded in convincing an individual to renege Torah study, to leave the halls of the bais hamedrash, it has then succeeded in taking from him his weapons. Without Torah, one no longer has the munitions for carrying out a successful battle against the yetzer hora. Thus, if one leaves Torah, his next stop is idol worship, because he has nothing with which to repel the powerful effect of the yetzer hora.

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, adds that we can now understand why the sin of bitul Torah, wasting time from Torah study, is so grave. Indeed, concerning any other sin, even morality, murder and idol worship, Hashem will patiently tolerate the infraction. The opportunity for repentance is still there. The yetzer hora can still be bested. Once the yetzer hora has convinced him to close his Gemora, to leave the bais hamedrash, the individual no longer has the means for battling the yetzer hora. If one does not learn, he does not really know what is wrong and from what he needs to stay away. The yetzer hora has won.

Arise, descend quickly from here, for the people... has become corrupt; they have strayed quickly from the way... they have made themselves a molten image. (9:12)

The Torah here records Klal Yisrael's sin in the phrase, "they made themselves a molten image." In Parashas Ki Sissa, the Torah elaborates and "adds" three more sins to their original iniquity. After creating the idol, they bowed down to it; they sacrificed to it; and they declared "These are your gods, Yisrael!" Creating the Golden Calf was a terrible sin, but venerating it through service and sacrifice magnified their sin. Why does Moshe Rabbeinu seem to gloss over the additional sins, focusing only on the actual creation of the idol?

At first glance, we suggest a simple explanation. The making of the idol involved a major segment of the nation. What followed, however, worshipping it and the other invidious activities, were sins perpetrated by only a small fraction of the people. Moshe was addressing the sin that involved the entire nation - or - at least, its majority.

Horav Shmuel Truvitz, zl, offers an insightful explanation that focuses on the root of sin. In the Midrash Tanchuma, Parashas Vayikra, Chazal explain the concept of Aveirah gorreres aveirah, "Sin leads to another sin." An individual sins inadvertently and hardly notices it. He does not, however, realize that now the entranceway to sinning has advertently been opened. Thus, the primary criticism against the individual who stands ready to embark on a dangerous and evil path away from Torah and mitzvah observance, concerns his initial sin. He is to be blamed only for his earliest misdeed. Everything else "follows" naturally, because Aveirah gorreres aveirah. A natural consequence of falling into the abyss of sin is that the sinner will continue to fall.

He also cites Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, who, in one of his letters, explains the statement made by Chazal in the Talmud Succah 52a. The Talmud relates that in the End of the Days, Hashem will slaughter the yetzer hora, evil inclination, in front of the people. To the righteous, the evil inclination will appear as a large, insurmountable mountain. They will wonder, "How were we able to conquer this mountain?" In contrast, the wicked will view it as a hairbreadth, which will cause them to wonder, "How is it that we could not vanquish it?" In other words, the righteous and the wicked will have totally opposing perspectives on the yetzer hora. How are we to explain this?

Rav Yisrael explains that every sin is weighed and measured according to the challenge it presents to the sinner. The easier and less challenging it is for a person to withstand the temptation of sin, the greater is the demand against him for committing the sin. In contrast, one who must surmount a powerful challenge does not receive as extreme a punishment.

We now understand the words of Chazal. A rasha, wicked person, has not always been wicked. At one point, he was a simple Jew. The yetzer hora did not seem to be so overpowering. Only after his first act of sin did the process begin, and Aveirah gorreres aveirah. Now, the sin appears to him to be as tall as a mountain. The more one sins, the more difficult it is for him to refrain from sin. The rasha, evil man, is acutely aware that there are serious consequences to his actions. Yet, he continues in his iniquity. Why? He thinks that since, with each sinful act, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to desist from his sinful behavior, Hashem will take this into consideration and limit his punishment. The more sin, the greater the difficulty and, therefore, the punishment should be commensurate. When the time of the advent of Moshiach comes, however, the sinner will have a rude awakening. Suddenly, he will see that the sin was actually like a hairbreadth. It was no accident. He could have halted his sinful behavior at any time he so pleased. What challenges he encountered were the result of his original sin -

which was an act of unmitigated defiance. The rest was simply a continuation of aveirah gorreres aveirah. It was entirely his fault.

In contrast, the righteous person works at his spiritual development, constantly seeking ways to overcome the challenges that confront him on the road to his spiritual destiny. Because he works at it, the road to success has seemed easy. The yetzer hora has not been a factor, because he labored with great intensity to succeed. True, mitzvah gorreres mitzvah, so it should have been easy, but Hashem looks at the first mitzvah, the genesis of the tzaddik's spiritual ascension. It was not easy then, and Hashem will take that moment into consideration as He rewards the tzaddik for his extreme dedication.

We now understand why the primary focus is placed on the creation of the Golden Calf, despite its apparent insignificance in comparison to the ensuing sins. That is the specific difference: the other sins followed. They were not the primary sin that catalyzed the proverbial ball rolling. This sin changed everything. When Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, they had reached an unprecedented level of spiritual ascendancy. The Golden Calf changed all that, as it caused them to fall deep into the nadir of sin and eventual moral depravity.

We find this often in the world of chinuch, Torah education. A slight change, a minor deviation, is noticed in a student's demeanor. His davening is just not the same. He changes his mode of dress - slightly. His hairstyle seems a bit different than in the past. All of these actions may be nothing, or, they might signal the beginning of a lifestyle change that must be halted - now.

Now, O Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d. (10:12)

Hashem asks very "little" of us: fear of Heaven. This very little thing is the most important aspect in being a faithful, observant Jew. Two questions come to mind: First, what exactly does the term yiraas Shomayim, Fear of Heaven, mean? Second, does not the idea of fear go against everything we believe in and preach in today's day and age? Love should be the optimum goal for a Jew. Fear can be overwhelming. Can a person live in fear and still function properly? Apparently, fear of Heaven has a different meaning than the "fear" to which we are accustomed.

Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl, explains that fear of Heaven is not the same fear as being afraid of harm. It does not mean actually being afraid of something. Fear of Heaven is something one experiences out of a profound sense of reverence, awe, a deep-rooted feeling of admiration, appreciation and recognition that accompany the knowledge that one always stands in the presence of the Almighty G-d. It is the type of fear one feels when he walks into the Capitol and gazes at the Declaration of Independence or enters the Metropolitan Museum of Art and comes face to face with a Rembrandt. One would never reach out and touch the canvas, even if it were permitted, for fear that he would do something wrong to the canvas. He stands within touching distance of one of the most significant pieces of art or history, and he is afraid to touch it. Why? Because there is a clear boundary that he may not trespass. The canvas is off limits; it is untouchable. One is afraid.

The world in which we live is perfect. Our bodies are perfect. Hashem's creations reflect a perfect symmetry, a masterpiece of perfection. We have no right to defile it. We must realize that if we taint this perfect creation, we will damage the perfect symmetry and harmony of the cosmos to some degree. Hashem sets the equilibrium of His world. If we really appreciate its beauty and grandeur, the sense of fear envelops us to the point that we would not dare do anything that would disturb either the physical or the spiritual balance of this world.

How does one achieve this sense of appreciation, this fear of Heaven? It is only through the study of Torah. It is not through the study of morals, ethics and the sciences. History proves this point. Wars, pogroms, greed, chauvinism, a total breakdown of society, have not been prevented through the study of ethics and morals, science and the humanities. One either has Torah, or he has absolutely nothing! The breakdown of contemporary society is a reflection of a lack of yiraas Shomayim. Otherwise, how could people act the way they do?

Yiraas Shomayim is the result of an appreciation of the harmonious integration, the symbiotic assimilation of the material and spiritual dimensions of this world, an appreciation that can be accomplished only through Torah study. Rav Freifeld adds that, just as there is a material ecology, there is also a spiritual ecology and an ensuing integrated ecology of both systems. One must be aware of the Almighty's will, the modes of behavior that He designed for the unified cosmos that He created, lessons that can only be derived through Torah study. The Torah is Hashem's blueprint for Creation and His book of directions for His creations to follow. We must immerse ourselves in its profundities and delve into its lessons. Every breach of the Torah causes a transgression of the Shulchan Aruch, Code of Jewish Law, which introduces a sour note in the incredible symphony of Creation. If we follow the guidelines and learn the lessons, we will develop the appreciation and be instilled with true yiraas Shomayim. Fear of Heaven is something one develops after he understands and appreciates the greatness of Hashem and His creations.

Rather, it is your own eyes that see all the great work of Hashem, which He did. (11:7)

The Torah says that we should be able to "see" Hashem's greatness by looking at His handiwork. While this is certainly true, regrettably, there are many who do not see. Why is it that some see clearly and others seem to have impaired vision? Horav Mordechai Pogremonski, zl, compares this to a visitor to Paris. His host wants to show his guest around the city and showcase its magnificence. First, he takes him to the world-famous Louvr'e Museum. As he points out the world-famous paintings, he is taken aback that the visitor is unimpressed. They walk over to a Rembrandt. "Is this not something incredible to behold?" the host asks. "I do not know what you see about this painting that impresses you so. I see nothing more than smudges and scratches," the visitor replies.

This went on all day. Every time the host showed his guest another aspect of the city, the visitor replied that he saw nothing but scratches and smudges. Finally, the host asked his guest if he could see his glasses. "Certainly," he responded. Lo and behold, when he looked at the glasses, he saw that they were badly smudged and scratched. He could see, but not through his glasses.

The same idea applies to life in this world. Many of us are wearing smudged and scratched glasses through which it is impossible to see the greatness of Hashem. Our eyes need to be attuned to what they are to perceive, or else we will see nothing more than scratches and smudges. The glasses that will improve and enhance our vision are the spectacles of the Torah which provides us with a clarity of vision, unimpaired and untainted by any external particles or blemishes.

This is what David Hamelech means when he asks Hashem (Tehillim 119:18), "Uncover my eyes, so that I may see the wonders from Your Torah." The text is enigmatic. It should have read, "So that I may see the wonder in Your Torah." Apparently, David Hamelech is intimating that it is through the spectacles provided by the Torah that we are able to see Hashem's greatness. Without the Torah, our vision remains critically impaired.

And to serve Him with all your heart. (11:13)

Le'vavchem is written in the plural. Certainly, man has only one heart. Chazal explain that this is a reference to the two inclinations that work simultaneously within man. The yetzer tov, good inclination, and the yetzer hora, evil inclination, are to be found only within the human being. Angels do not have a yetzer hora. They are "programmed" to carry out Hashem's bidding. Man, on the other hand, has two contradictory forces working within him. Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, notes this uniqueness of man. His ability to make one dominant over the other - while maintaining divergent emotions within one personality - distinguishes him from the angels. Furthermore, man has both of these forces playing active roles in his life - simultaneously.

We see this idea in action in the dialogue that ensued between the Angels and Hashem as Klal Yisrael stood at the shores of the Red Sea. As the water split and the Egyptians drowned, the Heavenly Angels sought to say Shirah, sing a song of praise, to the Almighty. Hashem's response was, "My creations are drowning in the sea, and you want to say Shirah?" Nonetheless, Klal Yisrael did sing Shirah, to which Hashem responded, "For them, I Have waited." He wanted to hear our Shirah, yet He eschewed the Shirah of the Angels. Why?

Rav Eliyahu Meir explains that when an Angel is filled with joy, he cannot sense any other emotion. He cannot feel pain when he feels joy. A person, however, has the ability to sense pain to the point that he is anguished and brought to tears - and still transcend his grief in order to serve the Almighty with complete joy. Avraham Avinu did this when he was instructed to prepare his beloved son, Yitzchak Avinu, as a sacrifice. He stood there willingly, with complete equanimity, ready to carry out Hashem's Will. Yet, Chazal tell us that he stood knee-deep in tears for his son! He did not ignore his emotions of fatherly love. He was not stone cold as he looked into the eyes of his dear son as he raised the knife about to serve Hashem. No, he ignored nothing; he transcended his emotions!

Hashem does not want us to put our human emotions to rest. Instead, He wants us to acknowledge and experience these emotions, but, when necessary, to override them for Him. Avraham stood there in control of his full complement of emotions. He sublimated his fatherly love to Hashem, because he was asked to do so. He was not a heartless, unfeeling robot. He was a loving father who carried his love to the highest level - serving his Father in Heaven.

During Klal Yisrael's darkest periods, this dual emotion was manifest by those who were able to transcend the pain and sorrow to continue to serve the Almighty with a sense of joy and pride. The Gerrer Rebbe would not allow the pain and grief inflicted by the terrors of the Holocaust to diminish his Oneg Shabbos. He experienced the sweet joy of Shabbos amidst deprivation and misery.

It was Friday night, and the chazzan began to chant the Lecha Dodi prayer with the traditional Gerrer niggun, tune. The Rebbe sang along, enunciating the words and emphasizing the melody. His son was standing by, staring incredulously at his great father. "Tateh, tateh," he cried out forlornly, "Maasei yadai tov'eim bayam ve'atem omrim shirah?" "(My, Hashem's) creations are drowning in the sea, and you want to sing Shirah?" This is a reference to the Angels who wanted to sing praise to the Almighty when the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea. The son was asking his father how could he sing with joy amidst all of the suffering and death? The Rebbe looked at his son with piercing eyes, replying with a calm, strong voice, "My dear son, we must always sing Shirah. It is up to the Almighty if He chooses to listen, but we must sing regardless." B'chol levavechem!

And now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you but to fear Hashem, your G-d. (10:12)

In the Talmud Menachos 43b, Chazal derive from the words mah Hashem, "What does Hashem", as alluding to the word meiah, one hundred; that a Jew should recite one hundred berachos, blessings, daily. What is the relationship between the recitation of berachos and yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven? Horav Yaakov Belfus, Shlita, in his sefer Chaim Shel Torah, gives the following analogy: A small town in Europe lived an idyllic lifestyle; quiet, pleasant, away from the tumult of the large cities. There was a road that passed through the town which was originally used by the peddlers in the community for their horses and buggies. With the introduction of the automobile, lifestyles changed. The little road soon became a busy highway, dividing the town in half. The quick pace of the speeding cars back and forth on the highway became a danger for the citizens of the town and their families. People feared for the safety of their children. Suggestions poured in, but nothing practical enough to address the danger posed by the highway. One day, someone came up with a functional idea to solve the problem: speed bumps, every few feet. Along the road that traversed the town, speed bumps were placed to slow down the cars. Life soon reverted to its original slow-paced, idyllic state.

This same idea applies to yiraas Shomayim. The Rema in the beginning of Orach Chaim, writes that Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid, "I place Hashem before me constantly," is an important rule of the Torah and a crucial step for those who follow in Hashem's ways. A person's day involves many different circumstances, many of which remove him from the perfect environment for mitzvah observance. Thus, he needs reminders to keep him on track to remember that he is always in Hashem's Presence. The hundred brachos that one is to recite daily are one hundred meetings with Hashem. A berachah recited with the proper kavanah, intention/concentration, enunciated correctly, is a rendezvous with the Almighty during which one becomes acutely aware that he is in the Presence of Hashem. This catalyzes a heightened sense of yiraas Shomayim.

If one only takes the time to think about the meaning of the words Baruch Atah Hashem, Blessed are You, Hashem, he would realize that he is speaking to the Almighty. This alone should generate a feeling of fear and awe.

A talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who was critically ill came to Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl, asking for advice concerning what he could do to merit a speedy recovery. Rav Shlomo Zalman replied, "I do not think that I am the appropriate person to ask, but I know what I would do if I was in your situation. I would be meticulous in reciting the one hundred brachos we are to recite daily."

He carries out the judgment of the orphan and widow. (10:18)

The attitude of our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, towards widows and orphans was exemplary. While they empathized and were sensitive to the needs of all Jews, they were especially circumspect with those individuals who were alone. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, would go out of his way to ease the plight and loneliness of a widow. He would say, "Any widow, regardless of her strong nature, experiences a feeling of loneliness. It is difficult for her to acclimate herself to her new circumstances. After a while, the reality of her husband's demise seems to settle and she begins to find comfort and the

strength to go on. Everything that one can do to assist such a woman in need achieves a great mitzvah."

One of Rav Shach's close students recounts how he was walking down one of the streets of Yerushalayim when he saw his venerable rebbe going into an apartment building. He followed him up a few floors, to the home of a widow whose husband had passed away a few years earlier. Her husband had been a student of Rav Shach and the Rosh Yeshivah felt a strong obligation to see to the needs of his widow. Rav Shach at the time was over 100-years-old. He sat with the widow for about half-an-hour and talked. He then played with her young children. One can only imagine what such a visit did for the mood in her home.

The Bais HaLevi remarried later on in life after his wife passed away. His second wife was a widow with a family of her own. The Bais HaLevi took her children into his home and treated them as if they were his own. Indeed, if he felt that his own children were mistreating his wife's children, he would exclaim, "An orphan!," and he would then punish his children. This, despite the fact that his own children were orphans. The Bais HaLevi spared no expense in caring for his wife's children, to the extent that when he passed away his own children were in dire financial straits.

This legacy of caring for widows and orphans was transmitted to the next generation. Once Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, was presiding over an important meeting of rabbanim when a widow came to the door and asked to speak with him. He immediately left the room and spoke to her for about half-an-hour. Those in attendance were reasonably impressed until the widow later said, "That is nothing. His father (the Bais HaLevi) would spend hours talking with me."

The Brisker Rav, zl, was once approached by a student in Yeshivas Chevron and asked for advice concerning a shidduch, matrimonial match. The rav replied that he does not advise in these issues. The young man then said, "I have no father with whom to discuss my issues, thus, I came to the rav." The Brisker Rav replied, "If that is the case, you may come to me at any time with any sort of question, and I will see to it that you receive the necessary advice."

The Manchester Rosh HaYeshivah, Rav Yehudah Zev Segal, zl, was known for his sensitive and caring heart. This was especially true with regard to widows and orphans. He showered orphans with love and concern and provided emotional support and guidance, and, at times, financial assistance to widows. When no one called, he would call them to reiterate his offer. Once, while paying a shivah call, comforting the bereaved, to a student upon the loss of his mother, Rav Segal confided that from the time the student's father had died more than twenty years earlier, his mother had visited him weekly to pour out her troubles and discuss her situation.

When visiting rabbanim in various communities in England, he made it a point to also visit the widows of the rabbanim he had previously visited. He explained that it was extremely painful to a widow when she no longer could play hostess to those who used to come to pay her husband their respects. He made every effort to attend the wedding of an orphan. When one of his students, a baal teshuvah, who was raised in a secular home devoid of Torah, was forced to leave the yeshivah and return home upon the death of his father, the Rosh Yeshivah told him, "From now on, I will be your father."

Shortly after the Rosh HaYeshivah's passing, the family received the following letter: I include an excerpt from it because of its message to all of us.

"I have been a widow for twenty-one years. Many people do not realize that what is missing most for a person who is alone, is the warmth and caring of another human being. This is where the Rosh HaYeshivah excelled. His genuine warmth and concern was comforting. His initial "How are

you?", and his inquiring about my health, livelihood, and all other pertinent matters, always gave me the feeling that someone cared for me. It also gave me the strength I needed to continue carrying my burden. His readiness to listen to my problems at any time and to give them his utmost attention was quite unique...

"I do not know how I could have managed without his emotional support and guidance all these difficult years. May he be a meilitz yosher, intercessor, for us all."

As a postscript, I would like to add a point and be so bold as to draw focus on another type of "orphan" - those boys or girls whose parents either do not care, or are incapable of caring for their emotional, spiritual and even physical needs. Every community has its dysfunctional families who need our assistance. Are these children to be viewed in a different light? They also have no one to turn to, or in some cases, the one's they turn to are detrimental to them. We must open our hearts, homes and minds to them as well, because they also need our love.

To love Hashem, Your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (11:13)

In the first passage of Shema, the Torah adds u'b'chol me'odecha, "and with all your money." What is the meaning of this term? Let me share with you two examples of this quality. The Satmar Rebbe, zl, was a towering figure in a spiritual and inspirational sense. His encyclopedic knowledge was only surpassed by his love for his fellow Jew. His devotion to mitzvos was an inspiration to all who came in contact with him. When he came to these shores, a remnant of the fires of the Holocaust, he rallied the other survivors not to lose hope, not to fall prey to apathy, but instead to embrace the Torah and mitzvos with fervor and love, and serve the Almighty as they did before the tragic Holocaust. Slowly, he succeeded in establishing yeshivos, chadorim, schools for girls, chesed organizations and just about everything that was needed for a vibrant Jewish community. He did not stop with the Williamsburg section in Brooklyn, New York. He set his sights westward and turned to Chicago, to give encouragement and succor to the survivors of that community. The Rebbe gathered his strength and with great resolve traveled to Chicago with the hope that his presence would inspire a renaissance of European Yiddishkeit in the Midwest.

The Rebbe spent seven days in Chicago, during which people from all walks of life thronged to see him. Some came for blessings, others came to imbibe his Torah, and still others came just to listen, to see, to remember what it used to be like in Europe. People gave him money. With every berachah there was a pidyon, money for redemption, and over the week the Rebbe amassed a small fortune. Four thousand dollars was an incredible amount of money in those days - enough money to support his many charitable endeavors in New York. Yes, the trip was very successful in many ways.

Prior to leaving town, the Rebbe made a point to look into the state of the community mikveh, ritualarium. After speaking with a number of lay leaders, he discovered that the mikveh was in dire need of repair. "Why is it not being fixed?" asked the Rebbe incredulously. "We have no money," they replied. "No money for a mikveh! How is it possible that there is money for everything else and for taharas Yisrael, family purity, there is no money?" the Rebbe asked.

The Rebbe began explaining to them the significance of a kosher mikveh in a community until they all agreed that something must be done immediately to repair the mikveh. "How much money is needed?" asked the Rebbe.

"Approximately \$5,000 dollars," they replied.

The Rebbe did not waiver for a moment as he took out from his briefcase the \$4,000 dollars that he had raised in Chicago, and said, "Here, take this money and I will personally sign a note for the remaining one thousand dollars, but, there will be a mikveh in Chicago."

The Rebbe returned to New York with empty pockets and another thousand dollars in debt, but his heart was overflowing with joy. He had been able to express his unequivocal love to Hashem with "all his money."

Horav Nachum, zl, m'Chernobel was told that a nearby community was in need of a mikveh. He turned to one of the great philanthropists of that time and said, "I will sell you my portion in Gan Eden for your contribution to build the mikveh in that community." The man jumped at the notion. What an unparalleled opportunity. The Chernobler's Gan Eden was certainly impressive. To be able to acquire it for mere money was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

When the Chernobler was later asked what motivated him to sell his Gan Eden for a mikveh, he responded, "The Torah instructs us to love Hashem b'chol me'odecha, "with all your money." I have not been blessed with material abundance. I do not have anything of monetary value that I can give up for Hashem. The only item of value that I possess is my portion in the World to Come. I am thus compelled to sell it in order to fulfill the mitzvah of serving the Almighty "with all my money." Otherwise, my Krias Shema which I recite daily is meaningless."

We now have a glimpse of what it means to serve Hashem with all that we possess.

To love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart. (11:13)

Rashi explains that one must serve Hashem for no other reason than because of deep, abiding love for Him. We are to serve Him with all our heart, which Chazal interpret as a reference to tefillah, prayer, which should emanate from the heart. Perhaps, we might add, that when one prays, it should be indicative that his prayer is out of love for Hashem, not for personal motive. Everything we do should be a reflection of our unequivocal love for the Almighty. We do nothing for ourselves.

I recently read a beautiful analogy in *Touched by a Story I*, by Rabbi Yechezkel Spero, which can be applied here. The story took place in Yerushalayim during the second World War as Rommel and his Afrika Corps were getting closer to the Holy Land. The mood in the country was one of fear and anxiety. Tensions rose as the people prepared for the worst. The Shomer Emunim Shul, in the heart of the Meah Shearim district was the place to be on Simchas Torah. The dancing and singing would attain such fervor that one felt a spiritual ascendancy like no other time of the year. That year, regrettably, the impending doom took its toll on the worshippers and the davening was listless, without the usual heart and passion. After a few minutes, the rav of the shul, Horav Aharon Roth, ordered the dancing to come to a halt as he addressed the crowd.

"My dear friends, I would like to share a story with you that I feel has great meaning for us. There was once a king who decided to make for himself a very festive and unique birthday party. He sent out letters throughout the land inviting the most graceful dancers, the finest musicians, and the most creative choreographers. They were all to assemble dressed in the most lavish outfits for the grand event.

"All was arranged and the special day arrived. Everything was as meticulously planned. What a sight it was. The music, the dancers, the outfits - everything blended together in a most unique harmony as truly befits a king's party. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, the king noticed a slight commotion in the back as an elderly, crippled man struggled to make his way to the dance floor. Not only was he handicapped, he was also blind and, thus, was bumping into the tables and chairs.

"After much exertion, the man finally made it to the dance floor and began to hobble around in a makeshift dance using his crutches as means of support. The king was mesmerized as he ignored the rest of the show and focused on the poor, wretched man who was doing his best to maintain his balance.

"One of the king's servants was taken aback with this sight and asked for an explanation. 'My king, we have assembled here tonight the finest choreographed dances, yet, you ignore everyone but that poor cripple who is hobbling around on his crutches.'

"The king smiled and explained, 'You are right. All those who have gathered here tonight are truly talented and their performance is certainly exemplary. But, let me ask you, are they not deriving personal enjoyment from their performance? Are they dancing solely for me, or are they also satisfying a personal desire? But the cripple has nothing personal to gain from his dancing. He cannot see, he cannot dance. Yet, he does so because I requested it. He is acting solely for me! Look at his face, how contorted it is with pain. But, he continues to dance, because he wants to please me. That is why his dancing is so precious to me - because it is for me.'

"My dear friends," Rav Aharon concluded, "In past years our dancing was different. We danced for Hashem, but we also danced for ourselves. We derived personal joy and benefit from the dancing. This year, however, with Hitler pounding down on our doorstep and the fate of the Jewish People on our minds, we have the unique opportunity to dance solely for Hashem. Let us dance tonight - for Him!"

Many of us pray with great concentration and devotion - but, we pray for ourselves. We should aspire to elevate our prayer so that we pray to please Hashem. When we will pray for Him, he will listen to us.

For just as a man chastises his son, Hashem, your G-d, chastises you. (8:5)

Yesurim in Hebrew also indicates suffering. Hence, the suffering we sustain in this world is actually Hashem's chastisement of us. Perhaps this is the only way one can endure the pain and anguish of suffering: he knows it comes from a loving Father. He also knows that he is not alone in his suffering. I once visited a young woman who was suffering through the terrible pain of end-stage cancer. I wondered what to say to her. Her life was dependent upon a miracle. The pain she sustained was excruciating. The mental anguish she suffered knowing that she would probably not live to see her son's Bar-Mitzvah, her daughter's chasunah, was overwhelming. I told her the truth, that she was not alone. Hashem was with her in her travail, because everything that she was enduring was from Him. I did not know the reason. The fact was, however, that she was not alone. From that moment on, she faced the future with a positive attitude. There was to be no future, but she was prepared to accept her fate with a renewed strength. She was not alone.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, suffered a number of personal tragedies that would have destroyed the average person. Eight of his eleven children died in his lifetime, most of them in the prime of their youth or early middle age. His strength of character and trust in the Almighty were incredible. He never once uttered as much as a sigh of complaint over his lot in life. Typical of his personality is the following note which he wrote to his brother during the terrible years of famine and illness that ravaged Yerushalayim during World War I. He wrote the following lines shortly after burying two sons, a son-in-law and a grandson:

"My dear brother,

I received your precious letter. It is difficult for me to write. Our Father in Heaven has taken away from me to the World of Truth my dear son Shmuel Binyamin, who had lain ill with typhus for fourteen days. He was a man at the apex of his achievement, and we had expected great things from him. The ways of G-d are hidden, but we believe with complete faith that everything that appears to us now as incomprehensible - like the mystery of the world in its entirety - will have an explanation in the future, when it will become clear that it was all for the good. This is actually the underlying meaning of our Kaddish prayer."

Rav Yosef Chaim was wont to relate the story of the chasid who went to the Mezritcher Maggid, zl, and asked, "Rebbe, how is it possible to fulfill Chazal's dictum that one must bless Hashem when misfortune occurs just as wholeheartedly as when good fortune occurs?"

The Mezritcher responded, "Go to the home of my disciple, Rav Zushia (m'Annipole), and you will understand."

The chasid did as he was instructed. When he arrived at Rav Zushia's home, he was taken aback with the abject poverty which he saw. Moreover, Rav Zushia was not a well person. Yet, he spent his entire day in avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty. The chasid entered the home and told Rav Zushia, "The Maggid sent me to you to find an answer to my query. How can it be expected of a person to react in the same manner to misfortune as to good fortune?"

Rav Zushia looked at his visitor incredulously and said, "I am afraid there must be some error! I have no idea why the Rebbe would send you to me. I have never experienced misfortune in my life. In fact, I have no idea what misfortune is!"

While this narrative gives us insight into the profound perspective of Rav Zushia, it also indicates the total acquiescence to accepting Divine judgment that exemplified Rav Yosef Chaim's life.

Bnei Yisrael journeyed from Beeros Bnei Yaakov to Moserah; there Aharon died. (10:6)

The story of Aharon Hakohen's passing is juxtaposed upon the breaking of the Luchos. Chazal derive from here that the death of a tzaddik carries with it the same impact as the breaking of the Luchos. Chazal teach us that when a tzaddik passes from this world, he is immediately replaced by another tzaddik. Once the sun "sets" on one tzaddik, it begins to shine on another. This is especially true if the son of a tzaddik is eminently qualified and capable to assume his father's leadership role. Aharon passed away from this world after an exemplary "career" of leadership and inspiration. His son, Elazar, assumed the position of Kohen Gadol. If this is the case, why is the death of a tzaddik more of a tragedy than the passing of any person? The righteous influence does not wane with the passing of the tzaddik.

Horav Tzvi Hirsch Ferber, zl, explains that this is the reason that Aharon's passing is connected to the \breaking of the Luchos. When Moshe Rabbeinu descended the mountain on that fateful day and shattered the Luchos, it became an eternal day of infamy for our people. Although it was a great tragedy, were the first Luchos not replaced soon after by the second Luchos? The replacement is never the same as the original. Elazar Hakohen was truly a great nachas to his father. He had incredible leadership capabilities and was a great spiritual inspiration to the Jewish people. He was not, however, Aharon Hakohen. He was not his father. The second Luchos could not take the place of the first Luchos. While they were the Luchos which accompanied Klal Yisrael all those years, they still were not the original ones. We must remember that the spiritual status-quo of Torah diminishes as we move farther away from Har Sinai. When a tzaddik leaves this world his mission and legacy is immediately transferred to another tzaddik, who takes his place. The tragedy is that he is not the same as the original whom he replaced.

And to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (11:13)

Rashi says this pasuk refers to avodas halev, service of the heart, which alludes to prayer. The word b'chol, with all, has a powerful meaning. When we pray to Hashem it has to be "with all," with an all encompassing, unequivocal devotion to Him. Nothing should disturb or distract us when we are in communion with the Almighty. Yet, we all know that this is far from true. Many of us never find the time for davening with a minyan. Regrettably, we daven with complete attention to Hashem when we are in need. Perhaps if we would daven correctly when life is good, we would not need those little reminders that our davening is waning.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, makes a noteworthy observation. He relates how he went to the hospital to visit a congregant. As they walked through the lobby near the financial office of the hospital, two armed guards came out of the office with their guns in their hands and asked everyone to move to the side. It was obvious that they meant business, so everyone followed their orders meticulously. It quickly became clear that these two men were guards who worked for Brinks and that they were transferring money from the hospital safe to their truck. Suddenly, one of the visitors to the hospital looked at one of the guards and said in a cheerful voice, "Aharon, how are you?" No response. No movement from Aharon, the Brinks guard. He ignored his friend totally. He was transferring money. It could have been his best friend; it could have been his relative; it could have been his father - he was obligated to pay total attention to the money transfer. His mind could not wander from his mission.

Let us step back a moment and derive a lesson from the Brinks guard. When we go to shul and daven to Hashem, are we any different than the guard? Are we not in communion with Hashem - a mission that should take up our complete attention? Yet, we can be in middle of davening - and our friend asks us, "What's new?" - we feel we must immediately respond to him. Our attitude would certainly be different if we were praying for our lives.

This idea should apply to every mitzvah. Rav Zilberstein relates that Rebbetzin Feinstein, the Brisker Rav's daughter, does not speak to anyone when she is involved in salting meat - so intense is her devotion to performing this noble and necessary function. Perhaps, if we would add a little of intensity to our prayers, if we would listen to the words we are uttering, Hashem's response would be

positive.

You shall place these words of mine upon your heart... you shall bind them for a sign upon your arm... you shall teach them to your children... and you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house. (11:18,19,20)

Three mitzvos following in close succession after Hashem's threat of exile. Is there a relationship between these mitzvos and the exile? Rashi cites the Sifri that connects the juxtaposition in the following manner. We are enjoined to observe these commandments even in exile, so that when the redemption occurs, these mitzvos will not be foreign to us. There is a danger that when the Jewish people are in exile living in a non-Jewish environment, speaking the language of the host nation, adopting its customs and lifestyle, there is a real threat of assimilation. It is for this reason that we are to distinguish ourselves as a separate nation by performing mitzvos while we are in exile. Rashi cites the pasuk in Yirmiyahu 31:20, "Set up signposts for yourself." Surprisingly, the reason given here for continuing to perform the mitzvos of Tefillin, limud haTorah and Mezuzah in exile is to prevent them from being forgotten. In our journey throughout galus, exile, these mitzvos will serve as signposts, markers, to insure that we find our way back to Eretz Yisrael.

The question is obvious: are these mitzvos functional only in Eretz Yisrael and to be practiced in galus only so that they are not to be forgotten? What relationship is there between these mitzvos and Eretz Yisrael? While the Ramban says that, indeed, the mitzvah applies everywhere, it has greater significance in Eretz Yisrael because of its greater sanctity. The Ramban concludes by saying, "This Midrash contains a deep secret." What is the Sifri teaching us? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that while these three mitzvos have no specific connection to Eretz Yisrael, they are not practiced in their ideal way when we are in galus. We practice them meanwhile as tziyunim, road markers, keeping us on course, until that special day when we will return to Eretz Yisrael with the advent of Moshiach.

The way we learn Torah she'Baal Peh, oral law, today is not the optimal way of doing so. Oral law is supposed to be transmitted orally from teacher to student in the manner it was taught before Rabbeinu Hakadosh codified the Mishnah. He saw a crisis about to occur, and he did something about it. Ever since then, however, we have been studying Torah through the medium of seforim, written volumes. When Moshiach arrives, we will revert to the "old" system of studying from a rebbe. For now, Torah study from printed books is only a temporary measure, a marker to keep us on course for the day when the correct manner of learning Torah she'Baal Peh will be reintroduced.

Rav Schwab makes a noteworthy observation. The printing press, upon which the propagation of Torah among our people has depended heavily for the past 500 years, was invented by a German non-Jew named Gutenberg. This invention was truly a simple idea that had already been invented 1,000 years earlier in China, but had not reached Europe. It impacted Judaism in a manner that is indescribable, for without it Torah scholarship would practically have come to a standstill. Why did Hashem give this unparalleled zchus, merit, to a gentile? Why could it not have been a Jew that would be the father of the printing press?

The reason is that learning Torah she'Baal Peh from a written book is an emergency measure that was necessitated by the long galus in order to insure that Torah would not be forgotten. For the present, learning from a printed book is only a "road marker" which we are compelled to employ. This is not the ultimate destiny of the oral law. One day it will revert to the original. The gentile's zchus will suffice for a road "marker."

The mitzvah of Tefillin is also not practiced in the original designated manner. Originally,

Tefillin were to be worn all day, at home as well as in our place of business. As a consequence of our galus environment, this devotion to Tefillin is no longer practical. Yet, we continue wearing the Tefillin for Shacharis, so that we maintain our "road marker" for that glorious day when we will once again wear our Tefillin all day long.

Mezuzah is also not practiced optimally. According to halachah, a Mezuzah should be placed even on our city gates. B'ishea'recha, your city gates, applies to a Jewish city in which every entranceway to the city, a street, a neighborhood should have a Mezuzah. For example, the Jaffa Gate in Yerushalayim needs a Mezuzah. Rav Schwab remembered seeing a Mezuzah on the gate to the old city of Rottenberg, Germany, where the Maharal lived. The mitzvah of Mezuzah was to be a public affair for the community - not just relegated to one's private home. Accordingly, when Moshiach arrives, we will perform this mitzvah in the most advantageous manner. It, as well as the other mitzvos, will then appear to us as the natural progression of the mitzvah from its minimum as observed in galus to its fulfillment in the most optimum form.

This shall be your reward when you listen to these ordinances. (7:12)

Rashi explains that the word "eikav," which also mean "heel," alludes to the type of mitzvah that people consider to be relatively insignificant. Literally, they step on the mitzvah with their heel. The Torah here assures the nation that if they hold all mitzvos in their proper esteem, they will receive their due reward. The Lachmei Todah supplements this, citing a pasuk in the beginning of Sefer Bereishis, (3:15), where Hashem is admonishing the serpent for its part in causing Adam HaRishon to eat of the Eitz Hadas, Tree of Knowledge. "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He will pound your head, and you will bite his heel." Hashem is telling the snake, "If you incite the Jew to sin with his 'head', which is a reference to the entire body, he will triumph over you. He will not sin with his body to perform a sin wholeheartedly, maliciously. You will, however, succeed in instigating him to sin with his 'heel', which alludes to the fences that Chazal have erected around the mitzvos Lo Saase, negative commandments, that are to protect and discourage us from going all the way, to transgress the entire sin."

This is how the serpent misled Chavah. He began by enjoining her to distance herself from sin, to stay far away from the tree. Heaven-forbid she should touch it. Then, he pushed her against the tree, and nothing happened - no bolt of lightning, no punishment from Heaven. Next, he countered, since apparently there had been no punishment for touching, probably there would also be no punishment for eating. She ate and quickly noticed that the fruit was sweet and delicious. She fell in. She broke through the fence, and the rest became history.

The snake accomplished his goal first because he encouraged Chavah to break through the barrier that separated her from sin. This catalyzed the bechiah l'doros, eternal weeping and grieving, that accompanies the onset of death. The snake was very crafty. Knowing fully well that Chavah would never knowingly transgress Hashem's command, it incited her to break the barriers that ward off sin.

Throughout the millennia, the serpent's followers have done much the same. They focus on the "heel," the fence that protects us from sin. Whether it is the Rabbinic decree or a custom going back generations, they seek to pervert and degrade our Jewish way of life and our adherence to Hashem's Torah, by destroying the protective fences. Some are "insignificant;" others are "archaic," while still others have very little value. Their true goal is to encourage us to throw off the yoke of Torah. As the serpent's success was short-lived, so is theirs.

Perhaps ("ki") you will say in your heart, "These nations are more numerous than I; how will I be drive them out?" (7:17)

In a number of places throughout his commentary on Chumash, Rashi explains that the word "ki" has four different connotations: "perhaps", "rather", "because" "if/when". He submits that in this instance we are compelled to define ki as "perhaps", since the other definitions do not apply. In other words, we do not accept that Klal Yisrael would ever descend to total yiush, lack of hope, complete despondency, from which they believe that there is no escape. According to Rashi, machsheves yiush, an attitude of despair, are antithetical to Jewish perspective. A Jew does not give up hope! Hashem is always there: we need not worry - or fear - or give up hope. He will save us.

Sforno does not take this approach. He interprets the pasuk in the following manner: There can be two reasons for posing such questions. One is that you fear these nations. Such fear implies lack of faith in the Almighty. The second reason is that you recognize that without Hashem's intervention, you have no way of triumphing over your enemy. This is a commendable attitude, since it indicates a recognition of one's inadequacy accompanied by trust and faith in the Almighty.

Therefore, the Sforno indicates, the pesukim can be understood as follows: Let not your fears and anxieties be due to your fear of the enemy. Rather, they should be the result of a profound recognition and acknowledgement that, without the help of Hashem, we simply cannot succeed. When a Jew achieves such a penetrating recognition of his weakness and Hashem's greatness, he has nothing to fear.

What a powerful statement! Only when a Jew reaches the point of recognizing his own "afsiat," inconsequence, only then can he aspire to Hashem's salvation. As long as man thinks that it is his own prowess that catalyzes his success, he is doomed to rely solely on his own ability.

The Mezritcher Maggid, zl, makes a similar statement in regard to the famous Rabbinic dictum, "It is as hard/difficult to match a husband and wife as to split the Red Sea." Many commentators have rendered various expositions on this Chazal. What really is the relationship between finding one's mate and the splitting of the Red Sea? The Maggid explains that at the Red Sea, Klal Yisrael had exhausted all of the natural resources for her salvation. They were locked between a "rock and a hard place," between the Red Sea and the Egyptians. They had nowhere to go. They were finished. What eventually occurred was unimaginable; the sea split. Unimaginable occurrences often happen in the world of shidduchim, matchmaking, as well. How often does a young woman marry a young man who was the farthest individual from her mind? Certainly, we can all cite instances when a young couple come together under "miraculous" circumstances. Evidently, Hashem played a major role in the sea splitting, as well as in every shidduch. Klal Yisrael was acutely aware that she had no recourse - she had come to the end of her rope. They turned to Hashem and He responded. They finally realized that they had only one source of salvation. This might be an appropriate lesson for many of us.

*Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d, that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth.
(8:18)*

A person must always realize and remember that whatever he does, whatever endeavor he takes upon himself to perform, the ability to do so, the power to succeed, is derived from Hashem. This should be a source of encouragement for us. Let us explain with the following analogy. A king asked his trusted servant to prepare a lavish dinner in his house, which would be attended by the king with his entire retinue. Naturally, the servant was quite nervous. It was an awesome responsibility, and a compelling obligation to perform successfully. So many things could have gone wrong. If, however, the king told him to take whatever he needed from the royal kitchen, then he was much less concerned, because the food was from the king. The food was prepared exactly as the king liked it, since it was cooked in the royal kitchen in the same manner as usual.

The Mezritcher Maggid, zl, applies this analogy to explain the tefillah, Nishmas. We say, "Were our mouth as full of song as the sea, and our tongue as full of joyous song as its multitude of waves, and our lips as full of praise as the breadth of the Heavens... we could still not thank You sufficiently." In other words, we express our incapacity to describe Hashem's greatness, regardless of the powers and abilities with which we have been blessed. Yet, soon after, we continue the tefillah and say, "Therefore, the organs that You set within us, and the spirit and soul that You breathed into our nostrils, and the tongue that You placed in our mouths - all of them thank and bless, praise and glorify, exact and revere, sanctify and declare the sovereignty of Your Name, Our King..." There seems to be an apparent contradiction within the text of this tefillah. First, we declare our inadequacy to praise Hashem. We follow this statement with a declaration of praise. Are we able to praise Hashem or not?

The answer, explains the Mezritcher Maggid, is dependent upon with "whose" organs are we praising Hashem? If they are ours, and we think that "we" are able to praise Him, then it is fruitless. Man alone is unable to praise Hashem. If, however, we realize that what is ours is really from Hashem, and that whatever ability/strength/power we possess all is derived from Hashem, then "Hashem-given organs" are able to exalt Him. Like the servant who takes the food from the king's home to serve him, so, too, can we offer praise to Hashem, if we realize that whatever we are is only through His will. Likewise, the mere knowledge that whatever we achieve only occurs as a result of Hashem's Will, gives us much more confidence in our success.

It shall be ("v'hayah") that if you forget Hashem, your G-d. (8:19)

Chazal teach us that the word v'hayah, "it shall be," denotes simchah, joy. We wonder what joy there can be found in forgetting Hashem? Horav Baruch zl, m'Meziboz, one of the earliest Chassidic leaders, explains that there are two types of sinner: One sinner falls prey to the blandishments of his yetzer hora, evil inclination. He has lost control; he is, instead, controlled. This sinner's punishment will not be as serious, because he did not sin with malice. He is a lost soul - lost to his base desires. There is another kind of sinner: one who sins with contempt, with disdain and spite, in order to degrade and humiliate Torah and its Author. His intention is to rebel and repudiate. Indeed, he is filled with joy when he sins. His intended goal is the breakdown of Torah Judaism. His transgression engenders within him a feeling of satisfaction.

The pasuk addresses the fate of the malicious sinner, who is filled with glee at his act of rebellion. V'hayah, if you are filled with joy as a result of your forgetting Hashem your G-d, then I testify to you that, surely, you will be destroyed. One only has to peruse Jewish history to note that those whose sins were acts of sedition ended up destroying not only themselves, but also their families and descendants. Indeed, their names are lost to history. Whatever positive activity they generated was lost with them. Their misdirected joy catalyzed eternal grief.

Hashem is the Avi Yesomim, Father of orphans, and the Dayan Almanos, Judge of widows. Essentially, this means that Hashem is there for those who are in need. When a child loses his father, he should remember that Hashem is his father, Who watches over him and cares for him, just as his own father concerns himself with his welfare. The widow is not alone. Hashem is her advocate. He will see to it that those who oppress her will pay. Indeed, every individual Jew should understand that to intimidate the widow is equivalent to intimidating Hashem. One does not oppress the downtrodden unless he is prepared to incur the wrath of Hashem.

It happened in a small community in Egypt, where two Jewish businessmen, Raphael and Asael, succeeded in developing a successful import-export business. They were partners who had the greatest respect, love and admiration for one another. No one believed that anything could ever happen to tarnish this unique relationship. At least, so people believed. Raphael had to go on a business trip to purchase goods for their business. He was going to take a boat to Europe and return with the finest dry goods for their business. On his return to Egypt, a devastating storm struck the ship. The boat's crew fought the storm valiantly until they succumbed to its tremendous force. The boat capsized; everything and everyone on the boat went to the bottom of the sea. Raphael's wife was left a bereaved widow with two young daughters to support and eventually marry off.

As soon as the shivah, required seven day mourning period, ended, Asael gave his partner's widow a small sum of money to support her and her daughters for two weeks. He claimed that the business went down with the ship, and everything was lost. What could she do? It was her word against his. With bitter tears -- tears of insult added to injury -- the widow and her two small daughters moved away to a small community, where she supported her family by working as a maid and cleaning woman for the wealthy.

Time does not stand still for anyone. Years went by and the young widow grew old and weak; her daughters became young, attractive women. During this time, for a period of about ten years, Asael's business thrived. He became increasingly wealthy. One would think that his life was blessed with good fortune. Hashem, however, does not forget, especially when one oppresses a widow and orphans. Suddenly, Asael's only son became ill. The illness spread throughout his body until he was completely paralyzed. The finest physicians were consulted, to no avail. His illness was a mystery. He was beyond medical help. Shortly thereafter, the young man died -- to the excruciating grief of his parents. They could not survive the tragedy. He was their only child. How could their good fortune suddenly have changed?

Asael's wife could not tolerate the pain and agony of having lost her precious child. She succumbed to depression. Eventually, her broken heart gave out, and she also died. It did not take long, and Asael, despite his incredible wealth, left bereft of his two most important possessions, took ill and died as well.

What a terrible end to a story. But it is not over yet. The only ones left to inherit Asael's vast fortune were his two nephews. They were fine young men who themselves had recently entered the world of commerce. With the help of Hashem, their assets grew considerably. They met two wonderful

young women, who were orphaned at a young age and raised by their mother. Yes. They were Raphael's daughters, who -- after marrying Asael's nephews -- finally received their overdue inheritance. One's faith in Hashem need never wane, because everything that occurs is part of a Divine master plan. Regrettably, some of us think that we are the directors of the play called "life." Those who think so usually end up missing the show.

That as a man chastens his son, so does Hashem, your G-d, chasten you. (8:5)

Some people experience yisurim, suffering, in greater portions than others. The Torah is defining for us the essence of suffering: it is a loving Father's necessary and beneficial act toward His child. Although many of us acknowledge this notion from an intellectual perspective, when it hurts, it truly hurts. When we experience pain and suffering, our intellect does not necessarily influence our emotions. Great and righteous people throughout history have accepted Hashem's decree with great faith and love. Indeed, countless stories detail the devotion of the great, as well as the simple, believing Jew. We have selected two narratives which lend insight into the concept of suffering.

The Sanzer Rav, Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl, lost his seven-year-old son. On the way home from the funeral, in the early morning prior to davening Shacharis, the rav remarked that his situation was similar to that of a person who was walking to shul one morning, when he suddenly felt a strong blow on his back. When he turned around and observed that none other than his best friend had slapped him, he was relieved. "I have received a strong blow," said the Sanzer, "but as I look around I note that the source of the blow is my closest and most faithful friend - Hashem. If so, let us say Hodu, Give praise to Hashem." With these words, he commenced the morning prayers. On another occasion, when someone pressed him with questions about his troubles, he replied, "How long will you attempt to make the Ribono Shel Olam appear improper in my eyes?" Rav Chaim's cognitive understanding affected his emotions to the point that he really felt the good within, and the love behind, his suffering.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, inspires audiences with the following remarkable and true story. A terminally ill patient lay in agony, kept alive by an artificial respirator. His doctor, hoping to spare him his suffering, disconnected his life-support system. The man died soon afterwards.

A few days later, the deceased man appeared to the "benevolent" doctor in a dream, saying the following: "I had four days left in which to live, in order that I suffer terrible agony, so that I could pass directly into Gan Eden, pure, cleansed of sin. Because you caused me to die four days early, I lack that measure of suffering. Now I do not know how long I will have to suffer in Gehinnom to be purified. Suffering in the physical world expiates much greater than suffering in Gehinnom. You deprived me of this."

The doctor woke up from his dream totally shaken up. He repented and became a baal-teshuvah out of fear of his own day of Final Judgment.

This powerful story teaches us a hidden aspect of suffering. It also demonstrates that when we take G-d's role, we might cause irreparable damage.

You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem your G-d. (8:10)

The following story, related by Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, does not actually address the parsha. Its lesson and message, however, is compelling. It is especially significant in that it conveys to us the far-reaching effect of our behavior. We hope that our actions will all have similar positive consequences as evidenced in this episode.

A young kollel fellow in Yerushalayim went to a Judaica library in search of a certain volume not accessible in the local shuls. Knowing that the library was not located in an area that had a kosher restaurant, he brought along a sandwich for lunch. After a period of time perusing through the sefer, the young man decided to wash and eat lunch. He moved to a corner of the library and ate his meal. He then began to bentsh with great kavanah, devotion.

As he finished bentshing, the librarian came over and asked to speak to him. She remarked that listening to him bentsh brought a question to her mind. "We implore Hashem in bentshing. Shelo neivosh v'lo nikalem v'lo nikashel, that we not feel inner shame, nor be humiliated, and not stumble/falter. I do not understand why the words v'lo nikashel are included. They do not seem to fit in," she commented. The young woman added that while she had strayed away from Yiddishkeit and was no longer observant, she still remembered that this question had bothered her when she would bentsh.

The young man, who had been used to bentshing with this nusach, version, ever since he was a child, was stymied for an answer. He began to search through the various volumes in the library for a source for this version of bentshing, but he was not successful. He said that he would go home and find a bentscher which included the phrase, "and not stumble," in it and send her a copy. He returned home, and after some searching, he located a copy of bentshing in an old Haggadah. He made a copy and circled the words, "v'lo nikashel," and sent it to the librarian. After he did this, he forgot about the incident.

Many months after the episode in the library, the kollel fellow received an invitation to attend a wedding. He stared at the names and was at a loss; he did not recognize either the chosson or the kallah or their families. He assumed that the invitation was some sort of a mistake. It happened "by chance" that on the day of the wedding, he was on the street where the wedding was taking place. His curiosity was aroused, so he figured he would walk in and see who it was that was getting married. Perhaps he could find out why he had been invited.

He entered the hall, searched through the wedding, and found no one whom he recognized. As he was about to leave he told his wife, who happened to be with him that day, "I guess it must have been a mistake." At that same moment, someone came over to him and asked his name. When the messenger heard his name, he said, "Please come with me; the kallah would like to meet you." Now, his curiosity was truly piqued.

"Do you not recognize me?" asked the kallah. "I was the librarian who questioned you in regard to the correct version of bentshing." Suddenly, she became very emotional and said, "I want you to know that, in truth, you are the biggest mechutan, relative, at this wedding. Indeed, if not for you, there would be no wedding. It was indirectly because of you that I was inspired to return to a life of Torah observance.

She began to relate what had transpired since that fateful day that they met in the library. "It happened to be that, tragically, I was engaged to a non-Jew. Yet, I still had doubts. I still had feelings that pulled me back to the faith of my ancestors. I vacillated back and forth, obviously, to the concern

and eventual disdain of my fiancé. He gave me an ultimatum: either I said yes by a certain day, or the engagement was off. He could not marry a Jewess who was not prepared to sever all of her ties to her faith. The day soon arrived, and I was prepared to make my decision to give my affirmative answer.

"I arrived at the library a nervous wreck. I was about to renege my religion, the religion of my parents, the religion for which so many had died. I was in love, however, and love conquers all. I walked into my office at the library, and behold, in front of my eyes, laying on top of my desk, was your letter. I cannot remember how this letter was moved "by chance" from room to room, to end up on my desk on that specific day. I opened the envelope and glaring straight at me were the words "v'lo nikashel", and "not stumble," circled in red.

"I began to scream at myself. How could you stumble like this? How could you throw everything away? I was ruining my life. I called off my engagement and gradually returned to become a chozeres bi'teshuvah. Shortly afterward, I was blessed to meet a wonderful ben Torah, whom I have tonight wed. Thank you so much for bentching that day with such feeling that I was moved enough to approach you about the nusach of the bentching."

What a powerful story. What is most significant is the knowledge of the effect we have on those around us. We never know who is watching. We must make sure that what they observe is of a positive nature.

Lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle... and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem. (8:12,14)

The text of the pasuk is ambiguous. The Torah seems to imply that satisfaction and success in Eretz Yisrael are doubtful, while haughtiness and forgetting Hashem, the Source of success, seems to be a certainty. Horav Yosef Konvitz, zl, explains that if we scan Jewish history, we will note that during those times when we were blessed with material success, we were, regrettably, not able to withstand the allure of sin that inevitably accompanies it. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, works very hard to ensnare his prey. When he utilizes material benefits and comforts, he has added ammunition for success. The sin of the Golden-Calf, to a large extent, was the result of a nation that lost control of itself after being blessed with material blessings following the Egyptian exodus. It would, therefore, make sense that Hashem would act toward us in a pass? manner and not "overburden" us with material abundance. If we have less, we will do less. We cannot make a golden calf if we do not possess any gold.

Jewish human nature has proven itself to be unique in this matter. We do not wait until we amass material wealth to renege the yoke of mitzvos. As soon as we begin to dream about success, we are already making plans for our new lifestyle which, regrettably, is not consistent with Torah dictate. The haughtiness that quite often accompanies this sudden rise in financial status takes hold of an individual even before the success has materialized.

This is the pasuk's admonition to us. "Lest you eat and be satisfied." Even before you have built your new homes and acquired abundant gold and silver, even if your wealth and material success is but a dream, a reality that is still elusive, yet you already have the nerve to "become haughty and forget Hashem." The result will be that it will all be a dream. Your wealth will not materialize, and the haughtiness that preceded it will cause those around you to resent you. After all, there is nothing so revolting as an arrogant beggar.

Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d; that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth.

(8:18)

How easily we forget what Hashem does for us. When we are in need, we know to Whom to turn in prayer and supplication. When we are answered, however, our attitude takes a sudden change of course. We no longer attribute our success to the Source of all success. We quickly say that it was our endeavor, our strength, our ability that catalyzed the success that we enjoy. What happened? How did we suddenly become myopic, failing to recognize that it was Hashem Who was clearly the one Who brought about every achievement that we attribute to our own prowess? Horav Shlomo Brevda, Shlita, posed this question to the Chazon Ish shortly after he personally experienced a miracle. It was not long until his own feelings of acknowledgement and gratitude slowly began to dissipate. It happened that one night Rav Brevda was walking through one of the narrow alleyways of Yerushalayim on the way to the home of one of his relatives. A power failure that night made the walk in the pitch dark even more treacherous. He walked slowly, at times groping for a foothold. He was acutely aware that night that just before his relative's home, a steep slope with sharp steps jutted out. To slip on these steps was to place one's life in serious jeopardy. Rav Brevda walked very slowly until "something" told him to suddenly stop. He did, luckily stopping a few centimeters from the dangerous slope. There was no question in his mind. This was clearly a miracle.

The next day he was to go to the home of the Chazon Ish to discuss a number of issues with him. After the meeting, Rav Brevda was preparing to leave, when he turned to the Chazon Ish and said he had something else to discuss with him. After relating the miracle that had occurred to him the previous night, he said to the Chazon Ish, "Rebbe, after such a miracle, I was certain that the next morning I would arise from my bed a different person. I would sing forth the praises of the Almighty for saving my life. I would be overwhelmed with gratitude for Him. But, that did not happen. I arose this morning the exact same way I do every other day. No charge, no sparks; no enthusiasm and excitement. What happened?"

The Chazon Ish closed his eyes and thought for a few moments. Then he opened his eyes, looked at Rav Brevda and held his hands and said, "I will tell you a great yesod, principle, in avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. There is a special yetzer hora, evil-inclination, that is referred to as the yetzer hora which follows a miracle. The goal of this yetzer hora is to weaken the emotional enthusiasm that is aroused as a result of a miracle. It is there to undermine and destroy whatever spirituality one might have been stimulated with. You are the victim of this yetzer hora."

Rav Brevda supplemented this idea, explaining that with every level that one scales on the spiritual ladder, the yetzer hora, likewise, ascends and works harder to prevent any spiritual advancement. If we are to maintain the spiritual inspiration resulting from being privy to Hashem's miracles, we will have to work very hard to see to it that the inspiration not be a temporary catalyst.

And Hashem gave me the two tablets of stone. (9:10)

The word "luchos," tablets, is usually written with a "vav" to designate the plural. Rashi explains that the word luchos is written here without a "vav," in the singular. Yet, it is vocalized in the plural, by design. This indicates that while there were two luchos, they had equal significance as if they had been one. Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, adds that the word "shnei," two, also indicates that the two luchos were really one, reflected by the apparent redundancy of the word. Obviously, the word

luchos, which is the plural form, implies two luchos, since, as Chazal teach us, a plural noun written by itself, without a modifying number, means two, which is the minimum possible. Thus, the added "shnei," also teaches us about the Luchos.

In the Yerushalmi Sheklaim, 6:1, Chazal cite an opinion that all ten commandments were written on each of the two luchos. Horav Feinstein suggests an important lesson to be derived from here. One cannot fulfill the first five commandments, which address man's relationship with Hashem, unless he also fulfills the second set of five commandments, which concern human relationships. Hence, one tablet focuses upon the first five commandments and lists the others as an explanation for them, while the reverse is true on the other side. There is an unbreakable relationship between the two tablets. One must fulfill all ten commandments or forfeit the possibility of fulfilling any of them.

This shall be the reward when you will hearken to these ordinances. (7:12)

The commentators offer a number of definitions for the word "eikev," Most understand it as a word which is used to associate reward with positive action. The Midrash makes use of another definition for "eikav": heel. They interpret the pasuk to be alluding to those mitzvos which short-sighted people might regard as being less significant than others. They tend figuratively to "step on" these mitzvos with their heels. The Torah is telling Klal Yisrael that by giving equal time to all mitzvos, ascribing equal significance to every mitzvah, they will warrant a special reward.

In a simile quoting Hashem's praise of Klal Yisrael, Shlomo Hamelech says in Shir HaShirim (6:11), "I went down to the garden of nuts," referring to Hashem's "descent" to the Bais Hamikdash. Regarding the comparison of Klal Yisrael to nuts, the Midrash comments, "One may remove any type of fruit from a sack without affecting the remaining fruits. Once one takes a nut, however, the others are disturbed." Likewise, if one Jew sins, the sin leaves a stain upon the entire tzibur, community. In his sefer, Takanos Ezra, Horav Ezra Altshuler, zl, writes that this idea applies equally to mitzvos. If one were to be "pogea," breach one mitzvah, over time it will have a profound effect on the rest.

At first glance, one would think that the reason for using nuts as an example of a fruit which affects the space, is their physical structure: They are round. Thus, when one is removed, the others are compelled to fill its space. If so, why is a nut chosen rather than any other "round" fruit? Horav Alshuler explains that nuts manifest another feature which distinguishes them from other "round" fruits. The shell of the nut does not always contain a nut within it. Yet, when one moves a particular nut, it still affects the rest of the nuts in the sack. A similar idea applies to mitzvos. If one were to be lax in regard to the observance of even a seemingly insignificant mitzvah -- even a minhag, custom, which might seem negligible to the uneducated, it could signal the end of his Torah observance altogether.

Many personal anecdotes demonstrate the allegiance to every mitzvah and every minhag of our gedolei Yisroel, Torah leaders, who are never willing to compromise their service to the Almighty. Yalkut Lekach Tov cites the Dvar Avraham who related that Horav Yitzchak Elchonon Spector, zl, refrained from being mesader kiddushin, conducting the marriage ceremony, as he advanced in age. When one of the distinguished lay leaders of Kovno asked him to conduct the wedding of one of his children, he agreed to his request. The father added that, instead of having the chupah in the usual place in front of the courtyard of the main shul, he would rather have it in his own courtyard which was more spacious and elegant. Rav Yitzchak Elchonon refused to accede to his new request, maintaining that he would not be party to an infringement upon a custom. If an individual would breach a Jewish custom -

today, he is vulnerable to desecrating Shabbos - tomorrow. His future commitment to the entire Torah and mitzvos hinges on his commitment today. We have only to turn back the pages of history to witness the veracity of this statement.

You shall observe the commandments of Hashem, to go in His ways and fear Him. (8:6)

The Torah enjoins us three times to walk in Hashem's ways. The Chafetz Chaim zl, explains that each command to go in Hashem's way prepares us for a specific spiritual plateau in avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty. He adds that it is not possible to achieve spiritual ascension unless one walks in Hashem's ways. Chazal interpret this to mean that he is to act in a manner similar to Hashem. As He is compassionate and caring, so must we follow suit. In other words, the bein adam l'Makom, achieving a plateau in one's relationship with Hashem must first be preceded by developing our bein adam l'chaveiro, relationships with our fellow man. We must empathize with the needs of others, caring for them, sensitizing ourselves to the concerns of our fellow Jew.

Ostensibly, feeling the pains and frustrations of others will take its toll on an individual. How much more so, a gadol, Torah leader, and tzaddik who bears the burdens of Klal Yisrael, both physically and emotionally. The following story shows the care and concern the Chafetz Chaim demonstrated for an individual. Undoubtedly, this is but only one episode in the life of a person whose heart beat with the pulse of Klal Yisrael.

It happened that a student who had been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness came to his rebbe, the Chafetz Chaim, for a brachah, blessing. According to the medical authorities, there was no cure for his ailment. The Chafetz Chaim listened carefully to the broken-hearted young man and told him that he would advise him, provided that he never reveal the advice to anyone. The student immediately agreed. The Chafetz Chaim then instructed the student to go to a certain Torah scholar in a small village to ask for his blessing. "He will give you a brachah and you will recover," said the Chafetz Chaim. The bachur, young man, followed his rebbe's advice, and received the blessing. In a short while, he recovered. He eventually married and raised a family, all the while never revealing to anyone the events surrounding his illness and miraculous recovery.

Twenty years later, this man's sister-in-law became ill with an illness similar to the one sustained by him many years earlier. He kept his word to the Chafetz Chaim and revealed nothing about his recovery. His wife, however, remembered that he had once spoken about a mysterious illness that had afflicted him many years before they had met. When she questioned him about it, he suddenly became evasive and quiet. The more vague he tried to be, the more she pressed on, demanding an answer that might save her sister's life.

He could take it no longer; both his wife and sister-in-law pleaded with him to reveal what had occurred many years earlier and how he had been cured. He tried to keep the secret, but to no avail. He finally gave in, rationalizing that the Chafetz Chaim did not really mean forever. He told his wife and sister-in-law about his visit with the Chafetz Chaim and his instruction that he go see a certain talmid chacham to ask for a brachah. When they heard this, they became hopeful for a cure.

After a short while, the man himself became ill with symptoms similar to those of his previous illness. His worst fears had been realized. He had broken his word, and he was now being punished. He decided that he could do nothing else, but go to his rebbe.

He made the long journey to the Chafetz Chaim's home and entered his rebbe's home to find a frail old man. After listening to his student's heart-rending pleas, the Chafetz Chaim turned to his student and said, "My son, I wish I could help you, but I am no longer physically able. When you came to me last time, I was much younger and stronger. I was then able to fast forty days on your behalf, so that you would be cured. Today, I can no longer do that."

This remarkable narrative teaches us the love and devotion a rebbe had for his student. To fast forty days on behalf of a student indicates the overwhelming loyalty and love the Chafetz Chaim manifest for him. That is probably secondary to the Chafetz Chaim's humility in creating the ruse. Telling the bachur to seek a brachah from a tzaddik in order to conceal the real reason for the miraculous recovery. This is but a glimpse of the character of this outstanding tzaddik.

And what he did to Dasan and Aviram...when the earth opened its mouth wide and swallowed them, and their households and their tents and all the sustenance which was at their feet, in the midst of all Yisrael. (11:6)

Many things happened to Klal Yisrael during their sojourn in the wilderness. At times they sinned, challenging Hashem in a manner unbecoming their noble stature. There were individuals whose malicious intent motivated their insurrection. Among those were Dasan and Aviram, Moshe Rabbeinu's antagonists yet in Egypt, whose archeotypical evil "earned" them everlasting condemnation in the annals of Jewish history. In Parashas ha'Yiraah, Moshe Rabbeinu impresses upon Klal Yisrael the concept of yiraas ha'onesh, fear of retribution. He uses the punishment meted out to Dasan and Aviram as an example.

Veritably, Dasan and Aviram received a terrible punishment for the evil which they wrought. We wonder why they were singled out more so than Korach, the leader of the incursion against Moshe and Aharon. Korach's sons repented; his descendants stood at the spiritual helm of our people. Dasan and Aviram were lost to posterity - forever. What lesson may we glean from here?

The Panim Yafos posits that in the parashas ha'yiraah, the Torah focuses upon two forms of fear: fear of Hashem; and by extension, fear of a talmid chacham, Torah scholar. The parsha begins with Moshe's declaration: "And now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you but to fear Hashem," (10:12). It concludes with the words, "Hashem, your G-d you shall fear," (10:20) which Chazal interpret to include talmidei chachamim. When one fears a talmid chacham, he is actually in awe of the Shechinah that rests upon him. Regarding fear of the Almighty, Moshe recounts the various miracles that Hashem performed for us which demonstrate His awesome power. Now, Moshe adds the punishment meted out to Dasan and Aviram as an indication of what can occur to one who trespasses the honor to be accorded a Torah scholar.

The fear and awe one must display for a Torah scholar is not a simple virtue to access. While it is true that we do often fear human beings, we are usually afraid of their power over us. Wealth, brute strength, political power are areas which contribute to one's dominion over others. A Torah scholar, however, has little power, to the uneducated mind.. He rarely has material wealth, as he is usually relegated to living on the lower strata of financial accomplishment. Physical strength or power is a rare commodity among Torah disseminators. Indeed, they are so dedicated to spiritual achievement that material/physical success has little meaning to them altogether.

It takes a great man, a perceptive individual, one who views the physical/material dimension for

what it is really worth, to stand in awe of a Torah scholar. Only one who has a profound understanding of spiritual achievement will bow his head in fear and awe of a Torah scholar - even if he does not dress impressively or exhibit physical prowess.

This is why the Torah makes a paradigmatic statement by mentioning the punishment meted out to Dasan and Aviram. They superceded all others in sheer insolence. They spoke to Moshe Rabbeinu with a brazenness that was unimaginable. What was it that gave them the gall, the unmitigated audacity, to speak to Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael with such shamelessness, to talk to the man who was prepared more than once to give up his life for us, with such effrontery? It was their wealth. Their material excess went to their heads. They foolishly thought that, because they had untold wealth, they reigned over everyone - including Moshe Rabbeinu. They were punished, middah k'negged middah, measure for measure. Nothing was left of them and their physical possessions in order to demonstrate the futility and worthlessness of their material possessions. It was all swallowed up into the earth, as if it never had existed. Its real value was shown for all to see.

How meaningful are the words of the Panim Yafos. We live in an age in which one's status is determined in accordance with his material success. The reverence accorded to a talmid chacham who has devoted his life to accumulate possessions that are eternal, has reached a new low. Is it because so many people are themselves proficient in Torah, that they have less respect for others who also happen to be devoted to it? Could it be that once one has succeeded in both worlds, having done well financially after having achieved proficiency in Torah, that he has less respect for his counterpart who is totally dedicated to Torah? Could it be that financial success does go to one's head to the point that nothing else matters? One would not think so, but the Torah seems to disagree. Apparently, some who achieve material success undergo a metamorphosis whereby their seichel ha'yashar, common sense, becomes overwhelmed by their wallet. They cannot handle the nisayon, challenge, of material wealth. Neither could Dasan and Aviram.

"To love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in all His ways and to cleave to Him. (11:22)

To walk in Hashem's ways, is to act as He acts; as He is merciful, so should we act with compassion. As He bestows kindness, so should we be kind to others. While it is possible to follow in some of Hashem's ways, there certainly is a limit to a mortal's abilities. Hashem is, after all, mechaye meisim, resurrects the dead. Ostensibly, this is not something a human being could do - or can he? I once heard that, indeed, a caring, sensitive human being has the ability to be mechaye meisim in a figurative sense. Let us take a moment to observe the people around us. While it is true that they appear to be alive, are they really alive or are they just existing? Do they enjoy life? Do they have a zest for living?

Regrettably, we know the answer to these questions. Many people are beset by problems, be they personal, family, or work-related which take their toll upon their outlook on life. It is difficult to be happy when problems are gnawing away at one's mind. These people walk around as in mourning - for themselves. Yes - they appear to be alive, but if one penetrates beneath the veneer of existence, we note a totally different picture. These people live by rote. They have lost their vivacity; they have lost their life.

One who goes over to say, "Hello," or "How are you?" - or simply offers to listen to help out in some way -- is mechaye meisim, gives them life. It gives them hope; it encourages them and, quite

possibly, may be the turning point for them between living and giving up altogether. Rav Nachman M'Breslov says, "There are people who are in great pain. They cannot share this pain with others. They would like to talk about it, but they do not have anyone to whom to turn. They walk around in deep depression, waiting, seeking, looking for that one person who will lend them a listening ear. That person can save their life."

When we think about it, we all know someone in need. Yet, we do nothing about it. We conjure up any of a number of excuses to validate our passivity. Perhaps, if we would realize that it takes so little to accomplish so much, we might be less inclined to shirk our duty towards our fellow man.

And it will be, if you will listen diligently to My commandments. (7:12)

Rashi translates the word "eikav" as "heel". Thus, the pasuk is admonishing us regarding those mitzvos "that man treads upon with his heels." Our attitude towards Torah and mitzvos should be wholesome. We are enjoined to accept and observe Torah in its totality. The greatest danger to religious thought and observance is posed by he who takes extracts of the Torah. The Torah is a symphony, a harmonious blend of religious observances. To take one single bar from a musical composition is to destroy the music. It is no different regarding the Torah. To extract one period of our history - to scrutinize one moment in our lives -- can be devastating. We view history as a continuum in its totality. Otherwise, our faith in the Almighty might be challenged. We must focus upon the entire panorama, the good and the bad, to perceive the Hand of G-d weaving His guidance, directing one event after another.

The act of selecting mitzvos defaces the entire Torah. It is all one body of knowledge. To emphasize one mitzvah more than the rest, to remove one mitzvah because it seems antiquated, is like amputating a limb of the body. To focus on tzedakah, charity, and relegate Shabbos to antiquity; to concentrate on kashrus and ignore the laws of lashon hora, slander; to underscore the mitzvah of Tefillin, while permitting other mitzvos to be neglected and even rejected, is to cripple the Torah. To trample upon mitzvos which one feels are trivial is to begin to destroy the Torah.

The greatest menace to our people has been the individual who has decided to determine what is a major mitzvah and what is a minor mitzvah. This applies to anyone who is dishonest with one hand and puts on Tefillin with the other, as well as to those who slander with the same mouth for which he demands ultimate kashrus. There is no end to the double standard evinced by some - all in the name of the benefit of Torah. This is the interpretation of trampling upon mitzvos with one's heel.

Dovid Hamelech in Tehillim 49:6 laments, "What should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels encompass me," He fears the sins that were performed as a result of the "heels", the sins of double standard. In other words, he is afraid of the sins of distinguishing between mitzvos, of rejecting some and keeping others. Perhaps, we might also take his message to heart.

And it will be, if you will listen diligently to My commandments. He will bless you and multiply you, and He will also bless your children... (7:12,13)

There are many definitions for the word "eikav". The popular translation, "and the consequence will be," gives us something to consider. The implication is that the blessings of "good" sons and daughters are in accordance with one's commitment to observance. Good children are not a gift or a reward; they are a direct consequence of the parent's deeds. To paraphrase Horav Moshe Swift, zl, "If parents listen, children listen; if parents practice, children practice." Obviously, exceptions exist to

every rule, but there is definitely a corollary between the parent's behavior and the children's behavior.

Rashi translates "eikav" as "on the heel". Horav Swift interprets the pasuk as a lesson to parents. Children follow of the heel -- or in the footsteps - of their parents. They see and sense their parents' commitment and take it to heart. Our greatest error is to underestimate our children's perceptions. On many occasions, we express the hope that a child will follow in his parents' footsteps. We hope that this is an appropriate blessing.

The Torah offers an added suggestion for raising our children. In the closing words of our parsha, the Torah says, "For if you will diligently keep My commandments which I command you to do them; to love your G-d, to go in all His ways, and to cleave to Him." The secret is "l'davka bo," to cleave to Hashem. Chazal ask: How does one cleave to Hashem? They respond that it means to cling to students, to scholars, to teachers and to wise men, and it will be as though one is cleaving to Hashem. A good home is a great start, but good friends, a proper environment, a healthy, spiritual atmosphere are also necessary ingredients for raising children. If you cling to the Torah, if you associate with talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars, pious and learned, G-d fearing Jews, it is as if you are associating with the Almighty Himself.

There is no easy recipe for raising children. The Torah encourages us to follow its prescription for child-rearing. We may add that a little Tehillim goes a long way. Above all, we should realize that our children's future is not fully in our hands. We must listen to the advice of the Torah and remember that our children are entrusted to us by Hashem for a specific purpose. They are not our private, personal property to do with them what we think is right. Last, we must turn to Hashem in prayer for Siyata Dishmaya, Divine assistance, that the blessings we hope for will be actualized.

You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem your G-d. (8:10)

The Chidushei Ha'rim observed that the festive meals celebrated by the chasidim of his time had the same holy objective of the fast days of the misnagdim's devotion. They both inspired the individual to be cognizant of the Almighty. They imbued him with yiraas Shomayim, fear of Hashem. Horav Eli Munk, zl, notes that while the fast days are meant to bring one closer to repentance, their fixed schedule may be a drawback as a result of the lack of spontaneity. Celebrations, on the other hand, are an impulsive expression of joy. They are dynamic and inspiring, influencing their participants to greater mitzvah observance.

While it is not the purpose of this paper to delve into the background and philosophical perspective of chasidus, it is important to understand that the idea that a seudah, festive meal, is awe-inspiring is reflective of chasidic doctrine. Thus, what might seem "different" to one segment of Jewish belief might be quite natural to another. Joy is a basic component of chassidic doctrine. Dejection, depression and regret for past actions, walking around all day as if one is carrying the world on his shoulders, represent an alien element in man. Joy, unbridled enthusiasm, and hislahvus, ecstasy in the worship of Hashem, allows the individual to achieve dveikus b'Hashem, clinging to Hashem.

The festive meal, the tisch, table, in which the Rebbe shares a meal or a part of a meal with his chasidim, presented a unique opportunity for inspirational companionship, song and dance. The Rebbes made every effort to conduct their tisch whenever feasible, even under the most dangerous conditions. During the Holocaust, the ghettos were more than once the scene of clandestine "tischen". The Belzer Rebbe, zl, conducted a tisch on Friday night, on a train from occupied Greece to Turkey, during his

escape from Holocaust Europe. A number of Rebbes conducted tischen in Auschwitz proper. Probably the most poignant story which indicates the Chasidim's devotion to their festive meal as a means for serving Hashem is the following narrative: The Melitzer Rebbe, Horav Elimelech Horowitz, zl, conducted a tisch with his chasidim in an open grave prior to his death. When Rav Elimelech realized the end was near, he requested a piece of bread for his final meal. He reclined and ate with his chasidim in front of the open grave. Following the brachah over the piece of bread, he said a dvar Torah and entered into a state of great hislahavus, ecstasy. He began to sing a new melody "nishmas kol chai," the breath of every living creature (shall praise Your Name). Together, they danced their final dance. He then approached the German in command and said, "We have done ours, now you may do yours." Nothing can be added to such a moving story.

It shall be that if you forget Hashem, your G-d. (8:19)

In the pesichta to Esther Rabba, the Midrash says that the word, "v'haya," "it shall be", implies joy. If this is the case, how can forgetting Hashem be equated in any way with joy? Imrei Chaim interprets the pasuk homeletically. The word "shchoah"/"shchiach" has other meanings - "frequent" and "to be found". Thus, the pasuk is interpreted in the following manner: If simcha/joy, as implied by the word "v'haya", is shchiach, -- or commonly found -- in your home, with you wherever you are; if it is a part of your life, then "tishchach," you will find Hashem, your G-d. In order to reach Hashem, to establish a relationship with Hashem, one should be b'simchah, have a happy outlook. It does not mean that one should walk around all day smiling, even when life "throws him a curve" and things do not go his way; but a positive and hopeful outlook is part of one's bitachon, faith in the Almighty.

In an alternative exposition, Horav Baruch m'Mezboz, zl, explains that there are two ways to perform an aveirah, sin. In one instance, a person falls into the grasp, the stranglehold of the yetzer hora, evil inclination. He cannot release himself; he has sinned. While he is to be criticized, he nevertheless has the opportunity available to him to repent, to perform teshuvah. There is, however, the one who takes great pride in his rebellion, who actually manifests joy when he sins. Such a person has rejected the Almighty; he does not deserve to be forgiven. "V'haya" it shall be - if you forget Hashem, in such a manner that it is "v'hayah," full of joy. If one takes pride in his iniquity, if one apparently enjoys his act of transgression, then there is little hope for his return. Teshuvah is the result of reflection, of regret, of a feeling of remorse - the antithesis of this person's actions. Even in sin we are given a chance to come back, if we do not close the door.

*Then I saw and behold! You had sinned to, Hashem, your G-d, you made yourselves a molten calf.
(9:16)*

Horav Aizik Charif, zl, distinguished between the generation of the wilderness who made the Golden Calf and the ensuing generations who have also sinned. The "dor ha'midbar," generation that sinned in the wilderness, gave up all of their money, jewels and precious stones for an ideal - to make a god for themselves. The ensuing generations have given up their spirituality, even their tzelem Elokim, image of G-d, for the sake of money. Are the two truly that different? The sinners who made the Golden Calf wanted a god for themselves, they made a molten god for their personal use. They would be in charge. After all, they made the god. We are not much different. We are also making a god. Our

god is called money/materialism. They had a golden calf. We have the almighty dollar. The sin is the same - only the idols are different.

After all is said and done, they were willing to relinquish their money for something spiritual. We are more than happy to relinquish our spirituality for materialism. Do we think less of spirituality, or are we more materialistic than our ancestors? In any event, is it not pathetic if we cannot learn from those who made the Golden Calf?

Now, O, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d. (10:12)

Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, offers a practical explanation of this pasuk. One who truly fears Hashem -- in other words, he is in awe of Hashem -- really fears nothing or no one else. On the other hand, one who does not fear Hashem is unfortunately scared of everything - even his own shadow. Consequently, Moshe told Klal Yisrael, since they were compelled to fear something, that they might as well focus their fear on Hashem. Thus, they will have no reason to fear anything else. Moshe said to Klal Yisrael, "All Hashem is asking of you is that you fear Him." By fearing Hashem, you will relieve yourselves of all other sources of fear.

Horav Chizkiya Cohen, zl, notes the word "me'imcha," "of you," in the pasuk. He explains the significance of the word after first citing an anecdotal story that occurred with Horav Yisrael Salanter. Rav Yisrael once met a man and asked him, "What do you do?" The man responded by telling him his business/vocation. Rav Yisrael once again asked him, "What do you do?" The individual once again responded with the name of his business. This did not faze Rav Yisrael, and he once again asked the man, "What do you do?" Again the man responded, somewhat impatiently, with the type of business with which he was involved. Finally, Rav Yisrael told the man, "I am asking you what you do, and you tell me what Hashem does!" People, regrettably, think that their hard work affects their parnassah, livelihood. It is categorically not true. Everything comes from Hashem, the source of all parnassah. Man, unfortunately, has a difficult time remembering this. We go through life attributing our lack of mitzvah observance to our jobs, our involvement in business, or the demands of our profession. These excuses are as foolish as the one who is making them. To them, the Torah says, "What really does Hashem ask of you - just to fear Him." Disregard everything else. Hashem will take care of His responsibility, you take care of yours. Parnassah - Hashem will take care of it. You go back to the Bais Medrash where you belong, and leave Hashem's work to Himself. Regrettably, people would rather read this essay, say it is a good vort, and continue along with business as usual.

The Baal Shem Tov, zl, offers an alternative definition of yiraas Shomayim. While the usual term refers to man's fear of Hashem, the Baal Shem Tov defines it as the fear that Hashem has. Ostensibly, Hashem fears nothing. There is a form of fear, however, that applies in this circumstance, which can be explained through an analogy of a father and his child. A father, desiring to protect his child from injury, warns the youngster that if he goes where he does not belong, he will be punished. For instance, we tell our children not to run in the street, for fear they might be hurt by a car. In order to reinforce our warning, we "attach" the fear of punishment. Now, the child invariably stays away from the street; but for the wrong reason. He fears his father's punishment, not the possibility of injury resulting from his carelessness.

The same idea applies to our relationship with the Almighty. We are admonished regarding specific transgressions; we are also given a host of mitzvos to perform. By performing mitzvos, we

enhance our spiritual health. When we err and sin, we hurt our neshamah. Hashem attaches a punishment to the sins, so that we will be careful not to transgress. It would be wonderful if we would refrain from transgression out of a realization of the terrible effect of sin. We stay away from sin for the wrong reason. We fear the punishment, not the sin.

Hashem "fears" for our spiritual health and welfare. He "fears" we might do something foolish, something harmful to us. This is referred to as a yiraas Shomayim, the fear Hashem has for our welfare. We should aspire to attain that plateau where we fear the effect of sin, rather than the punishment. That is a trait which develops with spiritual maturity.

This shall be the reward when you listen to these ordinances. (7:12)

The word "eikav," when or because, also means heel. Thus, *Rashi* interprets the phrase to mean: when you listen to those *mitzvos* that appear to be of lesser significance, commandments which a person might tread upon with his heel. In *Pirkei Avos*, 2:1, *Rebbi* says, "Be as scrupulous in performing a minor *mitzvah* as a major one, for you do not know the rewards given for *mitzvos*." Can we view any *mitzvah* to be minor? Yes, if we view *mitzvos* to be a confirmation of ceremonies and rituals. When we realize that each *mitzvah* is one component in a vast integrated system, however, we no longer question the degree of importance. When each component exists to perform a specific function in an interrelated system, all are equally important.

Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl, interprets the word "eikav" as "consequence," since the heel naturally follows the foot movement. Hashem calls upon us to fulfill our Divinely mandated duties. He promises the prosperity of our material existence as a natural consequence. This interpretation focuses upon the second word of the phrase, "tishmeun", and its root, "shma" to hear/listen. He cites the *Midrash* that discusses why Moshe used the expression "Shema Yisrael" to address *Klal Yisrael* as they prepared to cross the Jordan. The *Midrash* analogizes this to a king who gave his bride two precious stones in recognition of her virtues. After the wedding, much to the king's chagrin, she lost one of the stones. He admonished her to be very careful not to lose the second stone. Hashem rewarded *Klal Yisrael* for the two virtues expressed in the words "naase v'nishma," "we will do and we will listen/obey." When they sinned with the Golden Calf they lost one "stone". Thus, He took "naase", "we will do," from them. Thus, He reminded the nation to "listen" - to be especially cautious not to lose the second virtue/stone - v'nishma.

This is the message of *Shema Yisrael*. *Klal Yisrael* - listen! If you listen and obey Hashem's command, you will repair the rift, correct the deficiency which was created by the sin of the Golden Calf. Our *pasuk* "v'hayah eikav tishmeun", underscores this same idea, as it admonishes us to listen carefully to Hashem's laws.

He afflicted you and let you hunger, then he fed you the manna that you did not know, nor did your forefathers know. (8:3)

Moshe recounts the trials and tribulations of *Klal Yisrael's* sojourn in the desert, as well as the effects it produced. Hashem had tested them, but it was for a specific purpose. As the *Ramban* explains, at times a father must chastize his son in order to prepare him for the future. It was better to endure the hardships of the wilderness, so that they would more freely appreciate the riches and the beauty of

Eretz Yisrael. The commentators address the "affliction" and "hunger" which Moshe mentions. Moshe is referring to the Heavenly food, the manna, which *Chazal* in the *Talmud Yoma* 75 say was the food of the angels. They ate manna during their forty-year trek in the wilderness; in the manna, they perceived the taste of every food. Why would the *Torah* regard eating manna as a test?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, cites the *pasuk* in *Bamidbar* 21:5, in which *Klal Yisrael* critiqued the food/manna they were "forced" to eat. They said, "*Our soul is disgusted with the lechem ha'klokel, insubstantial food.*" We note that as this was declared at the end of the fortieth year in the wilderness, the individuals who were issuing this complaint were the new generation, those about to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. These people had been born in the desert. They were not the people who left Egypt during the Exodus. What was their problem with the manna?

Their description of the manna, *lechem ha'klokel*, is noteworthy. *Ibn Ezra* says that the word "*ha'klokel*" is derived from the word "*kal*," which means light or easy. The generation that suffered in Egypt, that was subordinated to Pharaoh's cruel and merciless bondage, yearned for the day when they would obtain their food *b'derech kal*, through an easy, simple manner. They hoped for a *neis*, miracle, for a miraculous deliverance, when their food would be dropped down from Heaven. They valued the miracle of the manna. They understood only too well the difficulty of *avodas perach*, crushing labor. Yes, they appreciated the value of the Heavenly food.

The second generation, those who had not been in Egypt, who had never really suffered, who were raised on manna in the desert, had a different perspective. They had no need for Heavenly food. They did not and could not appreciate a food that was literally delivered to their door, that had in it every taste known to man. They did not want a gift; they wanted to work for their bread. They wanted to earn their bread; they sought no favors. "*By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread*" (*Bereishis* 3:18). The curse of *Adam Ha'Rishon* was a blessing for them! They wanted to sweat for their bread. Working constituted a *mitzvah*. Moshe understood this generation's dissatisfaction with the manna. They remained hungry after eating manna because it was not their bread, which they had earned. They could not assimilate its wonderful attributes into their being, because it was not what they viewed as their type of sustenance. True, they were afflicted, and they were tested - but they had brought it upon themselves.

At that time Hashem said to me: Hew for yourself two tablets of stone like the first...and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets...and I placed the tablets in the Aron which I had made. (10:1,2,5)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl., makes note of the fact that when the *Torah* discusses the *Luchos*, tablets, it mentions the material, *avanim*, stone, of which they were composed. This teaches us that the words of the law are engraved in stone. They are unalterable and absolute as stone. This lesson is especially significant in contemporary times when there are those who would raise their quill against the *Torah*, attempting to "modify" its laws to suit their own purposes. In the past, this practice has been the exclusive domain of the non-practicing Jew. Today, however, this malady has spread even to those who count themselves among the observant.

Hashem does not alter the law in order to accommodate the lapses in man. Two alternatives are before us: defection from the *Torah*; or complete and total return to the *Torah*. We cannot reform the *Torah* to suit our needs. Hashem wrote the same text on the new *Luchos* that He had written on the

original ones. Man changes; the *Torah* does not change.

The second *Luchos* were placed in the Aron together with the *Shivrei Luchos*, the broken pieces of the original *Luchos*. This serves to reinforce a dual memory. First, our iniquitous behavior broke the original *Luchos*. Every generation must remember to atone for that transgression. Second, atonement can be comprised only of a complete return to the old *Torah*.

And Hashem loves the ger/convert to give him bread and garment...you shall love the ger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (10:18,19)

The *Torah* repeats the mitzvah of *Ahavas Ha'Ger*, loving the convert, no less than thirty-six times! One would assume that the *Torah* would reiterate *mitzvos* such as *Shabbos*, the prohibitions against idol worship and murder, emphasizing their obvious importance. Indeed, the *Torah* does not repeat these critical mitzvos. The *Torah* is very careful with its words; every word has its own specific message. Yet, the *Torah* has no qualms about reminding us numerous times of our obligation to the *ger*. Why?

We can derive a profound lesson from this *pasuk* regarding human nature. Man's natural instinct is to denigrate those that are different in race, color, even status and position. Regardless of a person's humanistic values, the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, prompts him to view with disdain those who are different. The *Torah* specifically reminds us to love the *ger*, imbuing us with the tools to overcome the challenge of the *yetzer hora*.

What are the tools? What prescription does the *Torah* provide for us so that we will treat the *ger* with the dignity he deserves? The *Torah* enjoins us to remember the Egyptian bondage, "*And you know the soul of the convert, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*" (10:22) *Rashi* comments, "Consider how painful it is when he is persecuted." Feel the pain that the *ger* feels. Experience his humiliation. Taste his degradation. After all, in Egypt it was your lot. You should recall the time in your life when you were a *ger*, a stranger in a strange society.

Many people, however, cannot accept this type of logic. Indeed, reflecting on the ordeals of the past can have a negative effect. For some, it literally backfires, compelling them to act out their anxieties on those who are presently going through the same ordeal that they themselves had experienced. Their ears become deaf to the pleas of the downtrodden. They relive too many bad memories. Perhaps they think that by acting in an inconsiderate manner, they might erase the hurt and deprivation which they themselves endured.

We approach that person in a specific way. We remind him that he is no different than the hapless *ger*. He was once a stranger - in Egypt. Who does he think he is? How can he denigrate the immigrant when he himself was once an immigrant? It is ironic that so many of us become "citizens", quickly forgetting how we ourselves were recently immigrants.

Regardless of the approach, the *Torah* finds it necessary to reiterate the importance of being sensitive to the needs of he who is not "like us." One does not have to be extremely different; as long as he is not like us, we consider him to be different. The *Torah* senses the gravity of this malady and prescribes the ingredients for effecting its cure.

And you shall teach them to your sons. (11:19)

Regarding the word "v'nitzaltem" "and you will empty out (Egypt)", in *Sefer Shemos (3:22)*, *Rashi* comments that the word "v'limadtem," "and you will teach them", which appears in our *pasuk*, is the *piel* form, intensive conjugation, of the word "lilmod," to learn. Actually, the word that should be used to describe "teaching" should be the '*hiphil*,' causative form, of the verb. Hence, the *Torah* should have said, *le'halmid*, to make someone learn. This would be similar to the word, *l'halbish*, to dress someone. What is the reason for this change in the conjugation of the word?

Horav Yosef Berl, zl, infers a profound lesson from this. Teaching an individual *Torah* is an entirely different act than simply dressing him. It is not sufficient to merely impart knowledge to a pupil. It is necessary for one's teaching be an intensification of one's own learning. The *rebbe's Torah* study should be so powerful that it overflows and reaches out to the *talmidim*. The *rebbe's metzuis*, essence, pours out with love and enthusiasm for the *Torah* and the students.

This idea helps us to understand the sequence of the *pasuk* in *Krias Shma*: "And you shall teach them to your sons, and you shall speak in them." It would make sense that one first acquire the *Torah* by studying it before he speaks words of *Torah*. Should not *Torah* learning precede *Torah* speaking? The *Torah* is teaching us that even after one has personally acquired *Torah* knowledge, in order to disseminate this knowledge to others one should speak the *Torah* wherever he goes, when he sits down, when he travels. In this way, the *Torah* he teaches is the product of his own unremitting learning. This comprises the *Torah's* idea of "continuing education."

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Jerusalem, Israel
732-370-3344