

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARASHAT HA'AZINU

May my teaching drop like rain; may my utterance flow like the dew. (32:2)

The effect of rain and dew on the products of the earth is not noticeable. Indeed, it is primarily when it does not rain, when the earth is left dry and parched, that one realizes the critical contribution that rain makes to the finished product. When it rains, the moisture seeps into the soil, and the objective observer does not notice a change. When the earth produces verdant blossoms, fruit and grain, one realizes what the innocuous rain has accomplished. Likewise, when one studies Torah, the change is not immediate. One can learn and learn, and he does not seem to change. He becomes more knowledgeable, but no change in his personality is evidenced. Wait. Be patient. Nothing is wasted. The Torah enters his neshamah, soul, so that in due time, a marked change will become obvious.

It happens in the world of Torah chinuch, education, all of the time. One teaches a student and, at the end of the year, there does not seem to be any change. Has it all been a vain effort? Are some students destined not to make it? Are they doomed? No. Be patient. It might take years, but just as rain takes effect under the ground, hidden from the human eye, so, too, does the Torah work behind the scenes. It softens the heart and enters his soul, and, in due time, one sees fruit. Torah is never wasted.

The Rock! - Perfect is His work; For all His paths are justice. (32:4)

Hashem judges fairly, meting out justice in an exact and perfect manner. To the human eye, it may seem to be slow in coming, or it might seem questionable, but we trust that, since it emanates from Hashem, it is perfect. The word perfect applies to the totality of life throughout the continuum of time. We do not always understand what Hashem presents to us, but He takes everything into consideration and adds the happiness and sadness, pain and joy, failure and success - throughout time and puts it all together in His Master calculator to determine the perfect reward or punishment for this person. We do not understand, but we do believe.

Horav Aryeh Leib Shteinman, Shlita, addresses the fact that lately we have heard of individuals who at one point have possessed enormous wealth, but suddenly overnight have become poor men. People, who had until recently lived in palatial homes, are now relegated to live in homes that barely

would have housed their servants. This occurs also to individuals who until recently had been earning a decent to fine living and are now compelled to reach out to others for assistance in supporting their family. Why? What is the catalyst for this sudden downfall? Is it a punishment or does it have a silver lining?

He cites the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, in his commentary to Divrei Hayamim I 16:8, Hodi'u ha'amim alilosav, "Make His acts known among the nation." Alilosav is a reference to the chesed, kindness, that Hashem manifests to a person when He provides him with great benefit, with extremely good fortune, only to suddenly take it away from him. We perceive this as kindness because the sudden loss of so much good fortune cleanses him of his earthly sin. The great loss, which seems to be a tragedy, is really an act of mercy that spares him a worse fate. The Gaon cites the sefer Shaarei Rachamim that defines alilosav as referring to Hashem's attributes of rachum, chanun, etc., merciful, compassionate, etc. He explains that a person could have sinned in such a manner that his actions would incur the punishment of death. Hashem "provides" him with a poor man who is in dire need, so that the individual contributes to helping the poor man. Tzedakah tatzil mimaves, charity saves from death. In an act of mercy, Hashem has just spared the individual, by availing him of an opportunity in which he could circumvent the punishment that was due him.

People complain-- at times bitterly-- about their financial predicament, not realizing that the challenges that they are undergoing are actually for their benefit. Rav Shteinman exhorts us to wake up and realize once and for all that Hashem is the source of everything that occurs in our lives - whether good or perceived as not good. Hashem sends everything for a reason. Furthermore, it is inescapable and unavoidable. If, however, we do teshuvah, repent, Hashem, in His infinite mercy, might manipulate the punishment in such a manner that we pay our dues out of a "different pocket." Who knows if the financial crisis that one sustains does not take the place of a severe illness that could have struck him or a member of his family. He should be grateful for what he has and for what he receives. By repenting, he expiates his sin.

Is it to Hashem that you do this, O vile and unwise people? (32:6)

The word naval, vile, is not used anywhere else in the Torah. It is a strong term to describe an ungrateful nation. Why does the Torah use it here? Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, illustrates the lack of gratitude which Klal Yisrael demonstrates with the following analogy. A young couple won the grand prize: one year in a resort, all expenses paid. There had to be some catch to this prize. Who would give away such an incredible prize - and why?

They arrived at the small town which was at the outskirts of the palatial resort. The town hosted a small Jewish community among whose members was the wealthy sponsor of their prize. "Why did we win?" they asked him. He explained, "Our community needs a fresh infusion of spirituality. We need a young, vibrant couple that will raise the community's consciousness, elevate its spirits, and increase its commitment to serve the Almighty. We chose you because we feel that you have the potential to create this environment."

The young couple did not waste any time. As soon as they obtained the keys, they set to work - fixing up the cottage where they would be staying. Money was no object. They had a credit card to spend whatever they needed to produce positive results. First, however, they had to fix up the cottage, so that it would be more comfortable and give off a "positive" feeling. Every day, something else

occupied their time. After all, it was not a small cottage. After a day of shopping, they were tired and had to rest. A person must eat well in order to have the strength to do "so much." They ate well. They slept well; they enjoyed. They did everything, but what they had been asked to do.

Six months went by and they now needed a vacation. All of this "strenuous" shopping, eating and sleeping had taken its toll on them. Two weeks at a spa to "rest up" was not asking too much. When they returned, they discovered that their cottage was locked.

Their key did not work. Indeed, the locks had been changed. What chutzpah! They immediately went to town to confront their benefactor and demand an explanation.

"I am very sorry, but I cannot allow you to use the cottage any longer. Also, I must ask you to return the credit card. You will have to find another place to live and another source of income," the wealthy benefactor told them.

"How dare you do this without any warning?" the young man demanded angrily. "Is this the way you treat your guests? You invite us out here, and then you throw us out without so much as a roof over our heads!"

"You are surprised?" the man asked. "Well, I am also surprised. What possessed you to think that you could move in, spend all of that money and accomplish nothing? What have you done in the six months since your arrival? You have wallowed away your days shopping, spending, sleeping, vacationing - everything except the one thing that I asked you to do. You were supposed to raise the community's religious consciousness, and you did nothing but satisfy your own physical desires. You had everything, and you did nothing. How dare you complain?"

We have just read an analogy on life. When something goes wrong; when we are struck by troubles, illness, financial disaster, we ask the classic question, "Why me? What did I do to deserve this?" Then we become angry. It is wrong that we should have it so "bad."

Hashem responds with a powerful Ha'l'Hashem, "Is it to Hashem that you do this? I gave you everything. Where is your gratitude? Did you think that it was all for nothing?"

Nobody gets a free ride in this world. I provided you with life. I provided you with shelter, with health, with food, with family, and what did you do in return?

"Am naval, O vile nation!" Instead of sanctifying My Name in the world, you profaned it. Instead of acting like a moral and ethical nation, you became like all of the other nations. At times, you even attempted to outdo them. Now, when things are not going exactly the way you had planned, you come to Me to complain. After all of this ingratitude, you expect Me to give you back the keys to the house? What made you think that you could get away with it, live a life of abandon, taking and taking, and giving nothing in return? How dare you complain?"

There is one difference, however, between the analogy and reality. Hashem is not merely a human benefactor, who, when betrayed, responds negatively. Hashem is a loving Father, who never turns away from His children. He chastises and He punishes, but He embraces us lovingly when we return. We know what we have done. Now we must undo it. He is waiting.

O' vile and unwise people. (32:6)

Rashi explains the word naval, vile, as applying to Klal Yisrael for their lack of gratitude to

Hashem. They conveniently forgot what He had done for them. Sadly, we have not changed over the years. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates an episode that occurred concerning a couple who were on the verge of divorce. Apparently, the husband felt that his wife absolutely refused to do things "his" way. They had already gone to counseling and therapy to no avail. The therapists all agreed that his wife was not going to change, and, if it bothered the husband that much, they should get a divorce. There was no other alternative. Baruch Hashem, the couple saw beyond the shortsightedness of the counselors and sought out Rav Zilberstein as a last attempt at saving their marriage.

After listening to the husband present his criticism of his wife, Rav Zilberstein understood that much of what he was saying was not critical. His wife was really not guilty, considering the prevailing attitude in the house and some of the impossible demands the husband was imposing on her. After speaking to the wife, he saw a woman who was heartbroken, who did not want a divorce, but simply could not live up to her husband's onerous standards and demands.

Rabbi Zilberstein turned to the husband and said, "I know of a chosson, a bridegroom, who, one thousand years after the wedding, remembered the favors that his wife performed for him when they were first married. He took pity on her and remained committed to her."

The husband was certain that his ears were playing tricks on him. One thousand years after the wedding! "Who is this elusive chosson that lived for so many years?" he asked the rav. The rav was adamant. Yes, this chosson existed, and it was true. His devotion had not waned.

"Would you like to know the identity of this chosson?" the rav asked. "He is none other than Hashem! One thousand years after yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt, He says to Knesses Yisrael, that He remembers her love as a young bride. Yirmiyahu HaNavi says, 'I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unknown land.' (Yirmiyah 2:2) Hashem remembered how His nation followed Him out of Egypt, without anything but the basic essentials which they were able to grab during their liberation. A nation with so many children and infants left the 'protection' of Egypt to travel through a dangerous wilderness. Why? Because they followed Hashem - as a woman follows her husband.

"Tell me," the rav continued, "when you first married your wife, did she not leave her home and her family to follow you to the city of your choice? Did she complain? Yet, you have the audacity to sit in judgment against her. Where is your shame? Why do you not consider what she has done for you?"

"How many years have elapsed since your marriage took place? Ten, twenty, thirty? Certainly not as long as Hashem spent with the Jewish People - and He remembered. Why are you acting differently? If, after all of this, you insist on going through with the divorce, I suggest one thing. On Rosh Hashanah, when you recite the Mussaf Shemoneh Esrai, and you come to the passage of Zocharti lach chesed ne'urayich, 'I recall the kindness of your youth,' skip it! You have no business reciting this pasuk.

"Indeed, it might even serve as a prosecuting counsel against you. After all, you do not remember; you do not fulfill the meaning of this pasuk."

Rav Zilberstein concludes by exhorting us to remember what Hashem constantly does for us. Every Jew must remember his obligation to appreciate Hashem's beneficence. He cites Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl, who said, that to make a brachah, blessing, without kavanah, intention, purpose or meaning, is iniquitous, but to recite the Nodeh lechah, "We thank you Hashem," of Bircas HaMazon, Bentching, without kavanah, is much, much worse. To forget Hashem is the nadir of ingratitude.

He was like an eagle arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them, carrying them on its pinions. (32:11)

Rashi explains that Hashem led the Jewish People with mercy and compassion similar to the manner in which an eagle displays his mercy towards its young. He does not enter his nest suddenly. First, he flaps and shakes his wings above his children. He shakes between one tree and another tree, between one branch and another, so that his children awake and have the strength to receive him. Furthermore, he hovers above his young, careful not to rest his weight upon them. Rather, he covers them in such a manner that he touches, yet does not touch them. When he comes to take them from place to place, he does not take them with his feet like other birds. This is because other birds are afraid of the eagle which soars high and flies over them and must protect his young by holding them with his feet, thereby protecting them with his body. The eagle fears only the arrow. Therefore, he carries his young on his wings, implying, "Let the arrow enter my body, but not harm my children." Likewise, Hashem protected us from harm when the Egyptians shot arrows at us and catapulted stones. Likewise, when Hashem comes to redeem us, He will not come suddenly, but He will first make noise to arouse us so that we can prepare ourselves for the special moment.

Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, sharpens the contrast between the eagle and other birds. When other birds come to retrieve their young, they simply enter the nest, pick up their young, and leave. Not so the eagle, who first stirs up the nest and then spreads his wings above the nestlings so that, with keen, courageous eyes, they fly up to the nest upon the wings of their parent. They trust themselves to make this brave, upward flight because they have been imbued with courage and trust by their parent. So did Hashem first awaken His nation, giving them the opportunity to get in the habit of having the courage to trust themselves with free-willed decision and full consciousness to His guidance. This conscious, free-willed guidance was the preliminary condition that served as the basis for the future additional guidance that was to make them worthy of His Presence. The young eagle has the courage and self-confidence to leave the security of his warm nest and trust himself to fly upward into the isolating heights where his parent hovers. Anybody who has ever taken a chance, left a well-paying position to gamble on the future, knows that it takes courage and trust to make that move. Most people adjust very well to security - and want to remain that way. Everywhere, men and nations feel themselves secure only in the comfortable life established on the principles of power, money and strength. To sacrifice a life built upon the foundation of material exaltation and imagined security-- and transition into a life founded in the spirituality and morality that men are supposed to live-- does require courage and nobility of character. The world is used to self-worship, to the veneration of man and nature. To eschew all of this adoration in order to reach the lofty heights of morals and intelligence for which man should strive, to give it all up for a life of submission to Hashem, takes enormous courage. In order to obtain this courage, it was necessary for the nascent Jewish nation to receive its training by wandering in the stark wilderness under the guidance of the Almighty. The experiences which they sustained, as well as the teachings they received, provided them with an education and an awakening that inspired them to loftier goals. Indeed, they went from being a people of this world into becoming a People of G-d.

As the eagle trains and imbues his young, so did Hashem guide us to the realization that there was more; we should strive for it. We can obtain it, if we believe in ourselves enough to believe in Hashem.

The Rock! Perfect is His work... a G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He. (32:4)

Many of us go through life wondering... why a tzaddik, a thoroughly righteous individual, has to beg for a piece of bread to soothe his hunger pains, a glass of water to alleviate his thirst, a garment to clothe his body. This is, regrettably, his lot in life. Why? Certainly, Hashem has no problem addressing this person's material needs. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, analogizes this to a wealthy man whose only son was taken seriously ill. No one was able to help him, until a world-famous physician successfully diagnosed his illness and gave him medicine to save his life. In order to prevent the illness from recurring, the doctor strongly admonished the father to see to it that his son never eat any red meat.

One day, the father had to leave for an extended business trip. He reminded his wife that their son was not to have any meat. A few days later, the mother was having dinner, and the odor of the steaks overwhelmed her son to the point that he ran in and grabbed a piece of steak and gulped it down. By the time his father returned from his trip, the son was hovering between life and death. Once again, the father summoned the physician and pleaded with him to save his son's life. "I will never leave him again," the father cried. It took some time, but the doctor succeeded once again in saving the son's life.

After awhile, the father made a large banquet for family and friends, but did not invite his only son. In fact, his son was barred from entering the room where so many succulent meats were on display. People wondered how a father could be so "cruel" to invite everyone but his own son. Little did they realize that the father was performing the greatest service for his son.

The same thing occurs in this world. Hashem celebrates with many people, and it appears that everyone is at the party except his closest devotees. They seem to be barred from attendance. In reality, Hashem is true and just, and there is certainly a very good reason for their lack of inclusion at the party. They do not complain because they have unequivocal faith in Hashem's system of justice.

One last caveat that allows us a penetrating perspective into the manner in which Hashem balances the reward He bestows. Horav Arye Leib Hakohen, zl, the Chafetz Chaim's son, related that as a youth, his family lived in abject poverty. His father studied Torah day and night, while his mother eked out a pittance from their little grocery store. Once the situation became so impossible that his mother turned to her husband and asked, "Look at 'that' man who is illiterate, who never opens a sefer, whose children are boorish and uncouth. Yet, they are wealthy. They never want for anything. While you devote your life to the pursuit of Torah and mitzvos, with your children following in your footsteps, still poverty and starvation is all you have to look forward to. Why?"

The Chafetz Chaim turned to his wife and - in his quiet and gentle manner - replied, "Do you think that it would be right that a man who is not gifted with an astute mind, who has not tasted the sweetness of Torah, who has not sensed the beauty of mitzvos, and whose children are equally deficient, should also be deprived of material success? We should be happy that Hashem has granted us so much!"

What a beautiful thought! All too often we find reason to complain about our material circumstances, while we seem to ignore the spiritual gifts that Hashem has granted us. I dare say that anyone would not even dream of exchanging one for the other.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. (32:7)

It all boils down to perspective. We must address the issues of the present and look to the uncertainty of the future through the prism of the past. The experiences of those who have lived, their failures and successes, can serve as a source of direction for us as we develop the proper perspective on how to live. Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, asserts that delving into history is an indication of spiritual deficiency. He cites Chazal in the Talmud Nedarim 22b who say, "Had Klal Yisrael not sinned, they would have received only the Chamishei Chumshei Torah, five books of Moses, and Sefer Yehoshua, and the latter only because it details how the land should be divided among the tribes." By this statement, Chazal suggest that one must discern whether the study of history is really beneficial to people who are actively involved in a rigorous and spirited devotion to their duty. Only generations in a state of decline, who have lost their will and spirit, must look back to the past to be elevated and encouraged by the example of their forbearers. The consequences of their errors may serve as a guide and warning to their descendants concerning their present predicament.

For nations and individuals who live as they should, who have a strong, unswerving sense of commitment, the present will always be their primary focus. They are concerned with the here and now. Their minds and energies are so involved with the immediate task of carrying out their duties that they do not feel the need, nor do they have the time or patience, to look back for inspiration. Their lives are always in forward motion, always in "drive." Their search for knowledge centers on one question: "Where does our duty lie in what is our task now?" They understand that the answer to these questions will not be provided by a study of the past, by an in-depth analysis of the successes and failures of their ancestors. The answer to their question lies in the present, in the Torah and in the words of Chazal. Every generation has Torah leaders at its helm who have been imbued with an understanding of Hashem's word, and it is they who disseminate the Torah's wisdom to address the concerns of the present.

In other words, one cannot live in the past. One must live in the present while employing lessons and directions of the past, because issues of the past, quite probably, apply equally to the present. We believe in living testaments. The past continues to live, as it guides us in contemporary times. We do not study history; we live history.

We have learned from history that our People's strength has been derived from the beliefs which were imbued in them at the time of its inception in nationhood and that the endurance of those beliefs is qualified by the vision they carry with them. Other nations have expired because their perspective did not transcend their daily lifestyle.

Moreover, history is not something ancient. Hashem is a vital part of history, and Hashem has not changed! Our lives have meaning and purpose because Hashem is a part of our lives. He is as much a part of our lives today as He was a part of the lives of our ancestors'. This close affiliation to the past - as well as the search for moral principles and lessons to be gleaned from previous generations - has never meant retrogression. Its objective has been positive, as it has always been a basis for progress and a continuous source of achievement. The foundations of the past were concretized with the notion that they will be the link in a chain of continuity from Sinai until Moshiach redeems us from our present exile. Perhaps the perfect word to describe the history of the Jewish People is 'momentum'. From the very moment that we became a nation, we have surged forward with a tremendous drive to achieve national success. With the ever-present awareness that we are part of one long continuum, we look forward to a future of achievement until that auspicious moment that Moshiach Tzidkeinu will arrive and herald the end of history.

Ask your father and he will relate it to you, and your elders and they will tell you. (32:7)

Horav Meir Arik, zl, suggests an insightful rendering of this pasuk. A manhig Yisrael, Torah leader, is likened to a father. We find in Sefer Melachim 2:12 that Elishah refers to his rebbe, Eliyahu HaNavi as Avi, Avi, "My father, my father." Veritably, what else is he? A leader's function is to guide with a love parallel to that of a father. Thus, the pasuk is teaching us: If you have a question concerning which path to choose, ask your Torah leader for advice. What are the criteria for a Torah leader? He must be an individual whose reply will be, zekeinecha yomru lach, "Your elders have in the past responded to your question in such a manner." His reply is based on the age-old responses of the daas Torah, wisdom of the Torah, as expounded by the leaders of the past generations. If he says, however, "My grandfather, or those of previous generations have said so, but I think differently. I think that contemporary times demand a different approach," do not accept such a leader as your guide. If he responds in this way, he will surely turn you away from the derech ha'emes, true and correct path to spiritual achievement.

Looking to the past for guidance, reflecting upon the hashkafos, perspectives, and minhagim, customs, of Torah leaders of previous generations, is an essential component of a ben Torah's way of life. We do not deviate from the teachings of our Torah leadership of the past. On the contrary, we learn to implement their teachings into the contemporary settings and issues that confront us. I recently saw an interesting vignette in the published history of a distinguished family of German descent. It was a year after the Rosh Hayeshivah of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, Horav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zl, had arrived at the Mesivta. At that time, he was teaching a daily blatt shiur, Talmud class. Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl, the Menahel of Torah Vodaath, would teach Pirkei Avos from time to time to the older students. When he came to 1:17, in which the Tanna says, "All my life I have been raised among the sages, and I have not found anything better than silence," he explained that the Tanna had studied all the hanhagos, practices, of the chachamim, sages. This refers to not only their Torah teachings, but even their everyday, mundane practices, because the hanagah of a Torah scholar is in itself a manner of teaching dinnim, Jewish laws, and mussar, ethical behavior. Suddenly, one of the students in the class raised his hand and asked, "Can we today, at the Mesivta, also emulate and derive lessons from all the hanhagos of all the rebbeim?"

A total silence permeated the room at the audacity of the question. Rav Mendlowitz remained silent, as he sternly stared at the questioner. Finally he responded, "To publicly ask such a question is chutzpah, insolence. However, since you asked the question, I must answer it. For me to state unequivocally that a rebbe who teaches in the Mesivta is on the madreigah, spiritual plateau, that every practice of his is similar to a din in the Shulchan Aruch, code of Jewish law, it would be essential that I be acquainted with every aspect of his private and family life, in addition to his hanhagah in the Mesivta. Since I am not aware of every rebbe's private life, I am not able to give an educated reply. There is, however, one rebbe whose behavior both in the Mesivta and in his private life I have studied very carefully, and I have reached the conclusion that each hanhagah of his is like a din in the Shulchan Aruch. That rebbe is Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky. He is a very good example of what the Tanna in the Mishnah had in mind."

Rav Shraga Feivel was an individual who exemplified this virtue. He was a man whose every nuance was a lesson to be studied and emulated. Indeed, the following episode bears witness to this gadol's integrity and its influence on others. Towards the end of 1956, Shimon Linchner, a grandson of

Rav Shraga Feivel, who had recently become engaged, fell seriously ill and tragically passed away shortly before he was to have been married. It was a terrible blow to the family and to the entire yeshiva. The Rosh Hayeshivah, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, was maspid, eulogized, the niftar, deceased. He mentioned that it was well-known that Rav Shraga Feivel refused to ask for deference on behalf of any of his family members. Everyone was to be considered equal. Undoubtedly, Rav Yaakov said he carried this hanhagah with him into the Olam Ha'Emes, World of Truth, even for his beloved grandson. Thus, the Middas Ha'Din, Attribute of Strict Justice, was empowered to have its full jurisdiction.

He discovered him in a desert land, in desolation, a howling wilderness. (32:10)

Hashem found us to be loyal to Him when we accepted His Torah in the wilderness. This acceptance was especially significant and acknowledged by Hashem, since we were the only ones willing to accept the Torah. Fidelity to the Almighty is a virtue that is rewarded. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates an inspiring story which we should apply to our own lives. An American Jew worked hard at his job, but could barely make ends meet. He always had too much month left at the end of his paycheck. Nonetheless, he remained committed and observant in every aspect of his relationship with the Almighty. One day, he noticed an advertisement seeking a manager for an apartment complex. The owner was a wealthy non-Jew who was willing to pay a premium for the right person. Indeed, including a free apartment and benefits, the package totaled about \$10,000 a month, a salary that was many-fold more than this Jew was presently earning. He made the call and scheduled an appointment for an interview for the next day.

There was one slight problem: It was during the Nine Days from Rosh Chodesh Av until our national day of mourning on Tisha B'Av. This created a problem for the fellow seeking the position. He was in great need of a haircut and a shave. What should he do? He had never before shaved during this period of mourning. On the other hand, if he presented himself to the gentile in his current appearance, he would have very little chance of landing the position that he so badly needed. He decided that for once he would give himself a dispensation and shave. After all, his family had to eat. Such an opportunity does not appear every day.

The yetzer hora, evil inclination, has incredible powers. It can convince a person that the mistake he is about to make is, in reality, a positive step, a necessary move. As was the case, the yetzer hora did a job on this person. The next day, he presented himself bright and early at the gentile's office. The interview seemed to be going well, and the man was starting to get his hopes up. This was especially true when the owner told him that the previous eight applicants had failed to impress him. He said, "I would like to ask you one question that is gnawing at me."

"By all means, ask whatever you wish," the hopeful applicant replied. "Living with observant Jews for many years," the gentile began, "I have had occasion to have business dealings with them. I know that this time of year is a period of mourning for members of your religion, during which haircuts and shaving are not acceptable, except under extenuating circumstances. Thus, it surprises me that you have come to my office with a fresh haircut and shave. If it is a period of mourning, it should, likewise, affect you."

The Jewish applicant was embarrassed beyond words. He explained, "Under normal circumstances, I do not shave or take a haircut during this period. However, I feared that by presenting myself to you in my current appearance, I was precluding any chance of securing the position. So, I

allowed myself to shave."

When the gentile heard this, he responded in disgust, "As far as I am concerned our meeting is concluded. I am seeking a manager who is trustworthy, who will oversee my property with utmost reliability and truthfulness. How do you expect me to trust you if you have no loyalty to your G-d? If you are willing to renege something in which you have always believed, just to make an impression to secure a job, then you are not the man for this position."

This is a powerful reply that should give us all something to think about.

*Hashem will see and be provoked by the anger of His sons and daughters, and He will say, "I shall hide My face from them and see what their end will be - for they are a generation of reversals."
(32:19,20)*

The Chasam Sofer, zl, made use of an incident that occurred concerning his rebbe, Horav Pinchas Halevi Horowitz, zl, the Baal Haflaah, who at the time was the Rav of Frankfurt. One day, a woman entered the Rav's home with a complaint against her husband. Apparently, he would take everything that they owned and give it away to charity. While he earned a fine living, his family was relegated to living in near poverty because of his philanthropic tendencies. As soon as this woman finished speaking, a poor man in tattered clothes visited the Rav and asked to lodge a complaint against his wealthy brother. It seems that his brother was bent on redefining the concept of stinginess. He hoarded every penny that he obtained, allowing his brother and family to live in abject poverty. When the Haflaah heard these contrasting complaints, he asked that the two subjects of the complaints, the woman's husband and the wealthy brother, be brought before him.

The two men came and presented themselves to the Rav. Turning to the woman's husband, the Rav asked, "My sources inform me that you have a difficult time holding on to your money. You seem to have this compelling need to rid yourself of your possessions. While your charitable proclivity is to be commended, there is a limit even to charity."

"Rebbe, let me explain," the man replied. "Man does not know how long he will live. Tomorrow, I could be gone from the world. It is well known that the only possessions that accompany a person to the next world are mitzvos and good deeds. Tzedakah, charity, is my entrance ticket to Gan Eden."

After the Rav heard the first one's excuse, he turned to the wealthy man who had ignored the pleas of his poverty-stricken brother and asked, "What is your excuse for hoarding all of your money?"

"Rebbe," he began. "Man does not know the length of his days. I might live to a very ripe old age, and I will need all the funds in my possession to secure that my retirement is well funded. After all, no one else will take care of me when I am old and frail."

The Baal Haflaah turned to the two men and said, "Hashem should protect each of you from the source of his fears. The one who is afraid that he might leave this world in the very near future should be blessed with longevity, and the one who refuses to help his brother because he fears that he will live a long time should not have reason to worry about that." Shortly thereafter, the Rav's words became a reality.

The Chasam Sofer concluded the story, saying that this was the message of the pasuk. Hashem

saw that His sons and daughters were provoking His anger. He said, "Let Me see how they will respond to their 'end,' how they will react when they confront their thoughts concerning their own mortality." Alas, what did Hashem see? He saw that Dor tahapuchos heimah, "They are a generation of reversals." They turn everything around. Instead of reacting positively to the day of death, by giving charity and performing mitzvos, they respond with gluttony and self-indulgence, seeking to gorge themselves with whatever they can. It seems that the lessons imparted by this message have not yet reached our generation.

May My teaching drop like rain, may My utterance flow like dew. (32:2)

Torah is compared to life - sustaining, nourishing rain and to dew that is even more welcome than rain, because it arrives at a time that never inconveniences anyone. The commentators, each in his own manner, explain the simile of rain and dew with regard to the Torah. They focus on the ability of rain to generate growth and development. I would like to add one point concerning a function of rain, which could also serve as a metaphor for Torah. One of the extreme qualities of rain is that it causes whatever seeds or vegetation are in the ground to germinate and grow. In other words, if there are weeds or thorns in the ground, the rain will enable them to grow tall and strong. Torah is also like that. If one is worthy, the Torah will illuminate his eyes and he will be able to perceive the greatness and wonders of the Almighty. If, however, the individual is of a base character, morally deviant from a society guided by spiritual ascendancy, the Torah can have an adverse effect on him. He may use it to support his unconscionable behavior and practices.

We often forget that the early secularists were erudite in Torah literature. They used their Torah knowledge to develop loopholes in the law and to justify their rebellion against Hashem. The powers of reason which are honed through Torah study can themselves become the catalyst for undermining the Torah. Indeed, the founders of the Haskalah, Enlightenment, claimed that logic is the sole medium by which man can acquire knowledge. Thus, they reduced Revelation to nothing more than Divine legislation, dismissing the idea of revealed religion. They removed the Divine from the Torah, supporting their position with perverted logic based upon their knowledge of the Torah. In this case, the Torah nurtured weeds and thorns, enabling them to grow. The darkness that had not originally been expunged from this individual is nurtured by the light that was intended to illuminate his life. Just like the rain. Indeed, is this not the very reason the farmer rids his field of weeds and thorns prior to planting the new seed?

Rashi interprets the pasuk in Hoshea 14:10, "For the ways of Hashem are straight - the righteous traverse them and the wicked stumble upon them," in this manner. The very same path of G-d which serves to elevate the righteous also serves to make the wicked stumble.

Chazal make the same point with regard to the study of Torah. "For (those who study Torah) diligently, it becomes a source of life. For those who study it laxly, it becomes a deadly poison" (Shabbos 88b). The very Torah that is a life-giving elixir to the one who studies seriously becomes a poison to the one who views its study as a mere trophy or even as an intellectual exercise. There is nothing as pernicious as evil feeding and drawing upon the sources of good. When it is combined with evil character traits, the light of Torah does not mitigate the evil, but rather feeds and fans its flames. If a person does not entirely uproot the bad and evil within him, then light and darkness both have an equal influence upon him.

This idea is very aptly explained by the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna in his commentary to Mishlei 19:9. He cites the pasuk in Tehillim 85:12, "Truth will sprout from the earth, and righteousness will peer from heaven." He explains that the earth maintains the attribute of truth in its manner of producing its bounty. It grows whatever is planted therein. If wheat is planted, it will produce wheat, etc. From the heavens comes forth rain which is likened to righteousness - in that it is "fair," raining down equally on all vegetation. Thus, if one plants poisonous fruits in the ground, the "righteous" rain will nurture it and the "truthful" earth will produce it. Likewise, Torah, which comes to us from Above, provides the individual with the opportunity to attain whatever his heart desires. If it desires growth in yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, it will enable him to reach this goal. If, however, his heart is filled with a bitter, acrimonious seed, it will also give that sentiment the ability to grow. We should take a lesson from the farmer and purify our hearts, so that the truth that sprouts will be the truth of Torah.

Hashem will see and grow angry from the provocation of His sons and daughters. He will say, "I shall hide My face from them and see what their end will be; for they are a generation of capriciousness, children without trust. (32:19, 20)

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonenfeld, zl, gave a noteworthy interpretation of the above pasuk during a dialogue he had with Ben Hillel, one of the primary leaders of the secular Zionist movement. Ben Hillel had been raised as an Orthodox Jew and had rejected his upbringing, choosing a lifestyle of secularism instead. Regrettably, as was the case among many of his colleagues, there existed a bitter contempt for the path of life chosen by his parents and forebears. At every juncture, he would speak with disdain and derision to and about his observant brethren. Seeing Rav Yosef Chaim walking down the street, Ben Hillel approached him and said to him superciliously, "Rav Yosef Chaim, as a wise, intelligent man, have you not seen the folly of your clinging to an archaic tradition? You are a man who possesses keen insight and wisdom. Can you not see that there is no future to Orthodoxy? The young generations have turned away from your obsolete observances. Any intelligent person can see that the trend of the future is modernity, secularism and a complete break with the past. In another twenty, thirty years your brand of Judaism with its old-fashioned views will disappear completely. Concede and stop waging war with us. Do you really believe that your grandchildren will adhere to your way of life? They, too, will attend regular progressive schools, if they do not want to lag behind!" The man's chutzpah was outrageous. It did not faze Rav Yosef Chaim. With total conviction and equanimity, he looked Ben Hillel right in the eye and asked, "Are you so sure that your grandchildren will follow in your ways? On the contrary, I am quite certain that they will renege your perverse philosophies, end up attending yeshivos and growing into fully committed, observant Jews. Your descendants will one day open their eyes and see the shallowness of your beliefs, the vacuousness of your so-called ideologies. They will clearly see that your entire belief is based on falsehood and nurtured in deceit."

"What makes you so sure that you are right?" Ben Hillel asked him.

"It says so clearly in the Torah," Rav Yosef Chaim replied. "'Hashem will see and grow angry from the provocation of His sons and daughters.' Why does the Torah use the name Hashem which symbolizes G-d's attribute of rachamim, mercy, when speaking of His anger? The Name Elokim, indicating the attribute of Din, strict Justice, would have been more appropriate. The answer is that, despite the Jews' provocation of Hashem, He will not respond in anger. He will certainly be disappointed and become angered, but He will not lash out at them. They will be granted a reprieve during which time the Almighty will stand by and wait patiently. Why? Because Hashem knows that

their lapse in faith is temporary, 'for they are a generation of capriciousness.' They reverse themselves quickly. Thus, by the time the next generation appears, they will have reversed the disastrous course taken by their forebears. 'They are children without trust,' a new generation that does not give credence to the ersatz beliefs of their parents. They will quickly realize the void in their parents' lives and the vacuity of their ideologies. This will spur them on to search for a life of meaning, a life rich with meaning, a life filled with spiritual content, a life of moral rectitude, a life above the base desires of their physical dimension."

Ben Hillel said no more. He really had no response, because deep within his inner psyche, he knew that Rav Yosef Chaim was correct. Rav Yosef Chaim saw the future of the Baal Teshuvah movement, the waves of Jews who would return to a life of commitment and faith, to the life that has sustained our nation throughout the millennia.

Now that we know the fact, we must search for the reason. Why did so many return? What motivates thousands to reject the "fun" that is so endemic to today's hedonistic society? What voice tells them to stop what they are doing in order to commence a search for a deeper meaning to life? Last, what causes someone who has had no contact with any form of observance for two or three generations to drop it all to become frum, observant?

In the end of the days, in the period preceding Moshiach Tzidkeinu, there will be a great returning to Hashem. This is prophesized by the Navi Yechezkel and the Navi Malachi. It is as if Hashem is bringing back those whom He has selected to be a part of the Jewish People as they go on to their ultimate redemption. During this period, Hashem returns to us. To explain this concept further, we cite from the Tiferes Shlomo, who notes that when Yaakov Avinu bid farewell to his children, he said, "Come together, and I will tell you what will happen to you in the end of the days." The word "yikra," what will happen, is spelled in an unusual manner. It should be spelled with a "hay" at the end, instead of the aleph. The aleph at the end changes the meaning from "(what will) happen" to "calling." The Tiferes Shlomo explains that when one acquires an article he must make a kinyan, an act of acquisition. For movable objects or for animals, a kinyan meshichah, pulling the object to oneself, is sufficient. When dealing with animals, if striking it or calling it will cause it to move, the kinyan meshichah takes effect.

The period prior to the advent of Moshiach is the time when Hashem takes possession of the Jewish People. In the period prior to the end of the days, Hashem took possession via the medium of a stick; He drew us closer when we were beaten by the nations of the world. It was the persecutions to which we were subjected that catalyzed our movement back to the Almighty. Look at the pattern of history. Every period of assimilation was followed by oppression and persecution. It was always the stick that brought us back.

Not so in the end of the days. Yaakov Avinu alludes to the idea that prior to Moshiach's coming, Hashem will "call" us. This calling will engender within us a desire to come home, to return to Him. This is why the Torah uses an "aleph" for "vayikra" instead of a "hay." It will not be a happening; it will be a Divine calling. Those that are fortunate to listen will return and be embraced by Hashem.

For how could one pursue a thousand, and two cause a myriad to flee, if not that their Rock had sold them out, and Hashem had delivered them. (32:30)

One of the most challenging and, hence, often discussed theological issues is the holocaust that

destroyed most of European Jewry. There is no shortage of papers that have been written on the subject and no dearth of self-proclaimed experts and "prophets" who have attempted to attribute rationale to the calamitous events that have left an indelible imprint on the Jewish psyche. First, the term holocaust is a misnomer. Horav Simcha Wasserman, zl, notes that the Hebrew word used for holocaust is shoah, which means "disaster." The word "aster" means "star" as in "asterisk," which is the symbol used to make a star. People have associated mazal, luck/fortune, with stars. Hence, a disaster means a bad star, bad luck, referring to something that "just happens." Shoah then becomes an occurrence that just happened, something inexplicable. It is a tragedy that just happened with no apparent reason.

There is nothing further from Jewish thought than such a statement. Absolutely nothing in Jewish life simply "just happens." Everything occurs by design of the Almighty. Thus, if the words "shoah" or "holocaust" leads one to believe that these events "just happened" to us, then they are a misnomer and misleading. Perhaps a more correct term would be "tragedy." The European tragedy was designed by Hashem. We do not know why. All we can do is study patterns in history and attempt to understand them as a lesson for the present and a portent for the future.

How did it happen? How did the Jews of Europe go like lambs to the slaughter? These are some of the questions asked by self-decreed academics, who manipulate their audiences to support their own insecurities and religious shortcomings. Questions such as these are more provocative than explanatory. While many responses have been given, the one most cogent and theologically acceptable is found in our parsha.

In Shiras Haazinu, Moshe Rabbeinu relates to Klal Yisrael many of the experiences that they will undergo. He does not shy away from the unpleasant and the tragic. The song is a prophecy, which tells explicitly what is going to happen and why. Hashem tells Moshe that the song is an "eid." The word "eid," explains Rav Simchah, has two meanings. One definition is "witness," something which testifies. The second meaning is "warning." Shiras Haazinu is a warning of what will occur as the result of certain behavior, as well as a witness attesting to the fact that what is predicted will -- and has -- come true over the millennia.

Therefore, when we ask the questions of why and how, we should look into the Torah, and we will discover that the question had actually already been asked 3300 years ago: "For how could one pursue a thousand, and two cause a myriad to flee?" Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, the venerable mashgiach of Mir and Ponevez would point to this pasuk and say that Moshe was asking the question that so many have asked concerning the European tragedy.

While these are painful questions - questions that have alienated many - the Torah gives the answer: "If not that their Rock had sold them out, and Hashem has delivered them." Their passive response was not natural. It did not "just happen." It was a tragedy decreed by Hashem - a tragedy of epic proportion - a tragedy that we, with our limited ability, cannot understand.

Let me explain the meaning of an issue that is inexplicable. In Parashas Ki Sissa (Shemos 33:18-23), Moshe asks Hashem, "Hareini na es kovodecha," "Please reveal to me Your Glory." Hashem responds, "V'raisa es achorai, u'panai lo yeira'u." "You may see behind Me, but the front of Me you cannot see." The Yalkut Shimoni explains this dialogue, to be asserting that as inhabitants of this world, with its limitations, one cannot possibly comprehend events that are intellectually perplexing and emotionally challenging. One can only see the "footprints" of Providence as Hashem has passed.

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, explains this Midrash in light of the following incident. He was once invited to the home of an art connoisseur, who proudly displayed to him his collection of paintings. As Rav Aharon approached one of the paintings to get a closer look, his host said, "Rabbi,

you cannot appreciate the painting unless you are at a distance of five feet." If the work of a human artist cannot be fully appreciated unless it is viewed from a distance, how much more so the work of Hashem, the Cosmic Artist of the world. Only after Hashem has completed the canvas of history will His meanings emerge and His rationale be comprehended.

To attempt to rationalize the European tragedy is to try to assess a complex canvas from a distance of two inches. Hashem told Moshe that His work can only be understood in retrospect, from a distance of time. The grasp of our limited intellect does not permit us access to the realm of comprehension with regard to the troubling events that occur. To attempt to rationalize Hashem's actions is to claim knowledge of Hashem's Master Plan.

On the other hand, one may and should be a student of history in terms of searching for patterns. These patterns only give us something to consider, a way of viewing the present as a map for preparing for the future. Rav Aharon makes a strong point concerning those who attribute reasons to the tragedy. He distinguishes between: a rationalization, a theological explanation of the cause of the tragedy; and theorizing from a historical and logical perspective, based upon the Torah, why a tragedy has occurred. In other words, the famous statement issued by Horav Meir Simchah, zl, of Dvinsk, in his *Meshech Chochmah*, prior to the European tragedy, pinpointing the secular Jewish movement, whose roots were in Berlin, as the precursor of the tragedy is not a theological rationale, but rather, a historical perspective and portent for European Jewry. Indeed, noted secular historians concede that Biblical criticism, which emerged in Berlin, helped fuel anti-Semitism in Europe. As long as the Bible was an accepted and revered volume of Jewish theology, the Jews were not despised nationally, even though they were persecuted. It was only after "our own" Bible critics began to chip away at the credibility of the Torah, in their efforts to justify their own immoral miscreant behavior, that hatred for the Jews began to swell in the hearts of their gentile neighbors. Our exalted status was diminished, and roots of anti-Semitism that had been dormant were energized.

After all is said and done, this tragedy and the others that have befallen our nation are beyond the scope of our intellectual grasp. As Torah Jews, we accept Divine will and bow our heads in awed silence to those who, over the millennia, have been persecuted and murdered Al Kiddush Hashem. To paraphrase Rav Aharon, "Following that silence, we must raise our heads and declare to the world, 'Lo amus, ki echyeh va'asaper maasei kah,' 'I will not die; I will live and tell the Glory of G-d. (Tehillim 118:17)'"

My Torah shall drop as the rain, my speech shall flow gently like the dew. (32:2)

Moshe Rabbeinu uses the simile of rain and dew to describe the Torah. The commentators, each in his own unique manner, expound on the comparison of Torah to these natural gifts of Hashem. Sforno emphasizes the relationship of the mekabeil, receiver/student of Torah, to the Torah. Both rain and dew have a beneficial effect on the earth, providing the water it needs so that the seeds may grow. Rain may come down to earth in torrents. Dew, in contrast, lands gently on the earth in a thin layer.

Sforno posits that both the average person and the erudite, brilliant scholar are capable of comprehending the Torah. The difference between the two is in their level of understanding and ability to grasp its lessons and profundities. The average Jew will absorb Torah on a superficial level. His grasp does not exceed his reach. He understands and appreciates Torah within the constraints of his intellectual acumen. This concept of Torah is compared to tal, dew, which benefits and enhances the earth on a gentle and limited level. The intelligent, advanced student of Torah, who plumbs its profundities and resolves its mysteries, is compared to the rain. Strong rain is driven to the earth with

force, which, at times, overwhelms the land. The Torah overwhelms the mind of the scholar, just as it captivates and penetrates the soul of the wise man, who is capable of appreciating its depth and the wonders of Hashem's teachings.

How is it possible for the same item to have two distinct incongruous effects on people? How could Torah be compared to gentle dew and also to strong rain? Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita, cites Ibn Ezra in his preface to his commentary to Sefer Koheles, who compares Hashem's influence, His spiritual flow, to the rays of the sun. We see with our own eyes that some objects become brighter in the sun, while people turn darker in its rays. The sun is the same; the objects are different. Likewise, among people: There are those to whom Torah is overwhelming and compelling, due to its depth and wisdom. To others, Torah is simple and gentle. It all depends on with what capabilities and attitude one approaches it.

Attitude plays a critical role in success in Torah. One must have a great desire to achieve success in Torah and be willing to work hard to achieve his goal. The individual who takes it easy -- sitting back and waiting for the Torah to enter his mind -- will only develop a peripheral knowledge of Torah. I recently read a powerful story about a young boy's resolve to study Torah, related in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's, *Touched By A Story 2*.

The story is about a thirteen-year-old survivor of the Holocaust. As a child, he did not have the opportunity to study Torah beyond the primary courses taught in the local cheder. His desire had always been to go to yeshivah gedolah to study Torah in depth, but his hopes were not realized as a result of the war. He spent his youth differently than others. As a young boy, he was witness to his parents' execution. He then became a victim of Nazi cruelty himself. Forced to run away and hide, he survived on grass and hay.

With the liberation, he was thrown into a new turmoil. With no home and no family, he finally made it to the American shore, alone and lonely. Lucky to be befriended by a family, who, albeit kind, could not understand his plight, the next two years were at best bittersweet, filled with sadness and pain.

His dream to become a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, continued to burn fiercely in his mind. He visited a number of schools, hoping to be accepted as a student. Alas, no one was interested in teaching Aleph Bais to a thirteen-year-old boy. He was frustrated. All he wanted was to learn Torah, and no one was willing to give him a chance. He was about to give up, but decided one more attempt could not hurt. He would try one more yeshivah.

He walked into the principal's office and presented his case. Giving it all he had, he mixed emotion with logic and a little begging. The principal seemed genuinely concerned, and the young boy felt he might finally have made a dent. He would be accepted as a student in this yeshivah.

Just as his hopes soared, however, the rug was pulled from under him, as the principal said, "We would love to have you attend our school, but there is nowhere that I could place a thirteen-year-old boy whose proficiency level does not extend beyond the Aleph -Bais."

Crushed, the young boy looked back at the principal and, with dejection written all over his face and with tears streaming from his eyes, he said, "I accept the rejection. It is something I have become accustomed to hearing. I ask you only for one favor. Could you please write me a note stating that I came to you and asked to be accepted in your yeshivah, so that I could learn Torah, and you told me that it is ridiculous for a thirteen- year-old boy to be studying in the same class with kindergarten children. Please see to it that when I die the Chevrah Kadisha, Jewish burial society, buries me with

that note in my hand. This way I can come before Hashem and tell Him that I at least tried to the best of my ability to learn Torah!"

When the principal heard this heartrending plea from the boy's mouth, he jumped up from his chair, embraced the boy and together they cried. The very next day, the thirteen-year-old boy was learning Torah with boys who were nine years his junior. He did not care. He finally was doing what he always strived to do - learn Torah. Today, he is a talmid chacham who, for almost a half of a century, has been teaching Torah to earnest young men in Yerushalayim who, like himself, want to achieve Torah scholarship.

A G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He. (32:4)

In the Talmud Taanis 11A, Chazal explain the meaning of tzadik v'yashaar hu, "righteous and fair is He"; Hashem metes out exacting justice to the righteous for their misdeeds, while He rewards the wicked for their merits, so that He does not deprive the tzadikim of eternal life in the next world. They add that at the time of a person's departure to his eternal home, all of his earthly deeds also take leave of him. The Heavenly Tribunal then says to him, "Did you do thus and thus at such and such place on such and such day?" He responds, "Yes." He is then told to sign his name to attest to the veracity of the record of his deeds. Moreover, the individual is matzdik es ha'din, ratifies the judgment he will receive, telling them; "You have judged me correctly." This is the idea behind fairness and righteousness: everybody gets his due - and he accepts it.

Let us try to understand Chazal. This occurs in the Olam ha'Emes, World of Truth. There are no games there, no shtick, no lies. Why is a person asked anything? Is there a possibility that one might not recognize his own actions? Is it necessary to respond in the affirmative and to sign in testimony and agreement? What are Chazal teaching us with this idea?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, explains that in this world our perspective is limited to time, place and sensory perception. Everything we do has an enormous effect on our surroundings, on the people with whom we deal and on those we influence. We do not realize this, however, because we cannot perceive anything beyond the boundaries that being made of flesh and blood establish for us.

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, explains that only Hashem Yisborach can mete out justice in a righteous and just manner. When He gives retribution, He takes every variable into consideration. Every smile, every tear, every bit of joy, and every drop of sadness: all factor into Hashem's accounting of a situation and His retribution.

This process is beyond man, given his physical limitations. In the World of Truth, our perception becomes eminently clear, the past and future are no longer incongruent tenses. They can now be viewed as parallel with the present. Suddenly, the actions that appeared "reasonable" from the earthly perspective have now taken on a completely new image. More people are involved: ramifications are magnified and extended. The individual no longer recognizes his actions for what they were before. Could these be his actions? Is it possible that what he sees now is the consequence of his actions? Against his will, he must accept the new reality, the picture perfect of his earthly activities. "Yes," he acknowledges, "these are my activities."

Likewise, when a person acts in a positive manner, whether it be carrying out a mitzvah, performing an act of lovingkindness, or any good deed, the picture in the Olam ha'Emes also changes.

He will see the incredible long- term effect of his positive actions, whom they inspired, how their influence spread out in many ways.

He is then asked to affix a signature affirming his actions. That signature is the moment of truth. He now confronts the overwhelming reality of his actions. He sees the incredible good, and that is reassuring, but he also sees the extent of his misdeeds. The realization that all of the terrible consequences of his actions are before him -- and they are his sins -- is in itself the greatest punishment. When we are confronted with the truth - the extent - the effect - the overwhelming negativity resulting from our misdeeds, we realize the depth of our sins and recognize their severity. What we thought was a simple infraction has now become a sin of epic proportions.

As we begin a new year filled with aspirations, hope and renewed vigor to serve Hashem in the prescribed and correct manner, we should keep all this in mind. The good deeds that we perform are magnified beyond anything we can fathom. Regrettably, our negative activities have a similar effect. Our decision concerning which path we choose - that of reward or that of punishment - is a decision we must make here and now.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. (32:7)

Moshe Rabbeinu's theme is very clear: Klal Yisrael is an am naval, a vile nation, whose shortsightedness and ingratitude play a role in its malevolent attitude towards Hashem. The cure is equally simple: reflect upon the past; study the glorious history of a nation under G-d's direction and beneficence; and realize that what has occurred in the course of world history was all regulated by Hashem for His People. We wonder why the Torah focuses on yemos olam, the days of yore. Should it not have said me'oraos olam, the happenings of the world? What about the timeline during which these occurrences took place needs to be emphasized?

I think the Torah is teaching us a compelling lesson in history and gratitude. We must judge history corresponding to the backdrop of yemos olam, time period during which the historical endeavors and occurrences took place. Upon judging the people of history, we must do so through the prism of the time frame of that period.

Having said this, I feel it is necessary to focus on a topic that has long been ignored. If Moshe Rabbeinu tells us that studying the past will cure our ingratitude and that lessons gleaned from a previous generation will be therapeutic for our shortsightedness, perhaps we should also follow this advice.

American Jews of the post-Holocaust period are the beneficiaries of a rich legacy of Torah that was transplanted on these shores by the udim mutzalim me'eish, "firebrands saved from the flames," survivors of the European conflagration known as the Holocaust. America today is replete with Torah from coast to coast: Yeshivos of every genre; Torah chinuch for girls; kollelim; Jewish outreach centers; Day Schools in most communities, even in some of those communities where years before a Torah school was nothing more than a dream -- or a nightmare. It has not always been like this.

Sixty-five years ago, America was a spiritual wasteland, barren of Torah, bereft of schools, with a critical shortage of leadership that was capable and willing to lead. When the survivors of the Holocaust came to these shores, they did not concede to apathy and depression. They were acutely aware that they were spared for a reason: to build Torah in America. Together, with a handful of

devoted rabbinic and lay leadership, they transplanted European Torah to American youth. They planted the seeds that have sprouted and flourished with unprecedented Torah study and mitzvah observance.

Do we know who they were? Do we care? Have we ever taken the time or interest to study their lives, to delve into the challenges, trials and tribulations they overcame to build Torah for us? Or, in contrast, have we attempted to distance ourselves from them, because they would probably not fit in our present day Torah milieu? *Zechor yemos olam!* Remember the backdrop of that time period. Reflect on with what our predecessors had to contend: Who were their adversaries? What was public opinion? What was the effect of the economy? Of what did the spiritual landscape consist? Now, after we have factored in all of the above, we shall have a more profound appreciation of the vicissitudes they faced, the challenges they overcame, and the circumstances over which they triumphed. Whatever we have achieved in the area of Torah is in no small part attributed to their *mesiras nefesh*, self sacrifice - blood, sweat and tears. Indeed, we stand on their shoulders.

For it (the Torah) is not an empty thing from you. (32:47)

Rashi interprets this to mean that we toil in Torah for a good reason. Much reward depends on it, for Torah is our life. In an alternative explanation, Rashi says that there is nothing empty in Torah. Every word in Torah can be expounded upon. To substantiate this idea, he cites the pasuk in Bereishis 36:22, "And the sister of Lotan, Timna...and Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, son of Eisav." Chazal ask, why would a noblewoman such as Timna, who was Lotan's sister, settle to become a concubine? They explain that she said, "I am not worthy to become a wife to him. If only I could become his concubine!" Why did the Torah go to such lengths to inform us of this? It is to teach us the praise of Avraham, that rulers and kings would desire to cleave to his seed. This demonstrates how a few innocuous words in the Torah teach us a significant lesson.

It would seem that Rashi is implying that in order to become aware of Avraham's eminence, we need Timna's affirmation. Consider the facts that Hashem refers to Avraham as G-d - fearing and that the Torah records many episodes concerning Avraham Avinu that depict his exemplary character and virtue. What concern is it to us what Timna thinks?

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, cites his father the Telzer Rav, Horav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, zl, who explains that while Timna's praise does not add anything to Avraham's stature, the Torah nonetheless takes human nature into consideration. Any respect given to a person, regardless of the source, means something to people. An individual's esteem is elevated in our eyes when we see the respect accorded to him by others. If Avraham's esteem was elevated in the eyes of people as a result of Timna's respect for him, then it is worthy of being recorded in the Torah.

Rav Eliyahu Meir adds his own thoughts to the matter. The Torah is not simply conveying to us Avraham Avinu's virtue, it is also teaching us the importance of relating the greatness of a tzadik. While we are certainly aware of Avraham's righteousness, every incident adds to his distinction, and that is important to convey. When we see how far the Torah goes to relate the piety and character of a tzadik, we will be inspired to give a tzadik his proper esteem.

We see from here that the way we treat our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, is the way others will emulate. Thus, before we point an accusing finger at the average Jew and demand a greater degree of *derech erez* for our Torah leadership, we should set the standard.

Like gentle raindrops upon the vegetation and like pelting raindrops upon the blades of grass. (32:2)

The weeks prior to Yom Kippur have a certain mood to them, since during this time we are enjoined to do our utmost to repent and return to Hashem. At times, Hashem "avails us" the opportunity to realize that repentance would be appropriate. Hopefully, we do not stand on ceremony, waiting for Hashem's little reminders. We understand what is expected of us, and we act accordingly. In his commentary to the above pasuk, the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh presents an enlightening thought which can inspire us and direct us to the path of teshuvah during this propitious period.

He cites the Midrash Socher Tov on Sefer Mishlei 10, which depicts the judgment man faces after his life on this earth reaches its conclusion. If he has studied Chumash, the Heavenly Court will ask him why he did not advance one step higher and study Mishnah. If he has studied Mishnah, he will be questioned concerning why he did not study Talmud. If he has studied Talmud, they will want to know why he failed to master the more difficult parts of Torah. Even if he has achieved proficiency in the entire Torah SheBaal Peh, Oral Law, they question why he did not delve into Kabbalah, the mystical aspects of Torah. He who mastered even the most profound areas of Kabbalah will be asked why he did not master the most esoteric portion of Kabbalah, which deals with Maaseh Merakavah which deals - in turn - with the composition and structure of the Heavenly Throne.

There is a powerful lesson to be derived from Chazal: Hashem does not expect us to do the impossible. He wants us to maximize our potential. If Chumash was all one could master, due to one's limited abilities, he will not be questioned as to why he did not study Kabbalah, because it is clearly beyond him. He will be queried, however, about why he did not study Mishnah, because it was within the reach of his intellectual capacity. If Mishnayos was his forte' - great, but why did he not push a bit more and study Talmud? Do not go beyond your reach, but, by all means, achieve what is within your grasp.

The Ohr HaChaim derives this lesson from this pasuk. Hashem created variegated raindrops: each to nourish different types of plant life. Vegetation and herbage require a soft, gentle drizzle - consistent, but not heavy. Grass, on the other hand, needs to be drenched in order to thrive. Drizzle does not fulfill the needs of grass, while heavy rain will not serve vegetation well. The same idea applies to the life-sustaining waters of Torah. Each person is created with his own individual abilities and intellectual capacity. If he can study Mishnah, then he must strive to go a bit further and master Talmud. He must excel in his area of Torah and a bit more, because that is all part of his potential. All that is expected from him is within his grasp. He must live up to his own individual potential - not that of someone else.

This concept can have both a positive and negative connotation. While one is not expected to do more than he is equipped to do, he must reach and achieve the highest heights if he is endowed with superior capacities. Regardless of one's success, if he could have accomplished more, he will have to answer for not fulfilling his potential. One can never be satisfied with anything less than his own full capabilities. What is considered success for one person may simultaneously be viewed as utter failure and dereliction of duty for another. It all depends upon his unique potential.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, cites the Gaon m'Vilna, who distinguishes between the concept of din and cheshbon. Din is judgment for one's actions, while cheshbon refers to the good that one could have achieved during the time that he was involved in carrying out his transgression. In Pirkei Avos 3:1, Chazal exhort us to remember that we will one day have to give a din v'cheshbon, judgment and reckoning before Hashem. This means, for example, that if a person speaks lashon hora, slanderous

speech, against someone, he will not only be punished for his iniquity, he will also have to answer for all the good that he could have accomplished during this time.

Rav Pam posits that this idea is the basis for the Torah's comment regarding Moshe Rabbeinu's "sin" of Mei Merivah, Waters of Strife, where Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it. The pasuk in our parshah 32:51 describes the sin as consisting of two aspects: trespassing against Hashem and a lack of sanctifying Him among Klal Yisrael. Moshe violated Hashem's command and did not speak. Simultaneously, he caused the potential for a great Kiddush Hashem to be lost.

At a time when teshuvah should be foremost on our minds, we should remember that everything is within our ability to correct. Hashem does not impose upon us anything that is beyond our capacity to execute. Likewise, we must keep in mind that our repentance should focus not only on what we did, but, also, on what we could have done, but failed to do.

Recall the days of the world. (32:7)

The Yalkut Shimoni comments on this pasuk, "Moshe Rabbeinu said to Klal Yisrael, 'Whenever Hashem brings suffering upon you, recall how much benefit and consolation He is destined to give you in Olam Habah, the World to Come.'" The Maggid m'Vilna explained this Yalkut with the following mashal, parable:

A Jew rented a house from a Polish nobleman for three hundred rubles per year, which he paid on a designated day every year. Once, the nobleman took a vacation and left an unscrupulous, anti-Semitic official in charge of his estate. The official jumped at the opportunity to harass the poor Jew. He immediately raised the rent to five hundred rubles per year. On the designated day for payment, the corrupt official was at the Jew's home early in the morning to demand his payment. Regrettably, the Jewish tenant had only four hundred and eighty rubles. He requested a delay of a few days in order to get the remaining twenty rubles. The evil official refused to wait even a day. When night fell and the Jew had not paid, the official decided to whip the Jew twenty lashes, one blow for each ruble. This practice was carried out a number of times with other Jews, as the crooked official had found a helpless group of people upon whom he could prey.

The day that everyone had awaited had finally arrived: the nobleman returned home. It did not take long before the Jewish tenant who had been beaten went to notify the nobleman of his ill treatment by the nobleman's agent. The nobleman enjoyed a good relationship with his Jewish tenants. Consequently, he became furious at the corrupt official. He decreed that the Jew would receive one hundred rubles for every blow that he had received: a total of two thousand rubles. The official's property was valued at four thousand rubles. The Jew now became part owner of the official's estate as payment for the abuse that he had sustained.

When the Jew returned home, he related to his wife all that had occurred with the nobleman. His wife was excited to hear that they now owned half of the nobleman's estate. Looking at her husband's face, his wife noticed that he did not seem as happy as he should have been. "What is wrong?" she asked. "You should be ecstatic with the valuable gift we have received."

"It is not that I am not happy," he said. "It is just that the pain of the blows is long gone. Now I wish that the official had given me forty lashes. That way, I would now own his entire estate."

This is the story of life. We suffer in this temporary world. For some, the suffering is great and

painful. When a person is struck with misfortune, his suffering feels overwhelming. When he goes to his future place in the Eternal World, however, where payment is in eternal currency, where the reward he receives for every moment of pain and anguish is immeasurable, he will think to himself, "How I wish I had suffered many more yissurim, pain and troubles, in the lower world. I would now be receiving much more reward."

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, relates the following powerful story, underlining its inspiring message. A terminally ill person was attached to an artificial respirator and lay in bed suffering excruciating pain. His doctor, a compassionate man, hoping to spare him more suffering, decided to disconnect the life-support system. The man died soon afterwards. It seems like the end of the story, but there is more.

A few days later, the deceased man appeared to the doctor in a dream and said the following to him, "I had four more days left to live. During this time I was to suffer terrible yissurim, which would have catapulted me directly into Gan Eden. Their cleansing effect was all that I still needed. Because you caused me to die four days before my time, I lack that measure of suffering. Now, I have no idea how long I will have to be in Gehinnom, Purgatory, to be purified. Suffering on earth has a greater effect than suffering in Gehinnom."

The doctor woke up from his dream completely shaken. He eventually became a baal teshuvah due to his fear of the Final Judgment. Life and death are in Hashem's hands. We must learn not only to accept His decisions, but, also, to trust in them.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. (32:7)

Moshe Rabbeinu urges the people to reflect upon the past, to inquire about it, and to seek to understand the course of events, as well as their underlying message. Human error is based upon human shortsightedness. We either fail to see, or we refuse to look. According to some, the past has no relevance. It is long gone. We live for the future. These people do not realize that history repeats itself precisely because people refuse to learn the lessons of the past. They refuse to seek counsel with those whose perspective of the future has been tempered with their experience of the past. Perhaps this idea is alluded to with the words shenos dor vador, the years of generation after generation. Shenos can also mean the repetition - or, in this context, the repetition of the generation. It all comes around. The way to understand the yemos olam, days of yore, is by reflecting upon the shenos, repetition of generation. The sins and punishments of the past should serve as a portent for the future.

Alternatively, shenos can also refer to shinui, change. Understand that the next generation is different. Your children's environment and upbringing are different from yours. Thus, what was expected of you by your parents is not necessarily the standard by which you should define the expectations you have of your children. The generations change, and expectations must change. Your child is exposed to much more and much worse than you were. What was safe for you might be dangerous for your child. What was acceptable for you might be a serious challenge for your child to overcome. Understand the shenos, change, of the generation. It might help you understand your child and, consequently, help you to raise him successfully.

Moshe came and spoke all the words of the song. (32:44)

The Targum Yonasan gives us an insight as to from where Moshe Rabbeinu came. He says that Moshe came from the bais ulpena, bais hamedrash. Even on the last day of his life, when his imminent death glared at him, Moshe Rabbeinu felt that he could not interrupt his daily sedarim, study sessions. Moshe Rabbeinu was Klal Yisrael's quintessential leader. He was devoted to each and every Jew. His love of the Almighty, His People and His land was unparalleled. Yet, his hallmark was his diligence in Torah study. He could not be separated from the Torah. Is it any wonder that the Torah is referred to as Toras Moshe? He sacrificed himself for it.

The gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders of every generation, achieved the zenith of Torah erudition and leadership primarily as a result of their overriding commitment to and unceasing diligence in studying Torah. Their hasmadah, diligence, was legendary. Nachlas Tzvi relates that the Chasam Sofer was once asked to what he attributed his incredible success in Torah. He responded, "I became greater than my friends because of my commitment to five minutes." He explained that he never wasted a moment of time that could otherwise be spent studying Torah - even if it were only five minutes. If he had only a few minutes of free time, he would not waste it. He spent it constructively - learning.

Indeed, in the yeshivah in Kelm there was seder, study period, that lasted only five minutes! The Alter, zl, m'Kelm explained that it was to imbue the students with the idea that five minutes have inestimable value. The Steipler Rav, zl, would say that many of the Torah leaders of past generations achieved their level of erudition due to their extreme diligence. Without it, they would never have achieved such distinction.

"Today, I merited to complete the entire Shas for the one hundred and first time," said Horav Zelig Reuven Bengis, the Gaon Av Bais Din of Yerushalayim. This was an annual achievement of the distinguished sage. Indeed, a siyum in the rav's home was not unusual. It was a sign that another year had passed. This siyum, however, was different, and the rav invited his closest friends and associates to the affair. The invitees realized that it had been merely five months since that they had been to the last siyum. This siyum was special, explained the rav. Throughout his life he had tried to stay away from the yoke of the rabbinate because of its impact on his Torah study. He had spent the first eight years of his marriage in total immersion in the sea of Torah study. Afterwards, when he was compelled to take a rabbinic position, he accepted positions in those small communities which would accord him the most freedom to study Torah. As rav of Yerushalayim, the demands on his time grew, such that he no longer had as much time available for learning as he had before. He decided, however, that in those few minutes that he spent waiting for each simchah to begin, rather than waste precious time, he would make a seder, study period, for learning Talmud. Indeed, these minutes added up. In the span of five months, he was able to complete the entire Shas! We now have an idea of both the value of time and the definition of diligence in Torah study.

May my teaching drop like rain; may my utterance flow like the dew. (32:2)

Ibn Ezra explains the simile to rain and dew as meaning that the words of Torah should penetrate the nation and make it fruitful, just as the rain and dew nourish the earth. Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, notes that rain and dew have an effect only on earth, but not on stones. Only soil contains the requisite minerals and nutrients which are conducive to growth. Stones do not produce. Likewise, in

order to be successful, a rebbe must have someone with whom to work. The student must possess something: certain basics upon which to build. First and foremost is attitude. The weakest and most challenged student can achieve success if his attitude is focused on success. Torah is much more than a body of knowledge. It is our lifeline, our primer for religious and spiritual development. Hence, the student must have some degree of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. If these two principles are in place, then his rebbe's teaching can "drop like rain" and "flow like the dew," nurturing the spiritual development of the student.

This is not meant as a reference to those who toil in the fields of special education and with children who are at risk. Their noble work develops the necessary attitude and enhances the skills required for Torah study. The Ibn Ezra refers to a child who is "turned off" or has never been "turned on." They must first have their hearts of stone sensitized in such a manner as to be conducive to learning.

There is another student who I feel we should address: the one whose parents; either by design or by indifference, turn their child against the Torah. A depressed child cannot learn. By virtue of their actions and behavior, parents can make their child feel distressed- a feeling that can lead to depression and beyond. We also encounter the parent who does not know how to talk to his child, at times being condescending or even abusive. A child cannot learn if his emotional balance is being undermined by his parents. We should also not ignore the parent who denigrates the school and the rebbe.

Last, we turn to the key word which lays the groundwork for a child's/student's educational development: obedience. A child who does not obey cannot and will not learn. Rather than punishing a child for disobedience, we should first ask ourselves why the child/student is not being compliant? In response, we suggest the following: Do we know how to tell him what to do? Do we provide the proper example for him to follow? Do we ourselves meet the standard which we impose upon him? The weaker, smaller and less capable will naturally defer to the bigger, the stronger and the more capable. For this reason, the young look up to their elders for guidance. This is true to the extent that the elders prove themselves worthy of this deference, by being superior in stature, strength and ability.

The key to earning the respect and ensuing allegiance of our children is to behave in such a manner that they will have reason to look up to us as morally and spiritually superior. True obedience is not elicited by command. It is not engendered by the substance of what is being asked but, rather, by the character of the person who is asking. Any shortcoming in a parent's behavior, any deficiency in his character, will weaken a child's resolve to obey. The only source of genuine compliance is a child's free-will. Indeed, such submissiveness continues on even after parents and children are separated by distance in space or time.

This idea applies both to parent and teacher alike, for both seek to inspire and inculcate a child in the Torah way. We must remember that a child's docility and obeisance always correspond to the respect he has for the personality of his parent or teacher. This may seem to be a tall order, but then no one suggested it was going to be easy.

Ask your father and he will relate it to you. (32:7)

Parents are always there for us - or, at least, they should be. They advise, direct, guide and offer support and comfort - when necessary. Parents provide our most enduring form of support, being there for us even after they are no longer here in this world. How often does one go to the cemetery and

"unload" his troubles to his parents and leave somewhat relieved? We entreat them to be meilitz yosher, intercede, in our behalf - and they do. I recently came across a poignant story which illustrates this phenomenon.

The story is about a young girl who fell victim to the dread typhus epidemic which raged through the Bergen Belsen concentration camp. Tens of thousands succumbed to the disease. Indeed, the young girl, whom we will call Leah, was given up for dead, so severe were her symptoms. Yet, she refused to give in. She fought as the fever raged. She was determined to live. Afraid that if she lay down she would soon die like so many others, she wandered around the camp, delirious, stumbling over the bodies of the dead and dying. She could no longer go on. Her feet refused to carry her any farther. As she struggled to get up from the cold, wet ground, she noticed a hill veiled in gray mist in the distance. Leah felt a strange sensation come over her. Suddenly, the hill became a symbol of life, a token of hope. She felt that if she reached that hill, she would live; if not, she would die of typhus. There was no way she was going to give up.

Leah attempted to walk toward the hill. As she dragged her feet, she felt she was getting closer to her lifeline. Every step increased her hope; every inch made life a closer reality. As she neared the hill, it took on a new form - it began to look like a huge grave. Nonetheless, the mound remained Leah's symbol of life, and she remained determined to reach it. She crawled on her hands and knees, scraping off the skin. The blood flowed from her wounds - but she moved on toward that strange mound of earth that was the essence of her survival.

Long hours passed, and she finally reached her destination. With feverish hands, bloodied from her terrible ordeal, she touched the cold mound of earth. With her last ounce of strength, she crawled to the top of the mound and collapsed. She just lay there, tears flowing freely down her cheeks. These were no ordinary tears. This was the first time she had cried in the four years since her imprisonment in the camp. She cried because she finally felt that there was hope. She began to cry out for her father, "Papa! Papa! Please help me, for I cannot go on like this any longer!"

Suddenly, she felt a warm hand on top of her head. It was her father gently stroking her head as he used to place his hand over her head every Friday night when he bented, blessed, her. The hands were comforting and warm. She began to weep with greater intensity as she told her father that she could not go on. She had no more strength to live.

Her father listened as he held her head in his hands. He did not benth her; instead he told her, "Do not worry, my child. The end of the war is near. You will manage to survive a few more days, for the liberation of the camps is soon to come." This "meeting" occurred on Wednesday night, April 11, 1945. The first British tank entered Bergen Belsen on Sunday, April 15th.

The British took whatever survivors there were to the hospital in the British zone. Leah was extremely weak - but alive, as her father had promised. She recovered from typhus and soon returned to Bergen Belsen. Only then did she learn that the huge mound of earth in the big square, where she had spent that fateful night of April 11th, was really a huge, mass grave. Thousands of victims of the Nazi murderers were buried beneath that mound. Among them was Leah's father, who had died months earlier. Leah now realized that on that night when she triumphed over death, she was weeping on her father's grave. For it (the Torah) is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life. (32:47)

When the Torah tells us that the Torah is our life, it means just that - it is our source of living. Without the Torah we are not alive. A parent may say to his child, "You are my life," but despite the overwhelming affection the parent is trying to convey, his very life and existence are not dependent upon his child. The Torah, however, is meticulous in everything it says. Therefore, if the Torah asserts

that it is our life, it is certainly no exaggeration.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, cites the Rambam who states that all physical matter falls into five categories. They are: A) domeim - inorganic objects, such as stones and rocks; B) tzomeiach - plant life; C) chai - living animals; D) medaber - man, who has the power of speech; and E) Ben Yisrael - the Jew. The Rambam is teaching us that the Jew is in a category all of his own - distinct in kind and degree.

Plant life is not just a stone with an added feature, - the ability to grow. It is an entirely different form of existence. This is true of each of these five. They are all unique and exclusive of one another. The Ben Yisrael is distinct from the human being, despite the fact that the two seem to possess a greater commonality with each other than all the rest. Moreover, just as each category is distinctive in its individual level of life, so, too is each category unique in its source of life.

While a Ben Yisroel has a physical body, his essence is actually spiritual. Thus, his source of sustenance is primarily of a spiritual nature, not a physical one. He needs physical sustenance to maintain his physical existence, but his spiritual essence must receive spiritual nutrients. Hence, even when the Ben Yisrael is physically removed from his earthly abode, he lives on in the spiritual arena. Torah fulfillment is his source of life through which he connects with his spiritual dimension. If he fails to spiritually nurture himself, he may remain alive from a physical perspective, but his true essence and being are totally abrogated.

Our Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos 4:21, "This world is compared to a vestibule before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the anteroom so that you may enter the palace." When one enters the lobby of the king's palace, he is already in the king's domain. Although the lobby only leads to the main room, the mere fact that it connects to it gives it special status. Conversely, if it would not be leading into the main room, it would be insignificant in its own right. With this idea in mind, Rav Gifter explains the Mishnah's statement regarding the relationship between this world and Olam Habah. This world has significance only in its connection with Olam Habah. In other words, a Jew must maintain his bond with Torah and mitzvos, his source of life, in order to give this world "vestibule status" to the World to Come. However, if a Jew severs his bond with Torah and rejects its mitzvos, he cuts himself off from his true source of life. Hence, he divorces the vestibule from the palace, and the vestibule simply has no value of its own. We now understand that when the Torah refers to itself as "our life," it is, indeed, a reality.

*Hashem spoke to Moshe on that very day. Ascend to this mount of Avarim... and die on the mountain.
(32:48.49, 50)*

Rashi tells us that the phrase, "b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh," "on that very day," is mentioned in two other places. When Noach entered the Teivah, Ark, the Torah writes that he entered "on that very day." Also, when the Jews left Egypt, the Torah writes that they left "on that very day." The reason for emphasizing when they left and when Noach entered the Ark, is to demonstrate that even if the people would have said, "We will not let Noach leave; we will not let the Jews depart Egypt," Hashem enabled them to leave in the middle of the day, when everyone was around, and no one dared -- or was able -- to prevent them from leaving. Likewise, the Jewish People might have thought that since Moshe Rabbeinu had done so much for them - he led them out of Egypt, split the Sea, brought down the manna and the quail, raised up the well and gave them the Torah - they would not let him "leave."

Hashem took Moshe from this world in midday to demonstrate that no human being had control, only Hashem.

The question is obvious: How are we to compare Moshe Rabbeinu's death to Klal Yisrael's departure from Egypt and Noach's entering the Ark? The former and latter would have been preventable with sufficient strength and power. Moshe's death, however, could not have been halted in any way. When his time had come, it had come and we could have done nothing to prevent it from occurring. So what does Rashi mean? Furthermore, what does Rashi mean when he says the Jews might say, "A man who led us from Egypt, etc. cannot be allowed to die" What does Moshe's role in the Exodus have to do with his continuing to live? Certainly, they understood that it was Hashem Who took them out of Egypt, Who controlled nature and split the sea and fed them in the wilderness? What was Moshe's role in this?

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, gives a penetrating response which focuses upon our responsibility to acknowledge and pay gratitude to those who benefit us. Klal Yisrael presented a powerful reason for Hashem to keep Moshe alive. After all, he was the individual who had done so much for them. In his merit, Klal Yisrael was alive and miraculously sustained throughout forty years of wilderness travel. The amount of gratitude the Jewish people owed Moshe was immeasurable. If so, Hashem had to keep him alive when Klal Yisrael prayed on his behalf. Their obligation to him was overwhelming. This was reason enough for him to live.

Indeed, this is what Eliyahu HaNavi said to Hashem when he prayed on behalf of the Tzarfati's son: "How can You take the life of the son of the widow who provided me with a place to lodge?" Eliyahu owed the widow so much. He was obligated to repay her. Since he owed her - Hashem had to allow her son to live. If the middah, character trait, of hakoras hatov has the ability to bring someone back to life, as it did with the Tzarfati's son, it likewise should have the capacity for preventing Moshe Rabbeinu's death. Hashem had no other recourse. He wants us to be makir tov to Moshe - so He had to allow him to continue living.

A compelling reason, an excellent argument, but it was not enough. Hashem had other plans. Moshe's time to leave this world had arrived. "b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh, "on that very day," he was to take leave of his earthly abode - because this is what Hashem wanted.

When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d. (32:3)

The Talmud in Berachos 21a interprets this pasuk as a direct indication that one must make Bircas HaTorah, a blessing prior to studying Torah. The corresponding obligation also to recite a blessing after studying the Torah is deduced from the fact that there is an obligation to bench, say grace, after meals. If a person is expected to express gratitude for being the beneficiary of a transitory benefit like food, certainly he should bless the One Who gave him an eternal gift - the Torah. In contrast to the derived obligation to recite a blessing after Torah study, the blessing after meals is stated explicitly in the Torah, "You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless" (Devarim 8:10). Moreover, while the obligation to say Bircas HaTorah prior to Torah study is explicitly stated, the obligation to recite a blessing prior to eating is derived logically. If one is obliged to bless Hashem after he has eaten, how much more so should he do so when he is hungry.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains the distinction between the treatment of blessings for food and

Torah, study. The Torah focuses upon one's expected natural behavior when food is involved. One blesses Hashem when he is satisfied. When one studies Torah however, he experiences a natural intellectual thirst for knowledge which inspires him to plead with Hashem to help him quench his thirst. Thus, the blessing before Torah study is stated explicitly. Both regarding Torah study and food, Chazal employ logical reasoning to derive the alternative obligation. Consequently, one must bless Hashem both before and after studying Torah or once partaking of food.

In addition to the idea that Bircas HaTorah is a Torah-mandated obligation, Chazal attribute the destruction of the Land to the fact that although Klal Yisrael studied Torah, they failed to recite a blessing prior to studying. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that they did not value the Torah enough to recite a blessing before studying it. When Yirmiyah Ha'Navi laments Klal Yisrael's forsaking the Torah, he refers to their neglect and lack of appreciation of its worth. This is the catalyst of forsaking the Torah. The Mishnah Berurah adds that they viewed Torah as just another form of knowledge, an intellectual pursuit. They did not attribute Divine significance to it.

Horav Chanoch, zl, m'Alexander supplements this based upon the fact that Torah is compared to water. Everyone needs water; without it, we cannot live. Nothing quenches one's thirst like water. This is true, however, only when one is thirsty. One who is not thirsty derives no benefit from water. Thus, concerning the laws of Bircas Hanehenin, blessings for pleasure (ie: drink, fragrance) the halachah states that one makes a blessing over water only if he drinks to quench his thirst. Otherwise, he derives no pleasure and no blessing is indicated. This concept applies equally to Torah. If an individual "thirsts" for Torah and it is for him like water for a parched throat, surely he should make a blessing before studying it. If he does not quench his thirst, there is no reason to bless Hashem. He is not participating in Torah learning.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. (32:7)

Jewish history is much more than a subject - it is the narrative of our life's struggle and our commitment to Hashem throughout the millennia.

Our history differs from all other histories. It extends back into the mists of the past, to the genesis of the world and continues on to contemporary times. It covers the entire period of human history as it is known to man. It was only for a few centuries that we had our own homeland with control of our national affairs. During the majority of our existence, we have been scattered throughout the world, struggling frantically against the forces of evil and destruction, fighting against overwhelming odds to resist annihilation, driven from land to land by pitiless persecution, plundered and massacred by fiendish mobs.

The annals of Jewish history tell no story of imperial pomp and pageantry. The rich scenery that forms the backdrop of so many of the world's nations and empires is, for the most part, non-existent in our history. Yet, they are all very much alike - they are gone, having been built on shaky foundations. They all collapsed one after another, leaving only a memory of their glorious past.

Our people have survived and thrived despite the vicissitudes that have challenged them. They fell and picked themselves up and went forward. We went through periods of crisis and lived, whereas others perished. Why? Wherein lay the difference? What is our secret?

The fate of Klal Yisrael was different from that of other peoples of antiquity, because its

fundamental constitution is different. We did not depend upon possession of land or political freedom but, rather, upon our greatest treasure, our heritage - the Torah. We came into existence through the Torah and the Torah continues to sustain and nourish us. This is the uniqueness of Jewish history. This is our secret of survival.

Nations require a charter to govern their existence. Klal Yisrael received its charter when we stood at the foot of Har Sinai and accepted the Torah. This is really the underlying theme of Sefer Devarim. As he is about to take leave of his flock, Moshe Rabbeinu impressed upon Klal Yisrael that fidelity to the Torah was the essential qualification for their continued existence. A lack of faithfulness would result in destruction. A Covenant was drawn up and ratified with the words, "This day you have become a people unto Hashem." (Devarim 27:9) The basis of Jewish life was founded not upon a political constitution, but upon a religious character.

Struggle after struggle, challenge after challenge, through pogroms and persecution, we have survived. Our enemies have made every attempt to exterminate us or to compel us to forsake our Torah. This alone is the greatest proof of the truth of the Torah. If it were not the symbol of compelling truth, why would the nations be concerned with our continued existence as a nation separate from the rest of the world simply because of our commitment to the Torah? Indeed, in the chronicles of world history nothing is as remarkable in the human experience as the survival of the Jewish People. Exiled and dispersed, reviled and persecuted, oppressed and suffering, often denied the most simple human rights and victimized by ruthless fanatics and despots, we are here for one purpose - to serve Hashem.

How did the Jew confront his challenge? How did he muster the courage to overcome the misery that was his lot? The Torah was his source of courage and inspiration, lending solace when he was down. He would plumb its depths, mine its treasures, unfold its precious message and apply it to his vicissitudes. He would draw life-giving encouragement from the inspired visions of the Neviim. The spiritual treasures of Chazal would delight him as they gave him reprieve from his misery. In the filthy ghetto; in the dark, dingy building that served as shul and yeshivah, he would pass hours of spiritual joy in communion with the Almighty. His poverty-stricken home would radiate with the spirit of Shabbos, as he transformed his broken-down hovel into a mini-sanctuary. His table became an altar. He did not envy the material excess or the palatial lifestyle of his gentile neighbor. He felt himself to be superior to his persecutors. He maintained values; they reacted to whims.

"Experientia docet," there is no more reliable teacher than past experience. Theories give way to the facts, which are unambiguous in the study of Jewish history. The Jewish People is unique, because our religion is the cement that binds us. Religion is so interwoven with the race that they are inseparable. If we were to eliminate the religion, the race would crumble. To quote Rabbeinu Saadya Gaon, "Our nation is a nation only by reason of the Torah."

In closing, we take the liberty of citing a penetrating analogy from the Yalkut. A very old woman came to a certain rabbi and said to him, "I am already too old, and my life has become burdensome. I want to die. How can I find death?" The rabbi listened, then asked her, "What merit did you have that you were able to live to such an advanced age?" She replied, "I am well-versed in the Torah. Furthermore, regardless of what I am doing, I leave it as I go quickly every day to the synagogue." Upon hearing this, the rabbi turned to the woman and said, "Stay away from the synagogue for three consecutive days." She followed his suggestion, and on the third day she died.

This is a parable. The old woman is Knesses Yisrael, the congregation of Yisrael, privileged to grow old, to continue its existence by virtue of its attachment to Torah and avodah, prayer in the synagogue. Should we chas v'shalom, Heaven forbid, decide to rid ourselves of the "burden" of old age,

there is a simple solution: neglect of our national heritage, abandonment of our lifeblood, the Torah. This is probably the greatest and most compelling lesson of history.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. (32:7)

The Torah enjoins us to study and take note of our past. As he prepared to take leave of his People, Moshe Rabbeinu said, "For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and you will stray from the path that I have commanded you, and evil will befall you in the end of the days." (Devarim 31:29) He knew what would ensue over time: We understand the consequences of a harsh, alien society. He says, *Z'chor yemos olam, binu shenos dor v'dor.* "Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation." This *zechirah*, remembrance, coupled with *binah*, a thorough understanding of the events that occurred and how they fit into a Divine pattern, will protect you from straying off the path.

Why, specifically, should remembering the days of yore and studying our national history serve as a protective shield against the effects of society? First, it keeps Judaism alive. In the beginning of Sefer Devarim the Torah tells us, "When you beget children and grandchildren, and will have been long in the land... and you will do evil in the eyes of Hashem." What is the meaning of "*v'noshontem baaretz*," "And (you) will have been living long in the land?" In his preface to his *Toldos Am Olam*, Horav Shlomo Rottenberg focuses on the significance of studying Jewish history. He explains that when Klal Yisrael left Egypt and came to Har Sinai to receive the Torah, they were on a spiritual "high." The ensuing forty-year journey in the wilderness was not much different. Every move, every encampment, they were surrounded by a fiery Pillar of Fire and Pillar of Cloud. When they entered Eretz Yisrael, it was also amid miracles. In short, everyone perceived Hashem's Presence. After awhile, however, Klal Yisrael became complacent; the events of the past became "old" and distant, something to which they could not relate. They no longer viewed themselves as different from the other nations. If they were not different, they might as well act like members of the other nations.

By remembering their glorious past, by searching and delving into the annals of their history, Klal Yisrael could spiritually resuscitate themselves. Consequently, they would appreciate that yes, they are different. This understanding would inspire them to act differently.

Furthermore, history provides us with the opportunity through which man can begin to fathom the Divine Plan for the Creation and sustenance of the world. History is a chain of events, each interconnecting with each other, spanning the length of time from "*Bereishis barah*," "In the beginning Hashem created," to "*acharis hayamim*," "the end of the days." The gentile nations do not understand this, since their history begins somewhere in the "middle." We view "*toldos yemos olam*," the history of the world from its creation, as an integral part of our history. Their history begins with their god, who entered the scene a few thousand years later.

Moreover, through an appreciation of our nation's history we learn to develop a reverence for the previous generations, as we note the spiritual digression that occurs from generation to generation. Indeed, the *mesorah*, transmission of Torah throughout the generations, is founded on this premise: the generations diminish in their spiritual stature. The closer one is to the Revelation at Har Sinai, the clearer and more pristine is his understanding of the profundities of the Torah. With this concept in mind, how can we ever begin to dispute their words? There are those who would counter that idea, saying that from a technical/scientific perspective we are far ahead of our predecessors. In response, we

assert that this applies only from a technical standpoint; it is irrelevant to the greatness of man. Second, whatever we know or have accomplished is the result of the work begun by our predecessors. We cannot fail to recognize that we stand upon their shoulders!

The study of history is unique in that it is dependent neither upon one's acumen, nor upon his skills in understanding, or developing an issue. History is knowledge. Regardless of the brilliance of one's mind or his ability to introduce novellae, history remains the same. Whatever happened, happened. Our function is only to transcribe that which has occurred and to transmit it in its complete form to the next generation. There are many sources for Jewish history. Most of these so-called sources lack integrity. They are the work of disenchanted, bitter people who wrote history in accordance with their perverted perspective - in an attempt to make it appear that their brand of Jewish culture has found support throughout the ages. They have ignored Chazal and instead have chosen to cite pagan sources. It is, therefore, important that the Jewish history which we study be Jewish history written by Jewish writers whose affiliation to Judaism goes beyond a Jewish surname.

The Mighty One created you with forgetfulness, but you forgot the G-d Who formed you. (32:18)

It is incumbent upon us to decide how to use our G-d-given faculties - positively or negatively. We can either be constructive or destructive. Indeed, even those character traits such as envy, anger and hatred can be employed for a positive objective. The choice is ours. Imagine how wrong it is when Hashem grants us an attribute, an ability, a unique trait, and we use it against Him. This is what the pasuk in conveying to us. Forgetfulness can be most helpful. One can forget his past troubles which engender his continued depression. He can forget the evil others have wrought against him. On the other hand, he could also forget the acts of kindness from which he has benefited. It is important that one introspects his capacities and examines them to see if he is using them for the correct purpose or for the wrong one.

The Dubno Maggid relates a parable that gives us a practical insight into this idea. A man was deeply in debt to many creditors. It ran into thousands and thousands of dollars. One of his creditors, knowing fully well that this man certainly did not have enough money to pay all of his creditors, devised a plan which would help at least one of the creditors, namely himself. He said, "When others come to collect their money, act as though you are insane. Giggle hysterically, behave in a silly manner and do things that will cause them to think that there is no one to whom to talk. They will then conclude that you have lost your mind and forget about the money you owe them. You will then have sufficient funds to pay me back what you owe." The man did as he was told, and the scheme proved effective. People assumed that he had gone mad and just wrote off their debts. When the creditor who had concocted this ruse came to collect his money, the man responded nonsensically. "Do not attempt to pull that stunt on me," the creditor said, "You forget that it was I who gave you the idea to act this way. I know the truth."

Hashem says to us, "You go about your day, taking care of your personal needs and forgetting about the obligations you have towards Me. You have conveniently ignored the fact that it was I Who gave you the ability to forget, so that you could rid yourself of memories that might preclude your potential. Do not make the mistake of using this capacity to forget against Me!"

Is it to Hashem that you do this, o' vile and unwise people. (32:6)

In the list of middos, character traits, that can possibly define one's personality, the middah of ha'koras ha'tov, appreciation and expression of gratitude, is of pivotal significance. Relationships, our attitude toward Hashem and our fellowman, indicate our true character. Our Sages were meticulous in their "observance" of this middah. They made every effort to "recognize" every bit of benefit they received -- directly or inadvertently, from another person -- and return the favor, always cognizant of their "debt" of gratitude. Elisha Ha'navi was the beneficiary of a simple favor from the Shunamis. His appreciation of her gift compelled him to pray that she be blessed with a child. His sense of gratitude motivated him to pray for this child's return to life. In the Midrash, Chazal question Elisha's choice of beneficiaries. If Eliyahu Ha'Navi had guaranteed him the ability to be mechayeh meisim, bring people back from the dead, why did he not pray for his own father and mother? Why did he not seek to have them resurrected? Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita, derives from here the incredible debt of gratitude that Elisha carried. While we are not on Elisha's spiritual plane, we can learn something about fulfilling the obligation of ha'koras ha' tov from him.

In his commentary to Sefer Bereishis 2:5, Rashi presents an inkling of what ha'koras ha'tov means to Hashem. The Torah teaches us that Hashem did not cause rain to descend on the land until man had been created. Rashi explains that only after the creation of man, who would appreciate the effect of rain, did Hashem bestow rain on the earth. Certainly, Hashem could have had the vegetation grow without rain. Yet, Hashem created the world in such a manner that the earth needed the rain to produce man's crops, so that man would be thankful for all that he has. Indeed, the world was created incomplete. The fact that the earth cannot produce without rain establishes the need for ha'koras ha'tov, with man maintaining the main obligation. Moreover, based upon Rashi's pshat, exposition, Maharal M'Prague posits that it is forbidden to perform a favor for one who does not possess the middah of ha'koras ha'tov.

According to the Ramban, the Revelation, the awesome experience that accompanied the Giving of the Torah, occurred so that Klal Yisrael would realize that Hashem was doing this only for them - and not for any other nation. This knowledge was to imbue them with an impulse of reciprocity, to learn to return a favor, to show gratitude where it is due.

In his commentary on the pasuk, "Am naval v'lo chacham," "O vile and unwise people," Rambam comments that one who is not makir tov, who does not appreciate what others do for him, is a "naval," an abomination. Furthermore, he explains that in the Hebrew language the letter "bais" and "fay" are interchangeable. In other words, the word "naval" is the same as the word "nofel." Consequently, a leaf that "falls," "nofel," to the ground is called "naval." An animal that falls to the ground and dies is called a "neveilah." Hence, a person who does not appreciate what others do for him is considered a "naval," because he is "nofel," falls from humanity. He is no longer a human being. A kafui tov does not deserve to be counted as a person. He lacks the mentchlekeit that would render him a mentch.

Sefer Ha'Chinuch also uses the word "naval" to describe an individual who is unappreciative of what others do for him. In mitzvah 33, he opines that the shoresh, root/origin, of the mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Eim, honoring one's father and mother, is ha'koras ha'tov. One must recognize who has brought him into the world and who has cared for him throughout his life. One who does not accept the imperative to love and respect parents for what they have done for him is considered a naval and kafui tov. The respect one manifests for parents engenders respect for the One Who is responsible for all the good from which he has benefited in his life. We do not know the real reason for mitzvos. The rationale

that we determine only serves as a motivation so that some might relate more easily to mitzvos. The lesson, however, is apparent: Kibud Av v'Eim teaches one ha'koras ha'tov. Indeed, as Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, puts it, "Hashem has given us a mitzvah through which one can educate and refine his middah of ha'koras ha'tov." Ha'koras ha'tov is the ability to recognize and appreciate the benefits we reap from others. One who does not demonstrate this sensitivity is not a complete human being.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation; ask your Father and he will relate to you; your elders and they will tell you. (32:7)

Targum Yonasan interprets this pasuk as a reference to listening to daas Torah, the Torah's perspective, as expounded by our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders. The answer to all of our questions is in the Torah. A talmid chacham, Torah scholar, using his acutely "Torah-developed" mind, is able to render a response to our every issue, regardless of its mundane nature. Torah encompasses every aspect of our lives. We should look to it and its disseminators for guidance.

Nachlas Tzvi cites a powerful story that illustrates the incredible depth of daas Torah: The story is about a young man who was chozer b'teshuvah, returned to the faith of his ancestors, at the urging of his friend who had also recently become a baal teshuvah. One day, three months after he had become a baal teshuvah, he was riding a bus when an Arab bomb went off on the bus, killing him instantly. His friend, who was instrumental in bringing him back to Yiddishkeit, was doubly distraught: first about his tragic death; and also about what he should tell the parents of the deceased. A tragedy of such magnitude is difficult enough for the believer to confront, let alone a secular Jew who surely had not agreed with his son's recent discovery of Torah Judaism.

He decided to go to Horav Chaim Kanievski, Shlita, one of the pre-eminent sages of our generation, whose encyclopedic knowledge of every area of Torah made him a prime expositor of daas Torah. "What should I tell the parents?" asked the young man of Rav Chaim. The sage responded, "Tell them that in truth their son was actually supposed to die three months earlier. It was only in order to give him the chance to return to Torah that his life was extended."

While this may have been a solid response, the young man feared that this answer would not be adequate for his friend's secular parents. When he came to be "menachem aveil," comfort the mourners, he was immediately accosted by the father, "Why did this happen to my son? I thought that by becoming observant, he would be rewarded. Truly his premature death is far from rewarding." The young man gathered together his courage and said, "Sensing your question, I took the liberty of speaking to Horav Chaim Kanievski, who told me that your son had been granted three more months of life only to give him the opportunity to be chozer b'teshuvah." Expecting to be showered with abuse, he was shocked when the father stood up and said, "It is true. It is true. Three months ago when my son was still in the Israeli army, his platoon decided to make a surprise military strike into Lebanon. My son wanted to go on this mission. The sergeant, however, was adamant for some reason that he not go. My son begged and pleaded, to no avail. Because of his rejection, he decided to leave the Army, a decision which was the beginning of his three-month odyssey to Torah observance. Everyone who went on that ill-fated mission was killed. Had my son gone, he probably would have been among the fatalities. Yes, indeed, I believe that he was saved so that he could perform teshuvah. Blessed be Hashem's Name!"

There is nothing to be added to such a poignant story other than to say that it is but one of a

myriad of instances that illustrate the depth of insight of our gedolei Yisrael.

Ask your father and he will relate to you, and your elders and they will tell you.
(32:7)

The Kelmer Maggid, zl, addressed the redundancy of this pasuk homeletically. In earlier generations, children asked their father questions regarding religion, its codes and laws - and they received an answer. Regrettably, in contemporary times, the fathers are no longer "equipped" with the answer. Thus, they tell their children to turn to their elders, the grandfather who still remembers the answer. Let us for a moment analyze what has occurred. While it is true that the fathers are ill-prepared to respond to their children, what is the reason for this? Where were their fathers, the grandfathers, to whom we are now turning for answers, when their own children were growing up?

Perhaps we can offer the following response: The Torah uses two expressions for communication between the generations, hagaddah and amirah. The latter form, amirah, is a softer tone, more explanatory than the former, haggadah, which implies simply relating an answer without really getting into its underlying rationale. When a child grows up in a home in which his questions are answered curtly, without feeling, without looking to establish a rapport between father and son, he is in danger that at one point he will no longer accept the answer, or -- even worse -- he will refrain from asking. This child will become an adult who has no answers, who will send his son to his grandfather, who will, hopefully, be able to answer with sensitivity and warmth. As a postscript we might add that the Kelmer Maggid made this statement over a century ago. Unfortunately, today the grandfather is not distinguishable from his son; he also has no answers. The only cure for illiteracy is a Torah education.

The Mighty One created you with forgetfulness but you forgot the G-d Who formed you.
(32:18)

Every faculty with which man is endowed can be used positively or negatively. Certainly, Hashem's desire is that we use these G-d- given faculties for a positive goal. The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, says that the ability to forget is a perfect example. Shikchah, forgetfulness, is a gift, a vehicle through which we are able to proceed beyond our past troubles. If we do not forget the unpleasant occurrences in our lives, they will gnaw at us, wreaking havoc upon our emotional stability. Regrettably, some of us use this gift to forget Hashem's beneficence and patience with us.

The Dubno Maggid, zl, explains this with a parable: There was once a man who was deeply in debt, able to pay his many creditors only a fraction of what he owed. One creditor, out of concern for his own debt, gave the hapless debtor an idea that would dissuade his other creditors from bothering him. He said, "When the creditors come to you, act foolish and silly, so that they will think you are insane and will leave you alone. Afterwards, you can pay me what you owe me."

It was a great idea. One by one, the creditors came and left, some in disgust, others in sympathy. The pressure of the many debts must have gotten to him. When the man who had given him this advice came to collect his debt, he was met with the same response as the other creditors. This was just too much. "Whom do you think you are fooling?" he asked. "Did you forget that it was I who advised you to act insanely? Do not try to use my own idea against me!"

Hashem Yisborach tells us the same thing. He gave us the faculty to forget, so that we would not be overwhelmed by destructive memories. We function because we are able to forget. What do we do in gratitude to Hashem? We forget Him! It is one thing to neglect to think of Hashem, but to use an instinct with which He has endowed us against Him, is the height of audacity. But, is that not what forgetting is all about?

*Moshe came and spoke all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea bin Nun.
(32:44)*

Moshe Rabbeinu stood with his trusted disciple, Yehoshua, indicating that the transfer of leadership would soon occur. It was important for the people to see Yehoshua up there together with Moshe during Moshe's lifetime, so that no one would say that he rose to power only after Moshe's death. Interestingly, the Torah refers to Yehoshua here by his original name, Hoshea. Moshe had changed his student's name prior to leaving for Eretz Yisrael with the meraglim, spies. The added letter was to protect him from the spies' false counsel. Kli Yakar explains that since that whole generation was now gone, he no longer needed the name change. Rashi says that the Torah is teaching us that although he was elevated by Moshe, he remained the same modest Hoshea as he was before.

There is an interesting pshat, exposition, rendered by the Netziv, zl, which comes to us by way of a story. The Netziv was rosh hayeshivah of Volozhin, a yeshivah that prepared and graduated the pre-eminent rabbanim and leaders of European Jewry. As rosh hayeshivah, the Netziv took a personal interest in his students, assisting them in their positions. Once, one of his graduates came to him saying that he had recently accepted a position as rav of a community. He was concerned, however, that politics and controversy reigned in the community - especially among its leadership. He, therefore, turned to his rebbe for a brachah, blessing, that he be spared the lashon hora, slander, reserved for the community's leadership and that he be successful in shepherding the community.

The Netziv spoke to his talmid with the special love that a true rebbe has for his student: "I would very much like to bless you with every blessing in the world, but, alas, unfortunately, you cannot escape the ill effects of lashon hora. This disease destroys our finest and most promising talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars. When Yehoshua was selected to be among those who would spy out the land, Moshe called him aside and changed his name. He added a yud implying May Hashem save you from the false counsel of the meraglim. Conversely, when Moshe was about to step down from his position, when he was about to transfer the scepter of leadership to Yehoshua, he called him once again by his original name, Hoshea. Why? Why did Moshe not once again pray on behalf of his student that he be spared the consequences of lashon hora? The answer is that Moshe knew from personal experience that this was impossible. No leader is spared the sharp, lacerating tongue of lashon hora. Once one has ascended to a position of leadership over others, he is immediately subject to the abuse of disparaging speech. The Netziv's words are not very encouraging. Indeed, the nisayon ha'chayim, life's experience, shows them to be very true. If one, however, understands the role he has accepted, the harmful side-effects of his position can be ameliorated.

For Hashem's portion His people; Yaakov is the measure of His inheritance - (32:8)

Hashem's "cheilek," portion, is His people. Yaakov Avinu used the word "cheilek" in a similar sense in his response to his mother Rivkah, concerning why he did not want to pose as Eisav. " But my brother Eisav is a hairy man and I am an ish chalek, smooth-skinned man" (Bereishis 27:11). At first glance one would say that while these words "cheilek" and "chalek," portion and smooth-skinned, are spelled the same, their commonality is limited to their spelling. The Midrash, however, draws a parallel between Klal Yisrael as G-d's portion and Yaakov's smooth skin. How are we to understand this?

Horav Gedalya Schorr, zl, explains that, by nature, Klal Yisrael is upright and just, virtuous and pure. As the Maharal comments, Klal Yisrael's sin, their indiscretions are only b'mikreh, incidental, and not b'etzem, a part of their essence.

When a Jew transgresses, he does not sully his essential character. It is only an external, superficial failure which can easily be cleansed and removed via the medium of teshuvah, repentance. The Midrash explains that when one is hairy, the dirt sticks to him and becomes entangled in his hair. In contrast, one who is smooth-skinned can easily wash off the dirt. A Jew can repent and return to his previous standing because " Ki cheilek Hashem amo," the essence of a Jew is the fact that he is chalek, "smooth-skinned." His transgression does not permeate his essential character. Eisav, on the other hand, is an "ish seir," hairy man, an analogy that describes the manner in which sin envelops his essential character, making it difficult to remove the taint.

Horav Schorr explains that this is the concept underlying tevilah, immersion in a mikveh: the removal of spiritual contamination. Since a Jew is an "ish chalek," smooth-skinned man, the contamination is superficial, making it easy to wash off the taint via immersion.

Probably the most significant lesson to be derived from this idea is that the Jew is inherently good. Thus, regardless of his errors, the extent of his distancing himself from Hashem only represents a surface wound that can quickly heal.

Yeshurun became fat and kicked, you became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent and it deserted G-d, its Maker. (32:15)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, notes that this is the first time that Klal Yisrael is described with the august title yeshurun, which is a derivative of yashar, upright/ straight/ just. This application symbolizes the fact that we do not deviate from the right standards demanded of us by Hashem. The expression "va'yivat" " and (he) kicked," does not seem consistent with the idea of corpulence. One would think that obesity catalyzes a slowing of the physical response. With an increase in weight, there should be a decrease in speed of movement. One would hardly expect an aggressive "kick"/ rebellion from a corpulent Klal Yisrael. A more lazy, lackadaisical attitude would seem more "apropos."

We suggest that, rather than characterizing Klal Yisrael critically in terms of its iniquity, the Torah is actually alluding to its virtue. As mentioned previously, yeshurun is a reference to our ability to adhere to a high standard of living, a lofty level of commitment. This exalted stature is a "mechayev," obligates, and demands a lifestyle that is consistent with our position of distinction. When we defer to our base instinct and resort to a life of materialistic excess, we create a clashing of wills that results in a violent discharge. Materialism is the antithesis of the "intended" Jewish psyche. The reaction is aggressive - va'yivat - and (he) kicked. When the Jew falls, he regrettably falls hard.

O'nations, sing the praises of His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants and take vengeance upon His enemies. (32:43)

In the Talmud Berachos 33, Chazal say, "Great is vengeance, which was placed between two letters (two Names of Hashem), as it is stated in Tehillim 94:1, "Keil nekamos Hashem." "G-d of vengeance is Hashem." This maxim of Chazal seems to be in opposition to a pasuk in the Torah: "You shall not take vengeance upon, nor bear a grudge against, the members of your people" (Vayikra 19:18). Apparently, there are situations in which vengeance is inappropriate. Why does the Torah encourage vengeance, a quality which is generally considered undesirable, when it is directed towards Klal Yisrael's enemies? Does this analysis indicate a double standard or the true definition of vengeance?

Horav Yoel Schwartz, Shlita, feels that the reason for this is crystal clear: In seeking to destroy the Jewish people, our enemies are engaging in active rebellion against the Almighty. Their actions manifest a "hester panim," concealment of Divine Providence. The tool to reverse this trend, and restore Hashem's sovereignty, is vengeance. Our active revenge against our enemies constitutes a revelation of hashgachah, Providence. Through the act of vengeance, the world will say, "The righteous are rewarded. There is a G-d."

We suggest another form of revenge against our enemies. There is probably no more recent event in the history of our people that evokes as much anger, and begs for more vengeance, than the Holocaust that befell us sixty years ago. When we begin to think of the cold-blooded, ruthless murder of so many of our people, the wholesale slaughter of one and one-half million children, we shudder with anger and thirst for revenge. Is this humane, what the Jewish nation stands for? We are a "momleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh" " a kingdom of priests and a holy people." How can we stoop to the level of the beasts who perpetrated such a cataclysmic destruction against us? Will killing Nazis bring back our dead? Will destroying their cities rebuild ours? No. The only revenge is to continue to thrive spiritually, to continue to rebuild everything they sought to destroy.

My mother, a.h., passed away during this past year. She was a "graduate" of a number of Hitler's concentration camps. She, together with my father zl, lost everything to Hitler - everything but their emunah peshutah, simple faith and conviction in the Almighty. Despite tremendous challenge and adversity, they plodded on, rebuilding their lives and subsequently raising a family that was true to Torah, to the fullest extent of the word. My mother lived to see three generations of Torah-committed Jews following her example. At her funeral, I asked that her coffin be carried only by her grandsons. One can only imagine the nachas her neshamah experienced as her grandsons, a number of whom are accomplished talmidei chachamim, carried out their grandmother, without whom their own spiritual success might never have occurred. As I stood there and watched, filled with bittersweet emotion, an old friend of our family said to me, " This is her revenge on Hitler." How true were those words. She did not give in to depression. She was a fighter, who fought for the Torah way of life, who would not let Hitler and his hordes win. Her form of vengeance is to be encouraged.

Throughout the Holocaust, many of our brethren refused to grant the Nazis success. They stood steadfast, adhering to halachah, Jewish law, under the most difficult situations. The Torah commands us, "Remember what Amalek did to you, 'asher karcha ba'derech,' how he met you on the road." The word "karcha," which is translated as "met," may also have another connotation. It may be understood as a derivative of the word "kar," cold: Amalek sought to cool us off, to chill the passion of our service to Hashem. He wanted to infuse us with complacency and happenstance, to transform our love and

devotion into a smug, self-satisfied attitude. He knew that once the fire of our commitment was extinguished, the rest of our observance would soon follow.

The Nazis did everything possible to make religious observance impossible. This did not prevent the committed from conjuring up every bit of physical and emotional fortitude in an effort to maintain their observance, thereby thwarting the Nazis' plans. This was their revenge. They did not go like sheep to the slaughter. They sanctified Hashem's Name in a manner which defies description. In life and in death, they enthroned Hashem as the Sovereign of the world. Countless stories portray the unparalleled courage and strength of spirit exhibited by the Jews during the Holocaust. One moving story, retold by R' Moshe Prager, particularly characterizes the greatness of the Jewish spirit.

It was Friday, Erev Shavuos, 1943. The Nazis roused all of the residents of the ghetto, ordering them to assemble in the market square. While the murderers said nothing of the purpose of the assembly, everyone knew the truth. A few days earlier, the accursed Gestapo had rounded up ten Jews, nearly all of them Gerer chassidim, and charged them with economic sabotage for smuggling food into the ghetto. Everyone understood the Nazis' ruse. Ten victims were to be sacrificed Erev Shavuos, the time of the Giving of the Torah with its Ten Commandments. Once again the Nazis would present a painful and horrifying spectacle: the hanging of ten Jews.

Among the ten doomed men was a chasid by the name of Shlomo Zelichovski. He was a special person, deeply committed, with a passion and zeal for Yiddishkeit that had few peers. He had a beautiful voice which would grace many a Yamim Noraim, High Holy Days, prayer service. He proposed to his fellow inmates that they fast on the eve of their hanging, and he would pray with them the tefillos, prayers, of Yom Kippur. Thus, he conducted a personal "Yom Kippur" service on the eve of their deaths. The fervor was overwhelming; the love and devotion to the Almighty emanating from their prayers was unimaginable. When Shlomo reached the Neilah service, the culmination of the day's prayers, their emotion reached such a crescendo that even the hard-bitten ghetto policeman who were present cried like infants.

Shlomo Zelichovski did not complete the Neilah Service in the jail cell. He purposely left the conclusion of the prayer for the next morning, when they went to the gallows. The next day, as the ten kedoshim, martyrs, were led from their cells through the streets of the ghetto, Shlomo Zelichovski raised his voice in a heart wrenching rendition of the "Ezkerah Elokim Ve'ehemayah," "I shall remember, O'G-d I shall moan." This is the prayer recited on Yom Kippur which recalls the deaths of the Asarah Harugei Malchus, ten martyred sages, who were killed by the Roman government. All together they sang the prayer with bittersweet tears flowing down their faces. They wept tears of bitterness, to have suffered so much and die at the hands of the accursed Nazis; they wept tears of joy, to have withstood the challenge and to be able to go to their deaths proud in their Jewishness, exalted in their sanctification of Hashem's Name. They were now ready to die as Jews, with pride and dignity.

One could not remove his eyes from Shlomo Zelichovski. He was smiling, his face radiant. He did not wait for the executioner to "position" him under the gallows. He jumped up onto the bench in order to put his head into the noose. The heavy silence was broken as the flaming voice of Shlomo Zelichovski cried out, "Shema Yisrael." Everyone assembled was swept up with emotion, with exaltation, with pride and with awe. This was Kiddush Shem Shomayim at its zenith. Everyone cried out without voices, everyone cried without tears. In their innermost souls, they all cried out together, "Shema Yisrael." Then all of a sudden, they heard another loud shout, "Jews! Avenge our blood!" A porter, a simple, pure Jew, had released his pent-up emotion. He had cried out from among the masses what everyone had been feeling in their hearts.

This was the greatest possible vengeance. The Nazis sought to destroy the Jewish soul. That is why they chose Erev Shavuot as the time to attack and persecute the Jews. This is how they strove to weaken our resolve and deride our faith.

Shlomo Zelichovski demonstrated that they can kill our bodies, but they have no dominion over our souls. The Germans, together with the long list of oppressors who have tried throughout history to destroy us, had once again failed. They had no power at all to uproot faith from the heart of the Jew. This is the epitome of revenge!

Apply your hearts to all the words..... In which you are to instruct your children, to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah. (32:46)

The crowning point of Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy, which the Ramban suggests encompasses all of Jewish history, is that we must instruct our children in the Torah. Throughout the generations, from Avraham Avinu through contemporary times, the success or failure of each generation is dependent upon its ability to transmit the Torah to their young, so that it is carried forward as purely and vibrantly as the day it was given to us.

R' Moshe Prager very poignantly describes the scene in the detention camp in Vittel, France: a few remnants of Jews, gathered from various corners of Europe - rabbis, laymen, delicate women and children - were all frightened, having suffered terribly at the brutal hand of the Nazi fiends, not knowing what the future had in store for them. Officially, they had cards identifying them as American nationals, but to the Nazi this meant nothing. The bitter day finally arrived; they were being deported to the death camps of Poland.

Among the deportees was the aged Rabbi of Antwerp, Belgium. Last in line, he marched briskly toward the death train with an uplifted head and an erect bearing. Yet, it was not his march that was captivating; it was what he had with him that bespoke the essence of Judaism, its aspirations and source of strength. With one hand, he led a small child whom he had miraculously saved during a manhunt in his community. On his other arm, he held a small Torah scroll. Even in the last phase of the Nazi destruction, confronted with almost certain death, the Jew thought only of the future: The Torah and the children, two inseparable entities which secure the future of our people. Hashem gave the Torah to us as an eternal inheritance. The children of every generation serve as guarantors for the nation. Our children are much more than our offspring. They are the assurance of our survival, the links to our future. Regrettably, some of us have difficulty perceiving this reality.

May my teaching drop like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew. (32:2)

The Zohar Ha'Kadosh tells us that the "rain" is an analogy for Torah She'Biklav, the Written Law, and the "dew" represents Torah She'Baal'Peh, the Oral Law. Just as the former is celestial in nature, the latter is earthly and mundane in nature. We infer from this statement that the Written Torah contains principles and laws from a pure, Heavenly point of view, while the Oral Torah emphasizes rules and regulations from the perspective of earthly society.

The commentators emphasize the various differences between dew and rain, suggesting their

parallel to Torah study. Horav Eli Munk, zl, observes that while raindrops can be measured as a standard liquid, dew cannot. Likewise, the Written Torah, which is compared to rain, has clearly defined mass. It is composed of five books, containing 248 positive commandments and 365 prohibitions. The Oral Law is like the dew, that cannot be quantified. It spreads thinly over the land, without limit, literally like the vast sea of the Talmud overflowing on all sides.

Horav Munk cites the Chofetz Chaim who criticized the people's lack of proficiency in Tanach. He commented that one would expect a greater accomplishment in the Written Law, which has clearly defined parameters, than the Oral Law which is literally limitless. Regrettably, this is not the case. The study of Chumash lags far behind the study of Talmud. Perhaps one's accomplishment seems greater and more significant in an area that does not have boundaries.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. (32:7)

Moshe Rabbeinu implores Klal Yisrael to learn from the past, to study its lessons to enable them to plan for the future. The pasuk seems to delineate between "days" of yore and "years" of generation after generation. This prompted the Dvar Avraham to infer a valuable lesson for us to employ in coping with the reality of life's challenges. "Remember the days of yore;" view each day as a singular occurrence, exclusive of anything else. The challenges of each day should be perceived as they are, completely independent of any other situations. Afterwards, "understand the years of generation after generation;" consider how these autonomous daily challenges interact to create progressive consequences over the years. The only way to face the challenges of life is by viewing them as part of a large picture spanning generations. Each solitary event no longer stands by itself, but is rather another piece in the mosaic of life.

The Dvar Avraham articulated this idea on the eve of World War II, when the streets of Europe were already filled with the terror that would be inflicted on the Jews. He said, "It is imperative that these words be inscribed on the tablets of our hearts. Especially now, as we are being trampled under the weight of destruction, in a bitter exile that has been our life for two thousand years. There is no day that does not bring another curse. It would be quite easy to defer to depression and hopelessness and forget about the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu and, ultimately, also forsake our Torah. We should not view present circumstances as isolated happenings with no relationship to the future. Rather, we should remember that everything that Hashem does is for the good. Thus, all events are considered a preliminary for the future. The darkness of today will bring about tomorrow's light."

Life's challenges have been poignantly analogized to a needle-point which on one side is a disarray of colors and threads, each one going in a different direction. The other side, however, is a beautiful masterpiece of color, a portrait of joy expressed through rich pastels. Regrettably, we view only one side of the needle-point. If we would only overcome our spiritual myopia, we could perceive the other side. Perhaps we would even see some of the profound beauty on the side of disarray.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. Ask your fathers and they will tell you... when the Supreme One gave the nations their inheritance... He set the borders of the peoples according to the numbers of the Bnei Yisrael. (32:7,8)

In recounting Jewish history, Moshe notes that after the Mabul, flood, surviving generations attempted to build the Tower of Bavel. Hashem scattered them, dividing them into seventy nations. Each nation had its own distinct language, corresponding to the number of Bnei Yisrael, the seventy members of Yaakov Avinu's family who later went down to Egypt. The Shem M'Shmuel remarks that the correspondence between the seventy souls in Yaakov's family and the seventy nations of the world is significant in Jewish thought. Although today there are certainly more than seventy nations, after the Mabul initially seventy nations emerged. Likewise, when Yaakov's offspring were first considered to be a nation, his family consisted of seventy members. The implication is that each primary world nation corresponded to one root member of Klal Yisrael. If that member of Klal Yisrael optimized his spiritual potential, he had the ability to elevate his parallel nation. At some spiritual level the two were linked, resulting in a spiritual improvement for that nation, regardless of the behavior of its individual members.

As time wore on, the nations multiplied and increased in number, growing beyond the original seventy. In parallel, Bnei Yisrael increased far beyond the original seventy souls. The various components in the relationship between the Jewish People and the nations of the world became increasingly complex. The soul of an individual Jew was now linked to many more gentile nations. Thus, the ripple effect engendered by the actions of each Jew reaches out to affect the spiritual welfare of many people.

With this idea in mind, the Shem M'Shmuel observes that the mitzvah of "zechor yemos olam," "remember the days of yore," is much more than a dry intellectual imperative. It is similar to other mitzvos that require remembrance and reflection, such as Shabbos and Amalek. It should be an emotional experience in which we recall not just the concept, but also its ramifications. We are to understand that our actions affect the rest of the world. As a nation, our collective spiritual plateau, our level of mitzvah performance, our acts of chesed and good deeds influence the entire world. This remembrance requires us to realize that what we do, or neglect to do, can change the world. This mitzvah imposes upon us an incredible responsibility, but we do not expect that being a Jew is an easy endeavor.

In an alternative interpretation of the pasuk, the Shem M'Shmuel cites Ibn Ezra who observes that the root meaning of "shanah," which means year, is the same as "shinui," which means change. Thus, we read the pasuk of "binu shnos dor v'dor," to mean, "Understand the changes of each generation." We are thereby enjoined to consider the changes that occurred throughout history.

When one compares two opposing entities to one another, their respective differences are much more apparent. Darkness stands out as a result of our awareness of the advantages of light -- and vice versa. Indeed, this idea applies equally to spiritual strengths and weaknesses. It is a given that the Jewish People have digressed spiritually throughout history. The best tool for measuring our spiritual digression is comparison to previous generations. By "remembering the days of yore", and understanding the changes of each generation, we are better equipped to accept our own deficiencies and attempt to correct them. When we observe the spiritual plateau attained by Jews of previous generations, we are able to acknowledge our own needs. Indeed, our future is based upon the lessons we learn from the past.

Hashem will see and be provoked by the anger of His sons and daughters. (32:19)

Simply, the Torah is telling us that Hashem will be angry as a result of our iniquity. Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, makes a novel homiletic exposition to the pasuk, implying a valuable lesson. Hashem sees the iniquity, but that alone does not cause Him to become angry. After He sees how His children, Klal Yisrael, act when they do not get their own way, when they do not get their hearts desires, He is provoked to anger. It is one thing to make demands, to entreat Hashem for favors and hope that they are fulfilled. How do we have the audacity to sin, to perpetrate our evil actions, and still make demands on the Almighty? Furthermore, when we do not receive what we want we complain bitterly, impugning Hashem. Does this attitude represent gross chutzpah or is it merely human nature?

How often do we find people bemoaning their fate, expressing their complaints to the Ribono Shel Olam, while they continue to flaunt their selective form of religious observance? Perhaps if we were to open our eyes and take stock of our hypocritical behavior, we might see what Hashem perceives all of the time.

I put to death and I bring life; I struck down and I will heal. (32:39)

Hashem is the only source of healing. He strikes down, and He heals. Horav Yechezkel Abramski, zl, raised and addressed a pertinent question regarding the brachah of "Refaenu" which we recite in Shemonah Esrai. We say, "Heal us, Hashem - then we will be healed. Save us - then we will be saved, for You are our praise." Why do we add the words, "For You are our praise"? Why is this the only brachah in which we emphasize Hashem's unique involvement? Horav Abramski commented that in the field of medicine, one has the opportunity to attribute his recovery to the physician, due to his access to modern medicine. How often do we pay lip service to the Almighty by reciting Tehillim, all the while placing our entire faith in the hands of the physician as if he really were in charge? For this reason, we accent the fact that Hashem is our praise, which means that we realize and believe that only through His intervention will a refuah sheleimah occur. The physicians are merely His agents in effecting the cure.

Ascent to this mount of Abarim... and die on this mountain... and be gathered to your people... because you trespassed against Me among the Bnei Yisrael... because you did not sanctify Me among the Bnei Yisrael. (32:49,50,51)

Perhaps Moshe Rabbeinu could have sanctified Hashem more emphatically. Why, however, is this considered to be a transgression against the Almighty? Did Moshe's error constitute such an incursion against Hashem that hundreds of entreaties and prayers were not sufficient to effect his passage into Eretz Yisrael? Hashem refused to allow Moshe to enter the land, neither as a living being or as a corpse, as an animal or even an inanimate stone! He could not pardon Moshe's error! Moshe's behavior demanded serious consequences. Why?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, employs a practical approach to explaining this anomaly. Heads of state are provided with a security force to protect them. Ostensibly, this security force is comprised of trained, highly- skilled individuals whose function it is to protect their charge. They plan his trips, preparing the safest route to travel; they literally watch over his every moment of public exposure, insuring that no one can get close to inflict harm on him. Another, more select, group

of security people are trained not only in protection, but also to be prepared to go one step further. Their function is to protect the head of state even with their own lives, if necessary. They must literally throw themselves down upon their charge, protecting him with their own bodies, willing to absorb or deflect whatever harm might be coming his way.

On one occasion, two such elite agents slacked off in their responsibility. An attempt was made upon the life of their charge and they did not literally throw themselves upon his body. Consequently, he was seriously wounded. They were brought before the magistrate for their breach of duty. The prosecutor sought to punish them with life imprisonment. After all, they had not protected their leader.

The defense attorney arose and delivered a moving speech before the jury. He described how the two defendants really did nothing different than the other members of the security force. When the assailant came forth from the crowd, intent upon shooting the President, no one else came forward to cover him with their own body. Why should they be singled out for guilt? These two men had devoted many years of exemplary service to their leader. Should they be held liable for not covering the President with their own bodies? They behaved no differently than any of the other security forces assembled at the time.

The words of the defense attorney made sense. The jury deliberated for a short while before returning their verdict. To everyone's shock and dismay, they found the defendants overwhelmingly guilty. Why? Had not the defense attorney shown in his brilliant argument that the two defendants had done nothing different than the other members of the security force? Why should they receive such a stiff punishment? The answer is obvious. Indeed, the others had not shielded the President with their bodies, but that had not been their assignment. They were to remain in the outer periphery searching, on guard for anyone who might harm their leader. The two defendants, however, had the responsibility to shield the President, to throw themselves upon him, to give up their lives, if necessary, to protect their leader. They failed in their responsibility; they erred in executing their mission. Those who have more demanding responsibilities will be appropriately punished for neglecting to perform accordingly.

Moshe and Aharon were alike. They were enjoined to "protect" the Name of Hashem. Nothing, no incursion against the sanctity or integrity of Hashem's Name, could be tolerated. They were literally to "shield" the Almighty with their own bodies. They erred. On a single occasion, they acted in a manner unbecoming their lofty position. They could have been mekadesh Shem Shomayim, sanctified Hashem's Name to a greater degree, and they did not. They did not accede to their unique responsibility. A person is judged in accordance with his responsibility in life. Doing half a job is not sufficient for one who must always perform to a one-hundred percent level. The margin for error does not apply to individuals of the calibre of Moshe and Aharon.