

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARASHAT KI TEITSEH

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son. (21:18)

The ben sorer u'moreh, wayward and rebellious son, is punished al shem sofo, as a consequence of his iniquitous end. He will one day resort to murder in order to satisfy his desire. Rather than wait for him to be punished for committing a violent act, he is killed now, so that he dies on a relatively innocent level. This concept is not consistent with the idea expressed by the Torah concerning Yishmael: Ba'asher hu shom, "In his present state." (Bereishis 21:17) The angel asserted that the innocent child, Yishmael, should die as a consequence of what his descendants would do to the Jewish People. Hashem responded that a person is judged according to what he "is," not according to what he "will be." If so, why is the rebellious son judged according to the acts of terror that he will commit later on in life? What about his "present state"?

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, suggests a profound thought to explain this concept. The expression al shem sofo, translated literally, means "according to his end." While we interpret this as reference to what he will do later on in life, it may have another meaning. Al shem sofo, "according to his end," refers to the end of his title: ben sorer u'moreh. The word moreh, which we have translated as rebellious, can also be understood to mean "and he will teach." A moreh is a teacher. Our fear is that this rebellious child will not just simply isolate his iniquity; he will share it with others, teaching them to be rebellious. When the evil is such that it will be spread and develop a following, when it will be spawned by teaching it to others, it must be stopped now! It is important to give a person who is straying a chance to rehabilitate himself, but not at the expense of others.

*When you will go out to war...and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form...
If a man will have a wayward or rebellious son... an Ammonite or Moavite may not enter the
congregation of Hashem...because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water...and
because he hired against you Bilaam ben Be'or. (21:10, 11, 18) (23:4, 5)*

The Torah sees beyond the veil of ambiguities that conceal the essence and reality of an activity that appears innocuous or harmless. As members of the Torah nation, we unequivocally trust the Torah's decision concerning certain situations that would normally baffle human perception. Let us cite three examples from our parshah. The Torah begins with the halachic dispensation concerning the yefas

toar, the beautiful captive. One sees a woman among the enemy captives and is suddenly engulfed with an uncontrollable desire for her. Understanding the breakdown of human rationality during times of war, and addressing human frailty, the Torah recognizes that the soldier may not be able to restrain himself. Therefore, it provides a venue for the lustful soldier to satisfy his desire in a permissible way.

In the second example, we find the incident of a wayward and rebellious son, the ben sorer u'moreh, who becomes, among other things, a glutton and drunkard, stealing money from his parents to satisfy his addiction. The Torah understands that while the gravity of the sins that he has committed until now is not yet severe, it soon will be. His behavior is a clear indication that he will become a monster and kill people in order to satisfy his addiction. The death penalty is imposed on this youngster, even though he has yet to commit the capital offense that he is destined to commit. Let him die while he is innocent and not when he is actually guilty of capital crimes. What is the difference between the two cases? Why do we allow the soldier to defer to his passion? Why are we not concerned that he might be stricken with desire and plunge deeper and deeper into the abyss of sin - just like the ben sorer u'moreh? Why do we have more confidence in the soldier who is driven by lust than the youngster who is addicted to gluttony and liquor?

The soldier is a product of a Torah education who stumbled into desire. We can work with him. Until now, he has proven himself to be of impeccable character, virtue and piety. Otherwise, he could not have joined the Jewish army. Only the righteous were selected as soldiers, but even the righteous can falter in the heat of battle. Anxiety and fear dominate; the mind no longer thinks clearly; the passions of the heart begin to prevail. There is, however, hope. This man was educated. His connection with the Torah has not been severed. There is still room for hope.

The ben sorer u'moreh has not had a chance to develop his Torah values. He has no foundation - only an uncontrollable addiction that must be satisfied - or else. He will do anything to satiate that desire, because he has never had the basis of a Torah education to shape his outlook, to put the "brakes" on his lust, to control and guide his mind. He does not drive; he is driven. The Torah has determined that, for him, there is no hope. It sees beyond the cloak of human activity, to the motivating factor of every action. Is it evil incarnate, or is it a temporary flaw?

In our third example we are exhorted not to admit an Ammonite or Moavite as a convert, because members of those nations did not come out and greet us with bread and water when we journeyed past their land, and because they hired Bilaam to curse us. Once again, we see what seems to be a "gray" area, a lack of proper etiquette. A flaw in character refinement should not be license to exclude them from Klal Yisrael. Yet, if the Torah says no and includes it together with a second reason, a reason demonstrating extreme malevolence and hatred for the Jewish People, this is more than a character flaw. It is not simply a lack of human compassion. It is because they possess an implacable hatred for the Jewish People, a hatred only the Torah can perceive. People see what appears before them. The Torah looks into the heart - and Moav's heart is evil incarnate. They have no place in our holy nation.

Then you shall take them both out... and pelt them with stones and they shall die; the girl because of the fact that she did not cry out. (22:24)

Why is the girl who is betrothed stoned in the same manner as the one who attacked her? The Torah explains that she should have cried out. Since she did not scream, it indicates that this violation

was not an act of force, but was consensual. The Sefas Emes derives an intriguing thought from here. We often claim that we are not to blame for our sins, since the yetzer hora, evil inclination, coerced us into acting sinfully. It was an accident. We are not innocent bystanders. Blame the yetzer hora. This pasuk serves as a condemnation of such excuses. You should have cried out. If the yetzer hora is impacting your life and not allowing you to serve Hashem as you desire, then cry out to Hashem. Pray to Him to give you the fortitude and resolution to triumph over the yetzer hora's blandishments. Just as the girl is held in contempt because she did not vigorously protest her violation, so, too, are we held accountable for not turning to Hashem during the yetzer hora's coercion. When He sees how much we do not want to sin, He will protect us from the evil inclination's insidious effect. If we do not cry, it indicates that we are not that distressed by our sinful behavior.

Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water...and because he hired against you Bilaam ben Be'or...to curse. (23:5)

The Torah states two reasons for not accepting converts from the nation of Moav: because they did not greet us with bread and water when we traveled to Eretz Yisrael; and because they hired Bilaam to curse us. We are hard-pressed to develop a connection between these two reasons. What relationship exists between the two? Horav Meir Abavitz, zl, explains that greeting the Jews with bread and water is more than an act of kindness. It is an expression of kavod, honor, respect, for a nation that has been the beneficiary of such incredible miracles, as well as an acknowledgement of their unique relationship with the Almighty. Hashem's love for Klal Yisrael was no secret. The entire world community was aware of this exemplary expression of love. As the recipients of this special Divine countenance, they should have been accorded an outpouring of respect. Certainly, they should not have been scorned. There was one possible justification for the Moavites' lack of respect and recognition for the Chosen People: they did not believe in miracles. The supernatural was beyond their grasp. Whatever the Jewish People experienced must have been beyond the natural order of events. Miracles just do not happen. If it was a natural occurrence, however, Klal Yisrael does not merit any distinction.

When they hired Bilaam to perform his nefarious incantations and curse the Jewish People, they demonstrated that they did believe in the supernatural. The mere fact that they were inclined to accept the premise that a curse can affect an entire nation was the greatest indication of their belief. Apparently, their hatred for the Jews was so intense that they were even willing to believe in miracles. A nation whose hatred was so overwhelming that it created such a dramatic transformation in their belief deserves to be distanced from the Jewish People. Such implacable hatred is genetic and, thus, not easily expunged.

It occurs frequently. People claim not to believe in Hashem or in His ability to perform miracles. Yet, when these same people are confronted with a crisis, an illness, a tragedy, they suddenly turn to Hashem. Likewise, we find those who disclaim any sort of belief in spiritual powers. When they are in pursuit of fulfilling their base desires, however, they are prepared to go to any length to achieve their goals.

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, citing his rebbe, Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl, related a similar idea. The Telshe Rosh Yeshivah commented, "The word is that the secularists do not believe in anything. They simply have no conviction. That is a blatant lie! They certainly do believe, but they believe in the wrong thing. Instead of believing in a Navi emes, true, righteous prophet, they believe in a Navi sheker, false prophet. Every person has the power of conviction, the power of faith. The problem is that there is a dearth of knowledge in what and in whom they should believe. Without the Torah, one remains blind and baffled."

Horav Chaim Kamil, zl, cites a like-minded thought expressed by the Bais HaLevi in his commentary to the confrontation between Yosef and his brothers. He writes, "We see clearly that the denial of Hashem by the heretics of our times is not the result of a lack of belief. They are all believers! In fact, their heresy is a by-product of their belief, but this belief is in the words of heretics and false ideologies. They follow like the blind and believe and listen to everything they hear." After all is said and done, a person believes what he wants to believe, rather than what he should believe.

The Bais HaLevi's commentary on the famous Midrash focuses on Yosef's dialogue with his brothers and their frightened response -- or lack thereof. Yosef said, "Is my father still alive?" Their reply was, "No response," because, as the Torah relates, they were frightened. In its commentary, the Midrash notes, "Woe is to us for the Yom HaDin, Day of Judgment; woe is to us for the Yom HaTochachah, Day of Rebuke." Yosef was the youngest of the brothers. Yet, when he said, "I am Yosef," his brothers were speechless. What will we say when we face the Heavenly Tribunal in which each person will be rebuked according to what he is?" The Bais HaLevi explains the difference between the two terms, Day of Judgment and Day of Rebuke. How are they different from one another?

There are two aspects to Hashem's judgment of man: din, judgment; and tochachah, rebuke. Din focuses on the actual sin. One transgresses, and he must pay for his infraction. Human beings with their frailties and limitations are hard-pressed to own up to their responsibilities. Part of human maturity is to accept responsibility for one's actions. Regrettably, we always attempt to justify our actions, finding some excuse for the reason that we acted as we did. Heaven forbid we should concede guilt. At times, we even have the audacity to present our incursion as some form of mitzvah! Hashem understands how a human being might err and give credence to a sin, by seeking some validation. This could even be tolerated under certain conditions. When the person acts like a hypocrite by justifying his sinful behavior, rebuke becomes necessary.

The brothers expressed their overriding concern for their father's well-being. Everything they were doing to protect Binyomin was to spare their father any travail. Thus, when Yosef said, "I am Yosef! Is my father still alive?" he was implying, "You did not seem to care about our father when you sold me into slavery. All of a sudden, now when it is convenient to care about him, you care. Where was your concern all of these years?"

The same idea applies to each and every one of us. We claim we are too tired to attend a shiur, Torah study class, or to study with a study partner: "It has been a long day." Why is it that we find the time and strength to participate in anything else - be it witnessing or participating in a sports event or attending a function that is not Torah-oriented? We claim that it is difficult to arise early in the morning to attend davening. When we have to go away for any reason other than davening, however, we are able to get up bright and early. We are filled with hypocrisy. Our excuses cannot withstand the "rebuke" of our actions, because they do not coincide. When it serves our benefit, we are able to do anything we want. When it involves serving Hashem, we are very creative in conjuring up excuses. Day of

Judgment addresses the actual sin. Day of Rebuke focuses upon our hypocrisy.

The converse is also true. The individual who has a difficult time rising on time, yet makes sure to attend davening bright and early, surely merits a great reward, since he is acting contrary to his nature. He triumphs over the obstacles presented by the yetzer hora, evil inclination. That is his hope for the Yom HaDin. When we demonstrate our ability to overcome challenges, Hashem smoothes out the path to reward.

You shall not cause your brother to take interest...you may cause a gentile to take interest. (23:20, 21)

Rashi comments that this exhortation is directed to the borrower and serves as an addendum to the prohibition already mentioned in Vayikra 25:37, which prohibits the lender from taking interest from a fellow Jew. Gentiles, however, are exempted from the laws of interest. Thus, a Jew is permitted to pay them interest and extract interest from them. The commentators explain that the laws of interest are primarily part of the laws of chesed, kindness. One must lend money to his brother without taking interest as part of his obligation to perform kindness to his fellow Jews. Why is it different in regard to gentiles? Does kindness extend only to Jews? Furthermore, according to the Rambam, taking interest from a gentile is a mitzvah. Why?

Horav Simchah Wasserman, zl, cites the pasuk at the beginning of Sefer Mishlei (1, 3), which instructs the Jews to accept mussar haskel, wise discipline, tzedek, righteousness, mishpat, justice, and meisharim, fairness. The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna defines tzedek as one's obligations towards his fellow; and mishpat as his rights and what his fellow owes to him. The Torah instructs us to focus our efforts on providing good will to our fellow. We must ask ourselves: What do I owe my friend? What must I still do for him? Have I fulfilled my obligations? This is tzedek, righteousness. The Torah commands us to lend money to our fellow Jew without exacting any interest in return. It must be purely for the favor, a consummate act of kindness - not an act of taking advantage. If a person only focuses on what he must do for his fellow, but his fellow only looks for ways to take advantage of others, squeezing whatever he can from the other fellow, there would be nothing short of anarchy. Therefore, the Torah demands mishpat, justice, which indicates the other fellows' obligation towards me.

When a Jew lends money to his fellow Jew, he incurs a loss, since he cannot charge interest for the money which he is lending. Money that could have otherwise been earning interest in the bank is presently in another Jew's possession - for nothing! Remuneration is inherent in the concept of mishpat: When I borrow from my fellow Jew, he may not charge me interest. This reciprocity is called meisharim, fairness, in which I do for you and you do for me.

When a Jew lends money to a gentile, however, this reciprocity does not exist, since he may and will charge me interest. Thus, in accordance with the rules of reciprocity, I should do the "same" for him. Part of this idea of meisharim is that I do for the other person what he would do for me. He lends for interest; therefore, I lend for interest.

We are commanded to strive to be a mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh, "a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation." This can only be achieved when we adhere to the concepts of tzedek, mishpat and meisharim. Lending money to our fellow Jew out of a sense of kindness - not for profit purposes - is one of the ways that we may achieve this lofty and noble goal.

*When you go out to war against your enemies... and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form... If a man will have two wives... If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son.
(21:10,11,15,18)*

Chazal explain the confluence of the first three topics of this parsha as part of a pattern. Indeed, they serve to dispute the notion that a liaison between a soldier and a captive woman can work. It is an improper obsession to which the Torah acquiesces, but warns them will only lead to tragedy. This woman will never be properly loved once the infatuation dissipates. Her son, the product of this relationship founded in uncontrolled lust, will be a ben sorer u'moreh, a wayward and rebellious son. Interestingly, the Torah continues by presenting a number of social laws which enjoin us to demonstrate sensitivity towards our fellow man, when we see his animal lost or if we discover a lost article. The Torah continues with our obligation to assist our fellow man when his animal is weighted down in burden. We are then instructed concerning the mitzvah of Shiluach ha'Kein, sending away the mother bird. Once again, we are to be sensitive to a mother bird's maternal feelings for her offspring and not to take advantage of these emotions. Is there some connection between these mitzvos and the laws of yefas toar, captive woman, shtei nashim, two wives, and ben sorer, rebellious son?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, suggests a noteworthy relationship and message to be derived from these passages. He first cites an inspiring story that occurred a short time ago. A yeshivah student from one of the well-known yeshivos became engaged to a girl who was the product of one of the distinguished seminaries in Eretz Yisrael. The boy was serious and sincere about his learning, his character and ethical standards were exemplary. His kallah was of a like character, her head straight, her goals and objectives in life true to the Torah perspective of which she was a product. Everything seemed fine, with all systems go in anticipation of their wedding. Suddenly, a few weeks prior to the wedding date, the chassan began complaining about his health. He could not pinpoint anything specific. It was just that he did not feel right. After meeting with his family physician for a complete physical workup, he was given the somber news: he had a dread disease that was ravaging his body. He would need serious treatment that might cure him.

If matters were not bad enough, the terrible news had to be shared with his kallah and her family. He was no longer a single boy whose decisions concerned only himself. He now had a responsibility towards his kallah and her family. He decided that in order to spare his intended from any undue pain, he was breaking the shidduch, matrimonial match. His kallah would be free to look for someone else.

His kallah absolutely refused to hear of this. Her chassan had enough on his mind with the inevitable treatments he would have to undergo. He needed a wife to support him during his travail. She looked forward to their marriage. She would not listen to any nonsense about breaking the shidduch.

The parents on both sides were astonished with the exalted character of these two special young people. Such selflessness as evinced by the two was atypical of society's norm. They spoke to a number of rabbanim, questioning the halachah, seeking procedure, asking for guidance, but could not arrive at a concrete statement concerning which path to choose. Finally one Rav said, "Let us go to Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita. He is erudite in every area of Torah literature. Surely, this gaon will be able to decide on the proper course for this couple."

The families went to Rav Chaim, who, after listening to the episode, declared, "They should get

married! It is a perfect match!"

All who were there were dumbfounded. While they accepted the Rav's sage advice, they needed some clarification as to why he had rendered his decision in favor of their marriage.

Rav Chaim smiled, and said, "Bring me a Midrash." He opened the Midrash to Parashas Noach where Chazal relate an incident concerning Alexander the Great. The great warrior arrived in a country that was on the other side of the world, with the singular purpose of meeting its king whose reputation as a brilliant judge had preceded him. He simply wanted to sit in and listen to his judgments, so that they would serve to enhance his own ability to render justice.

One day, two litigants approached the king to decide between them concerning a parcel of land. It seems that the seller had sold a field to the buyer for an agreed upon, fair price. Upon digging in the ground, the buyer discovered a hidden treasure. The question was: Who gets to keep the treasure? The buyer felt it belonged to the seller, since he had had no idea that there was hidden treasure on his land, when he had agreed to sell it for that price. The seller felt that he sold the field as is, and, therefore, the treasure belonged to the buyer! The king of the country asked Alexander, "What would you do in such a situation?" Alexander immediately replied, "I would kill each of them and take the treasure for myself."

The wise king said, "Well, we do not do things that way in our country." He then turned to the litigants and asked one of them, "Do you have a son?" The man replied, "Yes." The king turned to the other one and asked, "Do you have a daughter?" "Yes," he responded. "If this is the case," said the king, "then let your daughter marry his son, and the field should be the dowry. Since each of you claim the treasure belongs to the other person, it should be given to your children who will share it accordingly."

Rav Chaim turned to the parents; "This Midrash teaches us that when the two sides care only about the other one, not about themselves, then we have the foundation for a perfect shidduch. Mazel Tov! Your children exemplify the finest and most critical qualities intrinsic to a successful marriage."

Let us now return to our parsha: the episode with the yefas toar is a lesson in self-gratification. It is about someone succumbing to his overwhelming passion. What about his family? What about his wife and children back home? Does he not care about them? What are they going to say when he arrives home with this beautiful captive that is permitted to him by a halachic dispensation? Regrettably, he is so involved in satiating his own physical desires that he does not think of anyone else - only himself. This is why the Torah follows up with laws that address our sensitivity towards others. Yes, yefas toar is a dispensation, but it is not the way life should be. One should think of others - not of himself. In order for the shidduch between man and Hashem to work, one must learn to give Hashem priority in the equation.

Perhaps this is another way to view the connection between yefas toar and the ben sorer u'moreh. Parents must give of themselves, placing their children far before themselves. One whose desires take precedence over his family is destined to fail as a parent. It is no wonder that one who falls for the allure of a yefas toar plants the seeds that nurture the growth of a rebellious son. After all, the apple does not fall far from the trees. The son has from whom to learn.

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son. (21:18)

Chazal tell us that the ben sorer, wayward son, is judged according to his (inevitable) end...

Rather he should die while he is still innocent than be put to death as punishment for a capitol crime that he will (likely) commit. In a remarkable statement, Chazal describe the impending path to doom that this rebellious son will certainly choose for himself. He will first be a glutton manifesting a complete lack of self-restraint concerning his parents' possessions. After he has exhausted what is available at home, he will sit at the crossroads and rob people in order to satisfy his unrestrained, insatiable needs. If he does not get what he wants, he will have no qualms about resorting to murder. Last, he will forget his learning. Therefore, the Torah says that he should die now, while he is yet innocent.

Upon perusing Chazal's words, one is taken aback with the way they view the ben sorer's digression. He will steal; he will murder; he will ultimately forget his Torah learning! Unquestionably, Torah study is the lifeblood of our People, but is forgetting one's learning to be considered worse than murdering a fellow Jew? What are Chazal teaching us?

Horav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv, Shlita, gives a noteworthy explanation. The Torah is about to pass judgment on a young boy, to have him executed while he is yet innocent, because of an inevitable future that will bring tragedy and death to others. To do this, the Torah must be certain that this boy's future of evil is inevitable. It is something that is irrevocable. Thus, Chazal teach us that as long as there is some connection to Torah, there is hope that he will change the course that he has chosen for himself. As long as the bond with Torah has not been severed, regardless of how thin is the strand that binds him, there is still hope for teshuvah, repentance and return. Once that bond has been irremediably disconnected, his lifeline to his faith has been broken. He no longer knows how to return. The cord that leads him to freedom has been torn. He is lost.

This is the meaning of our daily prayer in Shemonah Esrai, Hashiveinu Avinu l'Torasecha... v'hachazireinu b'teshuvah sheleimah lefanecha. "Bring us back, Our Father, to Your Torah... and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You." One depends on the other - without a return to Torah, there can be no complete teshuvah.

Torah is the lifeblood of our People, the lifeline from which the entire Jewish spectrum of observance is nurtured. A noted philanthropist once asked Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita, an interesting halachic question: He was used to giving the majority of his Maaser, tithing money, to support the various yeshivos throughout the world. Recently, he had come under pressure to help sustain the efforts of various bona-fide kiruv, Jewish outreach, organizations. While he conceded that he was a wealthy man, everything has its limit. Should he shift his priorities to kiruv, since, after all, the talmidei, students, of the yeshivos would continue learning regardless of his contribution? The kiruv organizations could accomplish more and reach out further, if they had greater support. What should he do?

Rav Shteinman replied that the inspiration that baalei teshuvah have today is a direct result of the merit of Torah learning that goes on in the yeshivos. The growth of the teshuvah movement is commensurate with, and attributed directly to, the level of Torah learning in the yeshivos. To lower the standard of support for yeshivos will have a direct and negative impact on kiruv. One must realize the efficacy of Torah and its powerful impact on the Jewish People.

That he happened upon you on the way. (25:18)

Rashi translates asher karcha, he "happened" upon you, using the word mikreh,

happening/chance as the root of the word karcha. This was Amalek's ploy. He would assert that everything which occurred was neither by design, nor guided by Hashem. It was all mikreh, chance, an occurrence, a happening. He sought to disassociate Hashem with the world. The Hashem factor did not exist in Amalek's lexicon. Their whole perspective of cause and effect is perverted, because they remove the primary component: Hashem. Thus, what we, simple humans, view as the cause might not necessarily be true. Indeed, the cause as we see it could quite possibly be the effect! Amalek would take the most impressive miracles and attribute them to being nothing more than an occurrence, while our perspective is not to ignore even the most rudimentary incident by attributing it to chance. Everything has a reason; everything has a purpose. It is all a part of Hashem's master plan.

The following story related by Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, supports this idea, as it demonstrates that as we take every step in this world, we are accompanied by Hashem. The story is about an American boy who grew up in an assimilated family, a family that over the years had become very distant to the religion of their ancestors. The boy never attended Hebrew Day School. His only memory of a relationship with Judaism was his weekly Friday night visit to his grandfather's home. His grandfather had remained observant, something he was, regrettably, unsuccessful in transmitting to his son. Out of respect, his grandson would come by as Zaidy returned from shul and spend about fifteen minutes discussing his week. One thing that the boy always remembered was the white challah cover on the table and something else - a song that Zaidy sang every Friday night. The tune became embedded in his mind, as he would hum it on his way home. Over the years, he fell in love with the tune of Eishes Chayil.

The boy grew into a man - a man totally unaware of, and alienated from, the religion of his grandfather. He met a nice Jewish girl and after a while they decided to marry. Prior to the wedding, the "boy-turned-man" asked his fianc?, "We are not observant, and we will not lead an observant lifestyle. There is one custom, however, I would ask you to share with me: Could we spread a white cloth on the table every Friday night and sing together a melody that has great meaning to me?" His fianc? readily acquiesced to his request, especially when she heard the tune. Slowly, it impacted her as well, but she wanted to go a step further. She had to know the meaning of the Hebrew words. Since they could not pronounce the words very well, it was difficult to find them in any translation. So they decided to go to a Jewish bookstore in Boro Park and sing the melody. Perhaps someone would recognize the song.

One can imagine a young, non-observant couple entering a bookstore in Boro Park and singing Eishes Chayil to the owner. Well, that is exactly what happened. They sang the song, and the owner said, "You are looking for a translation of Eishes Chayil. No problem." He gave them a Shabbos Zemiros book, fully translated and explained, and the couple appreciatively paid and left.

End of story? No. They read the Zemiron, and when the young woman realized that this was a song dedicated not only to the Shabbos bride, but also describing all the virtues and attributes of the Jewish woman, she was moved. She looked at her husband and said, "If the Jewish tradition so eminently venerates a woman, then I would like to observe the rest of the Torah."

The young woman had made her point, and, in a short while, she had so influenced her husband that they both became baalei teshuvah. Today their children are to be found in the finest yeshivos and Bais Yaakov schools. Now, can one suggest that the boy's weekly ritual at his grandfather's house was just an "occurrence." Maybe, however, it was a part of Hashem's design to give him the opportunity to return.

It shall be when Hashem, your G-d, gives you rest from all your enemies all around, ... you shall wipe

out the memory of Amalek. (25:19)

The pasuk implies that the command to erase the memory of Amalek applies primarily after Klal Yisrael is settled and at ease, with no fear of its enemies. This is substantiated by Ibn Ezra. In the Talmud Sanhedrin 20b, Chazal teach that the Jewish People were commanded to carry out three mitzvos when they arrived in Eretz Yisrael: inaugurate a king; destroy the descendants of Amalek; build the Bais Hamikdash. We wonder why it is necessary to first establish monarchy before we set out to destroy Amalek? There were many battles imposed upon the Jewish People when they entered Eretz Yisrael, battles in which they were to inflict permanent damage upon every member of the seven nations. Why was there no prerequisite to establish kingship before going to war with these nations?

Horav Tuvia Lisitzen, zl, explains that the fear of Amalek's impact upon our nation is specifically when we are at rest. We are enjoined to remember when Amalek struck us. He came right after Krias Yam Suf, the Splitting of the Red Sea, prior to the Giving of the Torah, when we were at the apex of our spiritual development. We were on an incredible spiritual "high." It was at a point when "the simple maidservant at the sea saw a greater revelation of the Almighty than what was seen by the great prophet Yechezkel." The entire world feared and trembled from us. It was specifically at this unique time, at the zenith of our spiritual stature, that Amalek chose to attack. His goal was to "cool" the water, to downplay Klal Yisrael's position, to make it easier for others to do the same.

Our greatest fear of Amalek is when there is peace and serenity, when calm and prosperity reign. That is when Amalek attacks. His goal is to shatter the calm, to demonstrate to others that Klal Yisrael can be taken. Furthermore, it is at such a time when we are at ease, that we tend to forget Who our Protector is.

Likewise, when monarchy has been established and there is a symbol of power in conjunction with the throne, then there is greater reason to fear Amalek's incursion. His goal is to mitigate the fervor, to destroy the calm, to rally others against us. This is when we are to see to it that his plan is not allowed to materialize.

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son, who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother. (21:18)

Upon reading the story of the wayward and rebellious son, one begins to wonder. How did this happen? How did such an ingrate boy grow up in a home that was replete with yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, and observance of Torah and mitzvos? Education is the key to growth, and certainly this boy has received an education, both at home and at school. Where did he go wrong? The Ohr Ha'Chaim Hakadosh feels that this miscreancy occurred neither in a vacuum nor overnight. Indeed, at a young age, his parents did not bother to emphasize the importance of listening to Hashem and observing His dictates. The Ohr Ha'Chaim interprets this exegesis into the pasuk. The phrase, the boy "who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother" is a reference to listening to the voice of our Father in Heaven, Hashem. Otherwise, it would have said, "who does not listen to his voice." We all know that it is the father's voice. Apparently, there is another Father's voice that he is ignoring: Hashem's.

"His father and his mother" is a metaphor for Hashem and Knesses Yisrael. If parents do not teach their children to listen to Hashem, they risk losing their own ability to discipline them. Children must be raised with respect for the Almighty and respect for Klal Yisrael. They should be imbued with a sense of pride, a sense of mission, and a love for their heritage. One who does not listen to his spiritual Father and Mother will eventually also lose respect for his biological parents.

While this is not necessarily a forum for a thesis on education, this writer cannot resist the opportunity to cite some advice and guidance from our Torah leaders of the past. Many people think that education is a form of discipline in which the rod is the symbol of reinforcement and encouragement. The Seforim Ha'Kedoshim do not agree with this method. They promote an educational approach based upon love and encouragement. There is a dynamics to teaching and learning that reaches into the deepest needs of each individual child. The primary educators in an individual's life are his parents. They must underscore the overriding importance of adherence to Torah and mitzvos. In order to be effective and enduring, this lesson should be rendered with love and respect. Yes, parents should demonstrate respect for their children. This respect will, in turn, be reciprocated.

Children should not listen to their parents out of fear, but out of respect. A sense of shame should envelop them when they do something wrong. They should realize that they have let their parents down. This is the result of a loving, caring, respectful relationship. Yosef Ha'Tzadik held back from committing a sin with Potiphar's wife when he saw an image of his father. He realized who he was and who his father was. He realized the hurt and humiliation he would generate with his sinful behavior.

While it is true that, at times, a child must be reprimanded and even punished, it should be carried out with love - not anger. This love should be palpable. The child should sense that his parent is acting out of love and necessity. The Chafetz Chaim's son related that his father never gave his children reason to fear him. His rebuke was always couched in love and expressed in a pleasant, calm and dulcet tone. He never raised his voice. He added that, while he and his siblings were careful to carry out the mitzvah of honoring one's parents, they never had reason or opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of fearing one's parents. Their father was a friend, a big brother - not someone to fear.

Horav Shmuel Halevi Vosner, Shlita, posits that it is important for a parent to rebuke his child and to even point to the rod that hangs from the wall - but rarely to use it. Above all, a child must be taught who he is, what his potential is, and what is expected of him.

The Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, was a Torah giant who survived the Holocaust, rebuilt his life after the war and was a source of fatherly love and inspiration to thousands both during and after the war. Shortly after the war, he searched everywhere for survivors, in the hope that he could imbue them with a desire to return to a Torah way of life. Many followed him, some out of conviction, others out of love for the Rebbe. One young man who had lost everything -- including his wife, his children, and his extended family -- just went along. He did not know why. After all, in what could he believe, now that everything he had ever had had been destroyed? His life was empty, his emotions a vacuum. Nonetheless, he was there.

One day as he was walking through the DP camp, he saw the Rebbe, surrounded by a number of followers, walking towards him. The young man moved to the side to let the Rebbe pass, but the Rebbe stopped and motioned his followers to continue. The man realized that the Rebbe wanted to speak to him - and he was not interested in speaking to anybody. He did not want anyone to proselytize to him. Look what all the belief he had brought him. Nothing! He was alone in the world with nothing. He

turned away from the Rebbe. The Rebbe called to him, and he had no recourse but to respond.

"Rebbe, I am sorry, but I have no interest in speaking right now," he said.

"My dear son, I know you do not wish to talk to anyone, and I will respect your wish. After all, I cannot blame you. After all that you have endured, your emotions are understandable. I just want to tell you one thing: Be yourself. Always remember who you are."

This is how the Rebbe succeeded in bringing back hundreds of lost Jews. He rekindled the spark of Yiddishkeit, the flickering ember of holiness that lay dormant within the recesses of their hearts. Eventually, over time, these Jews returned to their faith and conviction, becoming observant and raising beautiful families, committed to Torah and mitzvos. His success was due to his love for every Jew. He did not judge; he did not reproach. He simply reminded them from whom they had descended and to what they could still return. He reminded them who they were.

In summation, the way we are mechanech, educate, our children will impact them for life. By teaching them to respect the Almighty, we will benefit in having them respect us. Horav Shlomo Karliner, zl, was wont to say that in the manner that one acts with his own children he is "teaching," Kaviyachol, Hashem how He should also relate to His sons. If we show compassion, love, patience, kindness and forgiveness, so will He. Our actions have that kind of an effect. He interpreted this idea into the pasuk, V'chol banayich limudei Hashem, "And all your children will be students of Hashem" (Yeshayah 54:13). The way one acts with his children is a lesson Kaviyachol to Hashem, that He should also likewise treat His children.

Horav Asher zl, m'Stolin would entreat Hashem saying, "Hashem, we put up with so much from our children. Please do the same for us." As we approach the Yemai Ha'Din, may Hashem listen to our tefillos in the same way that a father listens to his son.

You shall surely send away the mother and take the young for yourself. (22:7)

Arichas yamim, longevity, is the commonly cited reward for two mitzvos: Shiluach hakein, sending away the mother bird; and Kibbud Av V'Eim, honoring father and mother. The Midrash goes one step further, saying that the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird is the easiest mitzvah, while honoring one's parents is the "hardest of the hard." What are Chazal teaching us?

Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita, gives a novel explanation. He cites the Ramban who explains that the reason one sends the mother bird away is to teach us to have compassion. The Ramban emphasizes that the mitzvah is not necessarily simply to demonstrate that Hashem has mercy on animals, but, rather, to teach us to be compassionate. One who is compassionate towards animals will certainly have mercy on humans. Compassion is a natural character trait for a human being. Indeed, one who is not compassionate is not acting in a human manner. This is why this is considered an easy mitzvah to fulfill.

Honoring parents has its source in the middah, character trait, of hakoras hatov, gratitude. Regrettably, this mitzvah goes against the grain of human nature. Expressing gratitude is not easy. Showing appreciation means that we owe somebody something. This is not easy for many people. The human ego likes to think it is beholden to no one. Hakoras hatov teaches us the opposite. Honoring one's parents is a difficult mitzvah to perform, since it is not a natural human character trait.

You shall not reject an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land. ((23:8)

Incredible! The Egyptians spurned us, made us into slaves, killed our children, spiritually defiled us and did just about everything an enemy can do, yet the Torah instructs us not to reject them. Rashi explains that despite their implacable hatred towards us, and regardless of all the terrible things they did to us, we owe them a debt of gratitude, since they were our hosts at a time of pressing need. When our grandfather Yaakov Avinu descended to Egypt to escape the famine that ravaged Canaan, and to be reunited with his long lost son, Yosef, Pharaoh gave him and his family a home in Egypt. They were given food and shelter and were treated with respect. Pharaoh was generous and gave them the land of Goshen to live in seclusion, so that they would not assimilate with the Egyptians. It was here that they grew from a family of seventy souls into a nation of millions.

The generous hospitality in Egypt continued until Yosef's last surviving sibling, Levi, passed away about ninety years after Yaakov's arrival. For ninety years we had it "good" in Egypt. Therefore, we are to accept male Egyptian converts after three generations. The reason is that it takes three generations for the Egyptian moral character to be expunged from his descendants.

In his commentary on the Torah, anthologized by Rabbi Sholom Smith, Horav Avrohom Pam, zl derives an important lesson from this pasuk. Miyut ha'tov einu batel b'ribui hara, "a small measure of good is not compromised by a large measure of evil." Egypt stands as the paradigm of evil, oppression, and cruelty, the forerunner of nations who have attempted to destroy us. Yet, we still owe them a debt of gratitude, and that debt is not to be ignored, despite all the evil they represent. We cannot forget that they once treated us benevolently. Thus, we are obligated to reciprocate.

This concept must remain a cornerstone in our interpersonal relationships. If one has benefited from someone, regardless of the fact that presently the benefactor causes us discomfort or pain, we must maintain our sense of hakoras hatov, gratitude. How often are decades of kindness washed away by a perceived wrongdoing or a thoughtless remark? How many family relationships have been destroyed due to foolishness or insensitivity on the part of one individual? Is this a reason to throw away all of the positive moments that have existed, all of the kindnesses that have been rendered, all of the experiences, both positive and negative, that have been shared?

This idea has its parallel in our relationship with Hashem. We certainly do not want Him to discount our mitzvos and maasim tovim, good deeds, due to an occasional indiscretion or a momentary lapse. Why should our standards change when it involves our interpersonal relationships?

Rav Pam adds that those who maintain a high degree of hakoras hatov, appreciation and gratitude, to those who benefit them are invariably happy people. One who is grateful for what he receives realizes how many good and caring friends he really has. One who cannot overlook an unintentional snub, a thoughtless remark, or a foolish indiscretion, is a perpetually unhappy person. He feels that everyone is his enemy and everyone is constantly conspiring against him. This sense of insecurity catalyzes his downfall and eventual rejection from society.

As we approach Hashem during the upcoming days of judgment, it would serve us well to reinforce ourselves and our relationships, so that we do not become victims of our own insecurities.

For Hashem, your G-d, walks in the midst of your camp...so your camp shall be holy, so that He will

not see a shameful thing among you. (23:15)

It is related that during the first Kenessiah Gedolah, which took place in Vienna in 1923, the assemblage included most of the gedolei Torah, prominent Torah leaders, of that generation. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, also attended and served as the unofficial head of the assembly. Prior to the Kenessiah, the Chafetz Chaim asked Agudath Israel's rabbinic leadership to meet with him in his hotel room. He said the following: "Rabbosai, my friends, there are gathered here rabbanim from all lands to seek counsel and initiate programs for the physical and spiritual improvement of our brethren. We must acknowledge and never forget the pasuk in Devarim 23:15 in which the Torah clearly states that Hashem walks in our midst to save and sustain us only as long as He does not note any moral deficiencies among us. If, however, there is ervas davar, moral degeneration, within our midst, we are driving Hashem away." The Chafetz Chaim continued, "What good are meetings and conventions with their broad declarations if we are deficient in the area of tznius, moral modesty? Hashem will leave our midst, and we will be the cause! If we will make tznius a priority, we will maintain Hashem's Presence among us and guarantee our success in all areas."

At that Kenessiah, the men had assembled on the main floor of a large auditorium. The women's section was in an area of the second floor, above the men. There was, however, no partition between them. In other words, those standing on the first floor, albeit separated from the women, were still able to see them from afar. This troubled the Gerrer Chassidim who refused to allow their Rebbe to enter the auditorium unless curtains were put up to separate the women from the men.

There were those who contended that since there was a separation in place and the women were on a higher plateau than the men, it was sufficient, so that a curtain was an unnecessary inconvenience. Understandably, each of the two sides was quite adamant in its position. Yet, calm and intelligence reigned, and the decision was made to abide by the sage advice that the saintly Chafetz Chaim would render. The Chafetz Chaim listened to the arguments and said, "Halachically, the separation is fine. Since there are those who seek to be stringent in a matter regarding moral purity, however, we should make every effort to acquiesce to their demands. After all, this is what determines Hashem's Presence in our midst. Why would we want to drive Him away? In fact, we should certainly implement every hiddur, meticulous adherence to halachah, that we are able. We need Hashem's help, and this will catalyze it!"

This story was related by the founder and Rosh Hayeshivah of Mir in America, Horav Avraham Kalmanowitz, zl. His son, Horav Shraga Moshe, zl, supplemented the story saying, "The Chafetz Chaim taught us a novel idea. Until now, a person might postulate that Hashem is either in our midst, or He is not. The Chafetz Chaim taught us that there are distinct levels to Hashem's relationship with us. When one increases his level of hiddur of the mitzvah of v'lo yeraeh, "so that He will not see," he will increase Hashem's closeness to us accordingly. If, on the other hand, he diminishes his level of adherence in areas of moral purity, he is distancing Hashem from us.

That he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were hindmost, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d. (25:18)

Amalek was not the only nation that contended with Klal Yisrael. Other nations also confronted us. Nowhere, however, do we find such harsh words against a nation as we find against Amalek. Hashem declares that He wages war with Amalek throughout the generations (Shemos 17:16). What is

the reason for this unprecedented condemnation?

The Brisker Rav, zl, explains that the answer lies in the words, "And he did not fear G-d." He stood out among the enemies of the Jewish People due to his lack of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. What does this mean? How did he manifest this lack of fear? Chazal teach us in the Talmud Bava Kamma 79b that the Torah is more stringent concerning a ganav, thief, than a gazlan, robber. The reason is that the robber steals by day, demonstrating a lack of fear, both for people and for Hashem. He does what he wants without a care in the world. The thief, however, is different. He steals under the cover of darkness, afraid to attract people. He is calculating and devious; he is meticulous in laying out his plans and following them to the letter. Nonetheless, with all his carefully laid-out plans and his fear of being caught, he blatantly exhibits his disdain for Hashem, for Whom he seems to have no fear. He screams out to the world: "I am afraid of people, but not of G-d!"

This personifies Amalek. The other nations also attacked Klal Yisrael, but they did so at will, when they were in the mood. It was not planned. It was an act of convenience. The Jews were there, so why not attack them? Not so Amalek. He waited for a time when the Jews would be tired. He attacked the weaklings who were at the end of the camp. He planned his attack down to every detail, ignoring nothing but Hashem. He showed that he did not care about Hashem. His fear was of the Jews, not of their G-d. He spurned Hashem. Therefore, Hashem will not rest until Amalek's name is blotted out.

Then his father and mother shall grasp him. (21:19)

The parents demonstrate that their love for and commitment to the Almighty transcend the love they have for their child, as they together take him to Bais Din, Jewish court, to be brought to trial. Society's values must supercede human emotion. It must be a most difficult feat to take one's child and bring him to the trial that will probably cost him his life. A young Torah scholar once visited Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl. During the course of the conversation, the young man remarked that he was currently studying the laws of the ben sorer u'moreh, wayward and rebellious child. Immediately, Rav Abramsky said, "Let me share with you an incredible story that occurred when I was rav in Russia."

As rav in the city, it was not unusual to be besieged with more than just sheilos, questions, regarding Jewish law. Many times, people came over to ask him for a blessing, to supplicate Hashem on their behalf, or just simply to discuss a problem. One day, a woman came over and begged, "Rebbe, I entreat you to pray to Hashem that my son should die!" When Rav Abramsky heard this shocking request, he was understandably taken aback. Why would a sane woman want to see her son dead?

The distraught mother began to explain her predicament. It seems that her son, who was an only child, had recently been conscripted into the Russian Army. Everybody was acutely aware of the magnitude of this spiritual tragedy. Rarely did anyone leave the army as an observant Jew. Regardless of the Jewish soldier's status prior to entering the army, being confronted with challenges to the spirit on a regular basis -- coupled with exposure to a harsh, base environment -- destroyed whatever Yiddishkeit he had. Therefore, the mother said that it was preferable that her son leave this world as a committed, observant Jew, than grow to be an atheist who denigrated everything Judaism represented.

Rav Abramsky was both shocked and impressed by her request. This was no ordinary woman. Here was a woman who was prepared to see her only child die prematurely, as long as he died as an observant Jew. It was mind-boggling. If this boy died, she would be left in the world alone, with no

future: No Kaddish, no one to carry on her name. Yet, it was all worth it, as long as her son would not have to contend with the spiritual trials and challenges that were so integral to the army way of life.

They both began to cry: the mother for her son; Rav Abramsky for the mother and her son. At the end, the rav said, "No, we will not pray for him to die. We will pray that he lives and withstands the challenges and emerges triumphant from the army wholly committed to Yiddishkeit. Their prayers were answered, and the young man completed his tour of duty as an observant Jew.

Rav Abramsky looked at the young scholar and said, "At that moment, I was able to visualize the type of individual, the strength of character the parents must possess in order to be prepared to grasp their son and bring him to Bais Din. These parents truly love their son and they know that if he is allowed to live he will desecrate the Torah and lose his portion in the Eternal world. They would rather he loses his life than forfeit eternity."

You shall surely stand them up, with him. (22:4)

The Midrash states an interesting halachah. If the owner of the animal decides to sit beside his animal and say to his would-be benefactor, "Since you have a mitzvah to unload my animal, do it and I will watch," the halachah is clear: he is not obligated to do a thing. The Torah states, Hakeim takeim imo, "You shall surely stand them up, with him." It must be performed with the owner sharing in the endeavor. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, suggests a practical application to this halachah. We may ask Hashem to assist us in our endeavor to ascend the ladder of spiritual success only if we share in the activity. If we ask Hashem to protect us from speaking lashon hora, slanderous speech, and we do everything within our power to watch what we say, then we can expect Hashem's Divine assistance. If we sit back, however, and expect Hashem to act for us, then we are demonstrating gross chutzpah. Hashem will assist us in our endeavor. The first step, however, must be made by us.

The Chafetz Chaim gives the following analogy. A poor man meets one of the wealthier citizens of the town and pours out his heart filled with woe to him. The wealthy man listens intently and says, "I will see you tomorrow at 4:00PM at my home, and I will have a check waiting for you." The next day rolls around, and the poor man does not appear. It is already 6:00PM and the poor man, who was in such dire need, is still absent. Another hour goes by, and the-would-be benefactor decides to go home.

The next day, the wealthy man walks down the street to be greeted once again by the poor man: "Please help me. I am starving. My family is starving. We cannot go on like this." He continues pouring out his tale of woe: "If you could only lend me a few gold coins, I could repay my debts and support my family."

The wealthy man looks into the poor man's eyes and says, "I do not understand you. We had made up to meet yesterday at 4:00PM. What happened to you? I waited until 7:00PM, and you did not show up, so I went home. Come again tomorrow, and I will bring the money."

The next day, the wealthy man waits at the appointed time for the poor man to appear. He does not show up until the following day, when they once again met on the street and the poor man once again starts to delineate his litany of woes. Finally, the wealthy man says to him, "I do not think you are serious. Twice we have met, and you have poured out your heart to me, only not to appear the next day to retrieve the funds. You just want to beg, but you do not want to follow through!"

This analogy applies to us. Every day, we entreat Hashem during the Ahavah Rabbah Tefillah of

Shacharis, "May You be equally gracious to us and teach us... instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate, to listen, learn...Enlighten our eyes to Your Torah...." We recite these and many other supplications daily. There is no doubt that Hashem is prepared to grant us our entreaty. After all, why not? It will certainly enhance our mitzvah performance and enable us to achieve profundity and understanding in Torah knowledge. There is only one thing that Hashem asks of us: to appear at the bais hamedrash and learn.

Regrettably, our entreaties are only lip service which we pay to Hashem. We say the words; we talk the talk, but refuse to walk the walk. And even when we do go to the bais hamedrash, do we apply ourselves to the learning -- or do we spend our time bickering and indulging in other forms of idle conversation? This goes on until the next day, when we once again turn to Hashem with more requests.

If you encounter a bird's nest on the road... with young birds... and the mother is roosting on the birds... you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall surely send away the mother and take the young for yourself. (22:6,7)

If the Torah's goal is to spare the mother bird, it would be more sensible to prohibit taking the young altogether. Surely when the mother returns, she will be anguished to discover that her chicks are no longer in the nest. What is the rationale for this mitzvah? Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, explains that the Torah is teaching us a powerful lesson in *menchlichkeit*, humanness and ethics: It is forbidden to take advantage of a mother bird's love for her children in order to catch her more easily. Usually, when a predator approaches a nest, the bird will immediately fly away. This bird did not leave, because she is a mother protecting her young. Her survival instinct is superceded by her motherly love, as she prefers remaining in the nest to protect her young over the option of escaping for her personal safety.

The Torah enjoins us to respect this motherly instinct and not take advantage of making an easy catch of a devoted mother bird. The reward for obeying this command is *arichas yamim*, longevity. The lesson is clear and simple: When someone demonstrates sensitivity towards Hashem's creatures, Hashem reciprocates towards him.

Rav Yosef Chaim substantiates this thesis with the words of the Rambam, *Hilchos Shechitah* 13:7 who writes: "If a person sent away the mother, but she came back, and after this he took her, this is permitted." The Torah forbids catching the mother only if she is incapable of flying away from her young, over whom she hovers to protect them from being taken. The *halachah* is applicable only if the mother remains out of love. The mother who does not place her young before her own safety does not necessarily deserve our protection. We may add that this idea should apply equally to the human arena. A child comes first. If we bring children into this world, we have a moral obligation to care for them - even if it might put us out. This problem often emerges with decisions concerning education. A parent chooses what is best for the parent, or what he believes is best for his child. What the parent thinks and the reality of what is, do not necessarily coincide. We may be so bold to suggest that this applies also to the surrogate parent, the rebbe, whose decisions concerning the student are critical to his growth and development.

When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a bundle in your field, you shall not turn back to take it. (24:19)

As Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, notes, the time of harvest is a milestone for the farmer. It is the culmination of a season's hard work of toil and overcoming challenges. It is a time when the farmer feels a deep sense of pride. It is precisely at this time that he is enjoined to share his success with the poor, to realize that what he has is in itself a gift from the Almighty to share with those who are less fortunate. Shikchah, the forgotten sheaf, applies to a single bundle that one has forgotten to gather -- or even a standing grain that a reaper inadvertently has passed by. This is an intriguing and fascinating mitzvah in the sense that one cannot prepare for it. One cannot have kavanah, concentration, since it is based on forgetting. The moment that he "remembers" to forget, it is no longer shikchah.

Horav Yaakov Dushinsky, explains that a significant aspect of this mitzvah is the Torah's admonition, "You shall not turn back to take it." One's innate love of money should not begin to stir within him, convincing him to return for the grain. Once one forgets, it is to remain forgotten. He should pay gratitude to the Almighty for availing him of the opportunity to perform such a mitzvah - a mitzvah with grain that to him is insignificant but, to a poor man, might represent his life. The inherent joy in such a mitzvah should be incredible, since the benefactor hardly loses and the beneficiary gains so much.

The Tosefta in Peah 3:12 cites an incident concerning a pious man who had forgotten a sheaf of grain in his field. He asked his son to sacrifice a calf for him as an Olah, Burnt Offering, and a calf as a Shelamim, Peace Offering. The son asked his father, "Father, what is there about this mitzvah that excites you so much, more so than any other mitzvah?"

His father replied, "Every other mitzvah in the Torah has been given to us by Hashem to be performed perceptively and with knowledge aforethought. This mitzvah, on the other hand, can only be carried out if one is unaware. The Torah blesses us for forgetting the sheaf. Now, if the Torah guarantees blessing for something which is the result of incognizance, how much more so will we be rewarded for a positive act of consciousness?"

The mitzvah of Shikchah addresses the unknown within a human being. It teaches us how to react to a lapse of memory and the positive consequences that can result from it. The poor and the needy are the beneficiaries of one's failure to remember the sheaf of grain, and, indeed, the individual himself is blessed thereby. Everything, even forgetfulness, can be a source of blessing.

In contrast to the mitzvah of Shikchah, there is a mitzvah of Zechirah, remembrance. We are admonished to "Remember what Amalek did to you. Erase the memory of Amalek from beneath the Heaven. Do not forget." (Devarim 25:17,19) The mitzvah to remember and obliterate Amalek's name also awakens and educates our unknown dimension. Instead of forgetting what Amalek did to us, even to the point that some might find a place in their hearts to forgive his malevolence, the mitzvah functions as a reminder - do not forget! Do not forgive! Do not fall prey to false dreams and liberal rhetoric as if Amalek no longer exists. His miscreancy is alive and well and burning with a passion. The hatred that he generated in the world towards the Jew has germinated and developed. His evil must be expunged. This can only occur if we never forget what he has done to us.

The mitzvah to forget has its place in the service of Hashem when it involves helping the poor and needy. Likewise, the mitzvah of remembering also has its place when it addresses the needs of Klal Yisrael and its land.

When there will be a grievance between people...and they vindicate the righteous one and find the

wicked one guilty. (25:1)

Horav Yaakov Kaminetzky, zl, infers from here that the appellation of tzaddik, righteous person, is applied to one who is supported by the truth. This makes sense, since tzaddik and tzedek, justice, share the same root. Thus, a righteous person is one who adheres to the truth, whose actions and total demeanor reflect integrity, straightforwardness and honor. A tzaddik is not only pious - he is straight and principled, always using absolute truth as his barometer.

Rav Yaakov substantiates this thought with the words of Chazal in the end of Mishnayos Otkzin 13:12, "In the future, Hashem will bequeath to each tzaddik and tzaddik three hundred words." The Tosfos Yom Tov explains that the redundancy in the text (each tzaddik and tzaddik) is a reference to the various shitos, contending opinions throughout halachic dialectic. Why should the sages of the Mishnah be called tzaddikim? They should be referred to as chachamim, wise men. Moreover, the title tzaddik usually applies to one who acts righteously with his fellowman, such as Noach HaTzaddik, Yosef HaTzaddik. Now, however, that we interpret a tzaddik as one who is the paragon of veracity and who seeks to establish his opinions only concerning that which he understands to be the absolute truth, we can understand why a chacham is a tzaddik - even disputing opinions in halachah. Since, Eilu v'eilu divrei Elokim chaim, "These and those are the words of the Living G-d," both chachamim have a parallel goal - the truth.

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son. (21:18)

The incident of the ben sorer u'moreh, wayward and rebellious son, is one of the most serious tragedies related in the Torah. A boy who rejects his parents and everything they have taught him, a boy who rejects everything his parents stand for, truly represents a tragedy of unparalleled proportion. Being a Jewish parent is an awesome responsibility. Parents are the link between the Jewish generations that precede us and those who will follow in the future. Ours is the privilege to maintain the faith of the past, to give meaning and value to the present, and to ensure that there will be a future. Surely the parents of the ben sorer tried everything in their quest to raise their son. They were present for him at home and at school - unlike those parents who simply drop off their child at school and expect their responsibilities to their child to be carried out by the school. Although it is true that good schools teach, instruct, guide and even inspire, their mission succeeds only with the support of the parents. Regrettably, there are too many Jewish "orphans" who are dropped off at school, while the parents wait for the finished product.

No, our ben sorer's parents cared about him. In fact, they did everything to help him "make it". Sometimes, however, everything is just not enough! We never stop loving our children regardless of what they do - and we never should. The heartache and agony which a parent sustains when his child rebels is immeasurable - or, at least, it should be. Some parents are stronger than others and continue trying, hoping, long after the average person would have given up. The following letter is about one such parent who was fortunate enough to see his everlasting love make a difference. The son who had "gone off" writes about his transformation and return - all because his father refused to give up on him.

"Until a few years ago, I did not take anything seriously. I was not like the rest of my class. Having graduated from yeshivah high school, I was undecided what to do. I was neither interested in

continuing my Jewish education nor was I ready to begin college right away. I thought I would just drift around for a while and then get a job.

My parents were obviously not very pleased with my decision, but, at that point, what my parents wanted did not carry much weight in my life. Regrettably, during this time, I fell in with a group of like-minded fellows who were not Orthodox. At first, I figured that they would not influence me, but I was dead wrong. It did not take long before I became like them: no interest in Judaism. Shabbos and kashrus were something of the past. Indeed, my entire life became a haze: no direction, no meaning, no value.

"My parents were devastated. While they did not expect me to become a rabbi, they certainly did not expect this. As well as having destroyed my life, I was on the way to destroying my family as well. It got to the point that, due to the adverse influence I was having on my younger siblings, my father asked me to leave the house. When I moved out, I said some cruel and vicious things to my father. I can remember him standing silently by the door, with my mother crying at his side.

"Looking back, I realize that what I thought I saw in them as a weakness was actually incredible strength of character. A year went by, and I had no contact with anyone in my family. I missed them very much, but I was afraid that if I contacted them, it would be viewed as a weakness on my part.

"One morning, I was shocked to find my father standing outside the door to my apartment building. He looked at me with tired, worn eyes and asked if we could talk. I was stubborn and obnoxious. I only nodded. We walked to a corner coffee shop where we sat down to talk. My father opened up. He said that everyone missed me and that, despite my absence, I had been on their hearts and minds every moment that I was gone. I saw the hurt in his eyes - eyes that had long ago stopped crying - because there were no more tears. He told me how my mother agonized over what had happened, blaming herself for not having been there for me. Why did he come? He came because he had one last request - no lecture, just one last favor. He wanted me to drive with him to Monsey, New York, to recite Tehillim at the grave of a certain tzaddik. I looked at him incredulously, and then he began to cry. Bitter tears streamed down his face as he asked me to please grant him this one request. As far removed as I was from Yiddishkeit, I was still moved by his request.

"I told my father that that day was impossible, because I had plans to go with my friends to Atlantic City that night. I would go with him another time. He reached across the table and took my hand in his, looking at me with his tear-streaked sad face. He said nothing - just stared and wept. I felt my own eyes begin to water, and - rather than have him see me cry - I just agreed to meet him later on that day.

"I made the necessary apologies to my friends. Atlantic City would have to wait. Later that day, I drove with my father up to the cemetery in Monsey. We did not talk much during the trip. I remember getting out of the car with my father and walking over to one of the graves. He placed some rocks on top of the grave and gave me a Tehillim. Anybody who walked by would have seen a bizarre sight: my father - standing there in his long black frock, a black hat perched on his head; and me - with my leather bomber jacket and jeans. We did not stay long. Ten minutes is all it took, and soon we were on our way back. We talked as much on the return trip as on the way in - very little.

"My father dropped me off and walked me to my apartment building. I will never forget the words he told me that day. He said that regardless of what had occurred between us, and no matter what might happen in the future, I was always going to be his son, and he would always love me. I was emotionally moved by his words, but I did not manifest the spiritual inspiration that he hoped would occur that day. I shook my head at his words, and we parted company.

"The next morning, I woke up to some shocking news. On their return trip from Atlantic City, my friends were involved in a head-on collision with a tractor-trailer rig. They did not survive the accident. Had I not gone with my father that day, I would have been in that car.

"As I write this letter, I am overwhelmed with emotion. I made a Bris for my bechor, firstborn, today. My father was sandek, and as he held my son on his lap, our eyes met, and we smiled. It was as if we had finally reached the end of a long arduous journey.

"We have never talked about that trip to the cemetery, nor did I ever tell my father about my friends' untimely death. I just walked into their home that evening and was welcomed with open arms. No questions asked, no accusations, no answers. I just know that, sitting here late at night with my son in my arms, I will try to be the father to him that my father was to me."

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son. (21:18)

The law regarding the ben sorer u'moreh, wayward and rebellious son, is a difficult one to understand. Just because the boy ate a sizeable amount of meat and drank the required measure of wine, does that make him guilty of a capital punishment? He is punished, however, because of what he will eventually do. Let him therefore be put to death now before he commits a serious crime. This is not a law that can be adjudicated by Bais Din, the earthly court system. The law of the ben sorer is from Hashem, who knows what this boy's future will bring.

The law, however, does not seem consistent with what the Torah teaches us concerning Yishmael. He was in the desert, suffering and in pain, and Hashem sustained him Ba'asher hu sham, according to what he is now. So what if his descendants had refused to give us water? So what if we have suffered for years from the Arabs? Now is what counts, and now Yishmael is nothing more than a child. Why is he different than the rebellious son who is judged in accordance with what he will become?

Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl, distinguishes between Yishmael's yichus, pedigree, and that of the ben sorer. The rebellious son is the end product of a union between a Jewish soldier who deferred to his yetzer hora, evil-inclination, and a yefas toar, beautiful captive. It was a marriage that was allowed only because of a special Scriptural dispensation. It was doomed from its very genesis. The ben sorer u'moreh is clear proof. Such a child has within him very little future to which to look forward. Therefore, he is judged according to his future. Yishmael, on the other hand, as the son of Avraham Avinu, had his roots in the foundation stone of Klal Yisrael. Indeed, he repented before his death. He was, thus, judged according to his present circumstance. Apparently, when we judge a person, we must take everything into account, because every factor plays a defining role in determining the outcome of a person.

If a man marries a woman... and it will be that she will not find favor in his eyes, for he found in her a matter of immorality, and he wrote her a bill of divorce. (24:1)

According to the flow of the text, it is implied that she lost favor in his eyes and, therefore, he divorces her. Rashi adds that he should divorce her because of her immoral conduct. Even if he does not have witnesses to prove his allegations to the satisfaction of the court, the fact that she is guilty of

immoral conduct should be reason enough for her to lose favor in his eyes. Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, derives an important lesson from Rashi. We are under the impression that "favor" is not dependent upon a person's moral posture. If he is a nice person, regardless of his moral behavior, he should be well-liked. Thus, he would have to divorce his wife, even though he still cares for her, because the Torah says so. The Torah teaches us otherwise. One should abhor a person who is immoral. They should be despicable in our eyes. If a person discovers an *ervas davar*, a matter of immorality, about his wife - there is no longer any room - or place - for love. She no longer has *chein*, favor, in his eyes, because she has sinned against Hashem. She has disgraced the institution of marriage with her immoral conduct. Divorce should not be the result of the Torah's demand, but rather, the result of the loss of favor in his eyes. Hence, the sequence of events is: immorality, lack of favor, divorce. One who is evil to Hashem neither deserves nor warrants our respect or admiration.

This son of ours is wayward and rebellious; he does not hearken to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard. (21:20)

The *ben sorer u'moreh*, rebellious son, does not listen to his parents. Clearly, this is a reason to bring him to *Bais Din*. He is also a glutton and a drunkard. While this is certainly not complimentary, is it a reason to be put to death at such a young age? Horav Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, cites Horav Nachum Zev, zl, m'Kelm who commented on Rav's statement in the Talmud Berachos 17a. Chazal say, *Maryela b'pumei d'Rav*, "It was a familiar lesson in the mouth of Rav. The World to Come is not like this world. In the World to Come there is no eating, no drinking, no propagation, no business, no jealousy, no hatred and no rivalry. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence." A very impressive statement. *Olam Habah* is utopia, but why was it necessary for Rav to constantly reiterate this idea? Was there something to be gained by this repetition?

Rav Nachum Zev applied the following analogy in explaining Rav's familiarization with the difference between this world and *Olam Habah*. "I earn my livelihood in the field of commerce," said Rav Nachum Zev. "My business demands that I attend the market in Leibzig and Danzig (Germany) twice a year. Since I must interact with German merchants, it is essential that I be well-versed in the German language. While it is important I am fluent in the language, it is not necessary for me to be proficient in every nuance of its grammar. I have to be able to converse - I do not have to write a thesis. The reason for this is simple. My entire life revolves around the town of Kelm. I speak its language: I know its people. Two weeks out of the year I have to be in Germany. For that, I have to know the German language, but I do not have to be versed in its grammar.

"The same idea applies to the Jew. Our place - the place where our *neshamah*, soul, and mind belong is in the spiritual world. That is our home; that is where we belong. We must be proficient in the language of the Heavens: *tzaddikim* sitting in the radiance of the *Shechinah*. We also descend to this world for a short period of time. During this juncture, it is necessary for us to acclimate to the "language" of this world - eating and drinking and living a somewhat material lifestyle. We do not, however, have to indulge ourselves in its grammar. We do not have to eat and drink as if it were our permanent home. We are only visiting.

"This is why Rav constantly sought to remind himself of the real place that he belonged. He did not want to get too comfortable in this world. He did not want to learn its grammar."

The same idea applies to the ben sorer, explains Rav Ezrachi. He enjoys a lifestyle that is the antithesis of what a Jew should live. He does not merely survive in this world - he thrives here! The language of this world is his lifeblood. Materialism and more materialism symbolize the motto by which he lives. Olam Habah is the farthest thing from him. A Jew must strive to be fluent in the language of Olam Habah, because it is his life.

That he happened upon you on the way. (25:18)

The pasuk seems to be addressing the nation as a whole. Why then does it switch to karcha, "it happened upon you," in the singular? Horav Eliezer Elyakim Schlesinger, Shlita, explains that the Torah is teaching us a fundamental principle. He cites the Brisker Rav, zl, who interprets the pasuk "I quarrel with those who rise up against you!...I regard them as my own enemies." (Tehillim 139:21,22) in which David Hamelech is saying that Hashem's enemies are his personal enemies. Anyone who rebels against Hashem cannot be David Hamelech's friend. Likewise, we are admonished here to view Amalek's evil as a personal affront against each and every Jew. When Amalek cooled the world's status quo of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, when he battled against Hashem, he became each Jew's personal enemy. This, similarly, applies to every person who has the audacity to speak up against Hashem or against those whose function in life it is to disseminate the word of Hashem.

When you will go out to war against your enemies...and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form...If a man will have two wives, one beloved and one hated...If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son...(21:10,11,15,18)

People refuse to recognize the consequences of their actions. No one really wants to take responsibility for his own behavior. Cause and effect demand accountability. If we act in a certain manner, we should expect specific results - results for which we have only ourselves to blame. The ben sorer u'moreh, rebellious child, is a classic example of this idea. Our parsha begins with the Jewish soldier going out to war and meeting an enticing captive woman. War takes its toll on the human psyche, and thus, the soldier's guard is down. The blandishments that have basically no effect on a person in everyday life, during a time of war suddenly become overwhelming. The Torah recognizes that a soldier might have a difficult time restraining himself during moments of great strain due to war, and, rather than risk a Jew sinning, the Torah provides an outlet, a dispensation under which it is possible for the soldier to marry the woman legitimately. The laws of yefas toar are followed by the case of the man who had two wives, one whom he loved and one whom he hated. We can well imagine the connection to yefas toar. When marriage is founded in lust, it deteriorates as soon as the physical allure begins to dissipate. This is what happened. Soon after marrying the beautiful captive, he realized that she either did not have the appearance that had originally captivated him, or that there is more to a relationship than physical gratification. He realized that a wife is much more than a plaything. He began to hate her, because she was a constant reminder of his utter foolishness, his moment of weakness.

The marriage produced a seed, a wild seed that matured into a rebellious, uncouth son who acted more like an animal than a child. Perhaps, the father is now waking up to the consequences of his

original deed. He now realizes that by marrying a captive woman, he will beget a rebellious child. We must ask ourselves, why should marrying a woman whom the Torah ultimately permitted, be the cause of having a ben sorer u'moreh? What relationship exists between the "cause" and the "effect"?

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains that while the Torah did provide a legal dispensation for the Jewish soldier to marry the captive, it is only just that - a dispensation, a loophole. It is certainly not the Torah's first choice. In fact, the Torah would much rather that the individual overcomes the urging of his yetzer hora, evil inclination, and not marry this woman. Hence, the entire marriage was based upon failure - a failure to triumph over the yetzer hora. A child born of a union that is founded in failure will likely become a failure. He will become a defiant, rebellious, uncontrollable child, one who is also unable to control his lust.

By definition, the ben sorer is a child who is unable to control his desires. In other words, the ben sorer is not some abstract child who is a glutton; he is the child "next door," the child who has been raised in an environment that is somewhat permissive. He is a child who is used to getting whatever he wants. Discipline is a word with which he is not acquainted. He might even be a good boy - as long as he gets whatever he wants. How did this evolve? How did a young boy, a seemingly nice boy, turn into a wild animal whose demand for meat and wine goes beyond lust, who will one day kill to satisfy his desires.

Once again, Rav Gifter renders for us a powerful insight into the child's upbringing. The parents declare, "Our son does not listen to us." His failure to listen to his parents' voice preceded his stealing money from his parents. Indeed, the pasuk does not say that the ben sorer does not listen to his parents' "words" or "commands." It says that he does not listen to their "voice." The difference between words, commands and voice is the difference between a normal boy and a ben sorer. When the Torah enjoins us to honor our parents, it is unequivocal. We obey our parents' voice. We do not need --nor do we expect -- an understanding of what and why they are demanding of us. The mere voice is sufficient, because it is the will of he who is commanding us. Hence, the ben sorer's descent to total iniquity begins with his disregard of his parents' "voice." He must understand what they are demanding of him and why. He will not fulfill his parents' wishes if he does not understand them.

This is the beginning of the breakdown in Jewish society. Children demand reasons; students demand reasons; people demand reasons from Hashem. If the mitzvah does not make sense to me, I will not carry it out. I am an intelligent human being, and I expect to be treated that way. Regrettably, the individual who feels that as a human being he must understand all of Hashem's ways, is missing a crucial component in his human makeup.

You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (22:10)

The prohibition against plowing with an ox and donkey together is exclusive neither to these two animals, nor to this form of labor. In fact, it applies equally to the coupling of any two different animals for any type of labor. The Torah is concerned about the extra physical strain placed on either animal due to its inordinate physical abilities. Furthermore, the issue of "sensitivities" plays a role in this prohibition. An ox chews its cud, a practice which might cause the donkey to "think" that the ox is receiving more food. In other words, the Torah goes to great lengths to see to it that the Jewish People are sensitive to the needs of others - even animals.

We say in the tefillah of Ashrei, "Tov Hashem lakol, v'rachamov al kol maasav," "Hashem is

good to all; His mercies are on all His works." As Hashem cares for all of his creations, so should we. This is one more area in which the Jew distinguishes himself from his gentile counterparts.

Horav Michoel Ber Weismandel, zl, relates a poignant story which underscores this point. In one of the smaller towns in Hungary, the Nazi beasts were rounding up a portion of the Jewish population to be sent away to concentration camps. The trains, with their infamous cattle cars, were being filled with hapless Jews -- to the glee of the gentile population who stood watching with great anticipation. As soon as each train began to pull out of the station, the miserable gentiles began to clap in unison. Their great joy contrasted the tears of sadness and fear that ran down the faces of those Jews who were left over - for another day. Suddenly, one Jew opened his window and screamed out to one of his friends who had come to see him off, "Moshe! I forgot to feed the chickens. Please do me a favor -- go to my house and feed my chickens." Can anyone imagine the superhuman strength of character this man must have possessed! He was being led to his death, and all he thought about was his chickens. Who would feed them? Two sides of the tracks. On one side stood the heartless Nazis and their henchmen, the gentile members of the community applauding, singing, laughing, because Jewish men, women and children were being taken to the slaughter. On the train were amcha Yisrael, Your nation, Yisrael, noble Jewish men, women, and children who were acutely aware of their fate, but who knew well that they were human beings, creations of the Almighty. They were concerned about the welfare of the chickens. They could never descend to the level of the subhumans who were taking them to their deaths. "Mi k'amcha Yisrael?" "Who is like Your nation, Yisrael?" How far is even the civilized world from the Torah weltenshauung of the Jew!

You shall not reject an Egyptian for you are a sojourner in his land. (23:8,9)

What an incredible demand: to be makir toy, recognize and appreciate the good that the cruel Egyptians did for us! While it is true that the Egyptians gave us a home, they also treated us cruelly, by making us perform backbreaking labor. They slaughtered our children and drowned our male infants. They used Jewish babies as filler in the cement for their buildings. They did not provide us with straw to make bricks, and when we went to the field to gather the straw, they would beat us incessantly. Perhaps cruel is not a strong enough term to describe their malevolence. Do we owe hakoras hatov to these people? Is that not going a bit too far?

Furthermore, if anything - they owe us. Was it not our ancestor, Yosef Hatzadik, who sustained them? When Yaakov moved to Egypt, the devastating famine ceased. Even to this day, Yaakov Avinu's blessing alleviates the need for rain to sustain their crops. The Egyptians acted in such a heinous manner against the descendants of Yaakov and Yosef. Yet, Hashem demands that we act towards them without malice or contempt. After a mere three generations, their converts may marry our children. All this is because they provided us with a home during our time of need. The famine was strong in Canaan, causing Yaakov and his family to seek refuge with his son, Yosef, in Egypt. We journeyed in their land for a little over two hundred years - most of which were difficult and treacherous. At least, however, we had a home, a haven from the trial and travail of wandering. All of the cruelty does not abrogate this good. This is how far hakoras hatov, gratitude to one who benefits us, goes.

In his Michtav M'Eliyahu Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, offers a penetrating insight into our chiyuv, obligation, for hakoras hatov even to such evil miscreants as the Egyptians. Hashem does not distinguish between the benefit derived from "good" people or "bad" people. After all, does He not say, "Zocharti lach chesed neurayich," "I remembered for you the kindness of your youth," -- "lechtech

acharai bamidbar" - "your going after Me in the wilderness." Hashem performed miracles for us then and continues to perform miracles every single day. Do we deserve it? Are we worthy of His kindness? Do we appreciate the good that He does for us? No! Yet, He continues to be benevolent to us, despite our many shortcomings. Why? Because we followed Him. Did we have a choice? To remain meant certain death, but we followed Him -- and for that, He remembers us.

Reciprocity is the term that comes to mind. We are to act towards others as we want Hashem to act towards us. True, they do not deserve it, but neither do we. Rav Dessler adds a postscript to this profound thought. If this is what Hashem does for those who once, -- a long time ago -- followed Him, how much more so will He shine His radiance and benefit to those who eschew the mundane and ignore the physical blandishments of this world, in order to devote their lives clinging to His Torah: studying it, observing it, and disseminating it. What are we waiting for!?

Remember what Amalek did to you...that he happened upon you on the way...when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d. (25:17,18)

It is a positive commandment to erase the memory of Amalek. We are equally enjoined to remember their evil deeds in order to inspire a greater hatred of them. It is true that Amalek's insolence supercedes that of the other nations, -- and he was the first to audaciously attack us, but is that a reason to hate him forever? Hashem considers Amalek His and our archenemy. Why is this? Wherein lies his unique evil?

The Brisker Rav, zl, notes the Torah's emphasis upon Amalek's lack of yiraas Elokim, fear of G-d. What did Amalek do that indicates his fearlessness of the Almighty? He cites the Talmud in Bava Kama 79a, where Chazal distinguish between a ganov, thief, and a gazlon, robber. The Torah fines the thief, keifal, double payment, whereas the robber only pays the principle. The ganov steals at night, when no one will find him. He is afraid of people. Consequently, he demonstrates a greater fear of man, the servant, than of Hashem, the Master.

The gazlon, on the other hand, does not differentiate between man and G-d. He steals openly, brandishing his weapon to protect himself from anyone who might attempt to stop him. He fears no one. The thief seems to have greater fear of what humans will think than what Hashem will say. The gazlon does not care about either.

The Brisker Rav presents a penetrating analysis of the minds of the ganov and gazlon. A robber does not make cheshbonos, deliberations, before he acts. He does what he wants. He needs something - he steals it, regardless of who is watching. Conversely, the thief is meticulous in planning, taking great pains to make sure that he is not caught. He does not want people to see him. He is afraid /ashamed of people, but could care less about Hashem. This is chutzpah at its nadir. He knowingly, cogently, with acute awareness rejects Hashem. He acts with extreme aforethought. He contrasts the one who does not think at all, but who acts impulsively. One who acts capriciously is not nearly as invidious as he who acts maliciously, contemplating every step of his actions.

The Torah says that Klal Yisrael was weak and exhausted when they were attacked by Amalek. This means that Amalek was deliberate in his actions, planning his incursion against the Jewish People at a time when they were down. He knew what he was doing. He planned his battle, staging his battle at a time when he knew the people were exhausted and had little fight left in them. He acted deliberately - like the thief. He acted with malice towards the Jews and contempt towards Hashem. He took all the factors into his battle equation - except for one - Hashem. He did not include Hashem in the cheshbon,

equation, because he was not a yarei Elokim. He did not care about the Almighty. Therefore, Hashem continues to wage war with Amalek m'dor l'dor, throughout the generations.

When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its captives. (21:10)

The pasuk's text is enigmatic. It begins by referring to our enemies in the plural, "your enemies," - but then it changes to the singular, saying, "And Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand." Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, addresses this question and derives a profound lesson from the pasuk. Whether we realize it or not, we enter battle daily against all sorts of enemies or, rather, one enemy in the guise of many different enemies. The yetzer hora, evil-inclination, man's archenemy is extremely cunning and seeks ways to destroy our spiritual development. He attacks us from all sides, transforming himself into many forms. Indeed, at times it appears that we are waging war with many diverse enemies. This is, however, not the case. As man possesses one yetzer tov, good inclination, so, too, does he possess one yetzer hora. Evil has many faces, each one seeking a vulnerability in our spiritual armor.

Hence, the beginning of the pasuk refers to the yetzer hora's bombardment, in its many guises. We are being challenged by "our enemies." This is not, however, a reason to despair. The battle might seem to be overwhelming, but - in reality - it is not. We must realize that it is not a multitude of enemies that we must conquer, but actually one solitary enemy: a formidable one, but still only one. The Torah, therefore, closes the pasuk in the singular, to teach us that we can win. We must arm ourselves with determination to triumph over our enemy. The sooner we see through his many disguises, the sooner we will succeed in prevailing over him.

And you will see among its captivity - a woman who is beautiful of form... If a man will have two wives, one beloved and one hated... If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son. (21:11,15,18)

Chazal derive a valuable lesson from the juxtaposition of the laws of the ben sorer umoreh, the rebellious son, upon the case of the man who has two wives, one of whom he hates, and upon the incident of the beautiful captive, in which the Torah gives a dispensation, a concession to human weakness, allowing the Jewish soldier to marry this woman. Chazal perceive this marriage, which serves to prevent worse manifestations of the unbridled passions of man, as the precursor of the disobedient and rebellious son. A wife taken in a such a manner will probably ultimately become an object of aversion to her husband. It is, therefore, no wonder that such a union can - and will - produce a ben sorer umoreh. When the relationship between husband and wife is rooted in a concession to lust, it often results in aversion. A child reared in such a home has little choice but to grow into a rebellious monster.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, finds a parallel to support this idea from an earlier episode in the Torah: the dor ha'mabul, wicked generation of the Flood. They were evil, base and immoral deferring to every abominable act of debauchery. Their degenerate behavior, however, did not just appear overnight. It was a slow process, the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, building up steam, starting with a

simple heter, dispensation, developing into a full-blown act of immorality. What was the origin? How did it all begin?

The Torah tells us that Lemech took two wives for himself. What seems to be an innocuous act, corresponding to the contemporary lifestyle, was actually, according to Chazal, a philosophy based on lust. Rashi cites the Midrash that sheds light on this practice of taking "two" wives. It seems this was the practice of the generation of the Flood. They would take two wives, one to bear children and the other to satisfy their base needs. The latter was meant not to have children and was, therefore, pampered like a bride. The former, on the other hand, would be left alone, bereft of her husband's care and companionship. She spent her life in mourning like a widow. Keeping this Midrash in mind, we now have an idea why the Torah details the life of Lemech, his exploits and that of his descendents. The Torah is telling us how a generation as evil as the people during the time of the Flood came to be so. They evolved. They were the result of a unique yetzer hora, evil-inclination, the yetzer hora of permissible desire. Lemech was one of the leaders of his generation. He developed for himself a philosophy which ultimately was followed by the rest of his generation. This philosophy was the precursor of the deluge that destroyed almost all of mankind. Lemech conjectured that since Hashem wants man to procreate, the wife - who is taken for the fulfillment of this mitzvah - becomes a cheftza d'mitzvah, an object of mitzvah, which means she is holy. How could he inject his personal desires into this mitzvah? This would be degrading the mitzvah. Lemech decided to alleviate this "problem" by taking a second wife - one for mitzvah and one for himself! The "mitzvah" wife would serve a purpose and otherwise be left alone in scorn, while the "other" wife would be there for him. In truth, both wives were there for one purpose - to serve Lemech. Lemech wanted to have his cake and eat it, too.

The yefas toar, beautiful captive, was also a concession to the yetzer hora. It was a "taavah shel heter," permissible desire. In any event, it reflected desire, base lust. The consequence of this "heter" is the ben sorer u'moreh. These are the descendants of desire: the generation of the Flood and the ben sorer umoreh. It began with a heter, permission, and ended with murder, immorality, and idol worship. When one seeks a heter for himself, if his sole purpose is self-aggrandizement, he is taking the first step toward idol worship.

And you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you will desire her, you may take her to yourself for a wife. (21:11)

The Torah recognizes that war wreaks havoc on a person's emotions. The anxiety and breakdown of normal life leaves a person in an unusually depressed state, emotionally fragile and susceptible to the blandishments of the yetzer hora, evil-inclination. Under such conditions, the Jewish soldier might defer to his base desires. Upon seeing a woman among the enemy, he might feel an uncontrollable desire for her. Rather than risk sin that may lead to further spiritual pollution, the Torah provides an outlet for the lustful soldier. There is a process which the female captive must undergo, after which he may marry her. The process is demeaning and is intended to encourage the Jewish soldier to change his feelings towards her. In any event, we see that the Torah extends itself to provide a concession to the Jew who is under duress, because a concession in the present will ultimately save a soul in the future. We must add that only the Torah - or Chazal, with their Divinely inspired knowledge - can undertake such a modification.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, remembers that when he was a student in the Slabodka yeshivah, Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, observed in one of his shmuessen, ethical discourses, that the

individual, who thinks that when he faces the Heavenly Tribunal he will be able to justify his non-observance of Torah and mitzvos, is utterly wrong. One has only to peruse the beginning of Parashas Ki Seitze to note the lengths to which the Torah goes to provide for the needs of its devotees, to ensure that they have no excuse for a lack of observance. If Hashem had sensed that it would not be within a person's ability to fulfill a specific mitzvah, He would not have given it. This idea should imbue us with a strong desire and enthusiasm for kiyum hamitzvos, mitzvah observance, for we know that it is within our ability to fulfill the mitzvos.

He is unable to give the right of the firstborn to the son of the beloved one ahead of the son of the hated one who is the first born. (21:16)

The firstborn has an inviolable right to his share of his father's inheritance. The Torah is teaching us that rivalries or animosities do not determine the laws of inheritance. There is a clearly defined halachah that the firstborn receive a double portion of his father's inheritance. The fact that his father harbors a hatred for his mother does not give him license to deprive his firstborn son of his rightful share. In forbidding the father to give over a firstborn's rights, the Torah uses a puzzling text. It says, "He is unable to do so." Why is the word "unable" used, as opposed to another term that simply says he cannot do so.

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, explains this concept with an analogy: If someone tells a man who is standing on top of a roof high above the ground to jump off, he will not simply reply by saying, "I do not want to jump"; he will, rather, say "I am unable to." He is so certain of his impending death if he jumps, that the knowledge alone serves as a powerful restraint. He is unable to jump, because he clearly sees the consequence of that jump. The same concept applies to mitzvos and aveiros, sins. One who views an idea as an absolute fact cannot begin to fathom it in another perspective. Thus, if we view mitzvah fulfillment as a fact, then we are unable to consider transgressing it. One who sins does not view the Torah's commandments as fact. Hence, those who have rewritten the Torah to suit their needs did so after first conjuring up a convenient philosophy that the Torah is not immutable, that it is not from G-d, that it is not an absolute.

The Torah teaches us that our attitude towards sin must be such that we are unable to transgress the commandments. We see the reality of sin; we are acutely aware of the consequences. This knowledge should serve as a powerful restraint.

Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (22:10)

Being sensitive to the feelings of another human being is a requisite for defining mentchlichkeit, humanness. While many of us go out of our way to be kind and thoughtful when it affects the feelings of a prominent individual, we often ignore the sensitivities of a common person. The Torah provides us with a penetrating insight regarding this inappropriate practice. We are adjured not to plow with an ox and a donkey together. Although the Torah does not suggest a reason, the Daas Zekeinim explains that these two animals have two diverse habits for digesting their food. Because an ox chews its cud, bringing up the food it has already swallowed and chewing it again, the donkey who is harnessed with the ox will feel bad that the ox is eating "once again" while it has nothing to eat. The sensitivities of a

simple animal play a role in the Torah. The reason is simple: when we stop caring about animals, we will soon similarly stop caring about people. A Jew is enjoined to care, to be sensitive to the needs of others, certainly not to hurt another person - even indirectly.

The great gaon, Torah scholar and posek, halachic arbiter, Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, was a person who exemplified caring for another Jew. Countless stories recount his sterling character and empathy for all people, regardless of their background or station in life. To hurt another person was the farthest thing from his mind. He took great pains to see to it that he never infringed upon another person. One very beautiful story, which this author recently heard, tells of Rav Moshe's anxiety prior to heart surgery. He was concerned with what he could have done to catalyze this pain. How could he have hurt someone in such a manner that he would be subject to such a consequence? Indeed, his anxiety alone bespeaks his saintliness and virtue. After much introspection, Rav Moshe concluded that when he was a young boy in cheder, his rebbe asked the class a question to which he immediately responded, before anyone even had a chance to raise their hand. He realized now that the little satisfaction that he enjoyed in surpassing the others to answer was the origin of his current pain. Veritably, there is very little one can add to such a story. Imagine, this was the only incident that Rav Moshe could think of in which he might have encroached upon another person's feelings. How far are we from this plateau!

Another episode cited by Rabbi Pesach Krohn, recalls the sensitivity towards his fellowman exhibited by a quiet, kind, and unassuming Jew, a Holocaust survivor, who came to this country as a teenager. Money did not come easily as he struggled throughout his life to eke out a meager livelihood to support his family. When he was older, retired from his daily endeavor to earn a livelihood, he would always carry a roll of quarters with him. No one knew the reason for this seemingly strange behavior. It was only after his death that the reason was revealed.

Every morning as he davened in shul, he would be approached by poor people seeking alms. Most people gave change in various denominations. This individual felt that if he would take out a dollar bill, intending to ask for change, the poor man might momentarily think that he was being given a dollar instead of his usual change. This fleeting hope would be quickly shattered. Rather than play with another person's emotions, he made it a point to always carry correct change for his daily contributions.

While we have just related two beautiful narratives about unique individuals, one a Torah giant, the other a simple Jew, we cannot ignore the fact that not everyone attains this noble plateau. The following story demonstrates the nadir of insensitivity, how low a person can sink in showing total disregard for another person's feelings. Yet, the story plays a secondary role to the statement issued by the founder of the mussar movement, Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl.

There was a custom in the city of Vilna that when a wealthy person married off his child, the wedding would take place amidst pomp and majesty in the main thoroughfare of the city. This "hall" was the sole privilege of the most wealthy, who were the community's primary supporters. It was known that if a wedding took place in this facility, it was the affair of a wealthy person. No poor person would ever think of celebrating his wedding there.

It happened once that a recently transformed rich man made a wedding for his daughter in the city's main square. This man, who only yesterday had been an itinerant shoemaker, did not endear himself to Vilna's "old money." This arrogant class of human beings were disgusted by this nouveau-riche's attempt to include himself in their elite society. One of these wealthy individuals made it a point to go over to the father and publicly humiliate him: "How much does it cost to fix my torn pair of

shoes?" he asked him in front of his distinguished guests. When Rav Yisrael Salanter heard of this outrage, he said, "I am sure that the Torah leadership of that community is being judged once again by the Heavenly Tribunal." What a penetrating statement! Those responsible for the spiritual development of their generation must realize the extent of their responsibility. They will be called to task for not educating a member of their community in character refinement. This liability is eternal. In other words, death does not abrogate their responsibility.

When you will go out to war against your enemies...And you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form...You will take her to yourself for a wife. (21:10,11)

The pasuk refers to a "milchemes reshus," optional/discretionary war, for in the war of Eretz Yisrael we do not take captives. It is in such a war that the soldier may see a woman whose physical appearance captivates him. The Torah permits their eventual marriage as a way of warding off the yetzer hora's, evil-inclination's, effect on him. The Torah understands that had he not been granted permission to marry her, he might marry her in a forbidden manner. This is a powerful statement. The Torah knows the power of the yetzer hora and the grasp it has over a human being. The Torah responds to the human being's natural frailty when confronted head-on by the yetzer hora.

Horav Shlomo Margolis, Shlita, derives a valuable lesson from here. We are under the assumption that man has before him two paths in life - what is permissible and what is prohibited; the right way and the wrong way. We derive from the incident of the "yefas toar," the Torah's response to the soldier's human frailty, that there is a third path: the optional path. The derech ha'reshus, discretionary approach, is available to everyone. He is empowered to transform this opportunity into a mitzvah, or he can defer to his base nature and act in an opposite manner. Since many obstacles and pitfalls line the optional path, if one is not extremely vigilant his discretion will lead to sin.

The Torah permits the soldier to marry the yefas toar. Chazal tell us that this marriage invariably will bring forth a son who will become a ben sorer u'moreh, a wayward and rebellious child. How can this happen? After all, the soldier is no ordinary Jew. He is one of those who remained after the Kohen announced that whoever was fearful should go home. Chazal define fearful and fainthearted as referring to one who is insecure concerning his aveiros midreRabbanan, sins violating rabbinic ordinances. In other words, this soldier is a G-d-fearing person who does not sin, who has no qualms about any indiscretion that he might have committed. Yet, he might be overwhelmed by the captive's physical appearance.

The Alter, zl, M'Novardok, explains that while this person is pious and G-d-fearing, he may remain committed only when nothing challenges his willpower. He is not prepared, however, to ward off the blandishments of the yetzer hora under extreme conditions. It is not enough to be good, to act properly, only under utopian conditions. One must temper his faith and galvanize his conviction to withstand challenge and trial.

Another lesson can be gleaned from the incident of yefas toar. The Torah juxtaposes yefas toar upon the laws regarding one who has two wives, one of whom he hates. This halachah precedes that of the rebellious son. Chazal tell us that one thing leads to another. In this situation, the individual has insisted upon marrying the girl who captivated him. He now has two wives. The harmony in his home will not last. Yet, he may never divorce the yefas toar. She is his wife until death parts them. He now has two wives, one that he loves and one for whom he no longer cares. In fact, the Torah refers to her as

the senuah, hated one. It is no wonder that a child born to this marriage will have a deficient upbringing. This is the genesis of the wayward and rebellious son. It all starts with the captive maiden who captivates him.

We see that if the yetzer hora has a hand in the equation, it is doomed. Even if the marriage is halachically legal - it has been forced in order to combat the yetzer hora. The evil inclination is involved. Therefore, it cannot work.

Horav Margolis notes that we often hear criticism from those who are estranged from the Torah way of life, claiming that if we would only be "meikil," lenient, in regard to some of the Torah's laws, we would bring many people back to Judaism. We should bend with the "times." Perhaps if Judaism would be a bit more flexible, more people could live with it. The Torah teaches us that these claims have no basis in reality. The prohibition against taking a woman from outside the faith was relaxed under specific conditions in response to a unique situation. The prohibition was lifted by the Torah itself due to the risk to the soldier's spiritual stability. Does it work out in the long run? No! The Author of the Torah, the Creator of humankind, knows the nature of His creations. The Torah does not have to be altered. We are the ones who need to change.

When you will go out to war against your enemies. (21:10)

The various commentators interpret this pasuk as referring to a unique war, one not fought with conventional weapons, because the enemy is not the usual type of adversary. This war is the battle that we wage throughout life with the yetzer hora, evil inclination. The yetzer hora is a difficult enemy to overwhelm. He fights with incredible guile. In fact, he uses us in his never-ending battle to deter us from the Torah. Chazal suggest a number of ways to assist us in this very difficult struggle to maintain our spiritual well-being.

Horav Avraham Yehoshua Freund, zl, rav of Nasaud, Hungary, suggests that the letters of the word "teitzei," "you will go out," are a notreikun, acronym, for the words: "tzayer tzuras avicha," "imagine/depict (before your eyes the) image of your father." The Torah offers us a sound piece of advice, a battle plan for winning the war against the yetzer hora: Conjure up the image of your father. One will think twice before he commits a sin when the image of his father stands before him. This is true, of course, providing that the father was an individual to whom a son would look up. Regrettably, at times some of us do not project a positive image before our children. We fail to live up to the paradigm that a parent must represent. Rather than reinforcing the message our children are being taught in school, we live a lifestyle that undermines it.

On the other hand, there are individuals who are saved from spiritual and moral extinction because of the image they maintain of their fathers. How wonderful it would be if we could all bequeath a legacy of honor, dignity and virtue to our children.

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son, who does listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother. (21:17)

How can a G-d-fearing, law-abiding Jew raise a rebellious son whose future is so bleak that the

Torah orders his execution before our fears regarding this boy are actualized? Did the parents fail him in the manner in which they raised him, or was he just a "bad seed" whose evil nature doomed him? The idea of a son who does not listen to his father or mother is a tragedy of formidable proportions. It certainly does not just happen. What was the genesis of the ben sorer u'moreh's downfall?

The Munkaczer Rebbe, zl, feels that the answer lies in the words, "einenu shome'a b'kol aviv u'b'kol imo," "who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother." As a boy grows up, he should "hear" about his father's positive deeds, his acts of kindness, his virtue and observance of the Torah. He should "hear" that his father rises early in the morning to study Torah and daven. He "hears" his father recite Bircas ha'Torah with a loud voice filled with excitement and enthusiasm. He "hears" wherever he goes of his father's virtue and service to Hashem. He "hears" his mother recite the brachah before candle-lighting, with tears streaming down her face, as she implores Hashem on behalf of her husband and children, that they should continue to excel in their Torah studies and mitzvah observance. He "hears" his mother's supplicating Hashem on behalf of her daughters that they should grow in the way of the Torah, being true bnos Yisrael with middos tovos, positive character traits. When a child grows up in a home in which he "hears" such wonderful sounds emanating from his father and mother, there is hope that he will follow suit and live up to their expectations. A child who grows up in a home where he does not listen to such voices from his father or mother, when what should be the hopes and aspirations of every Jewish parent is neither felt nor articulated, so that they are subsequently not heard, it is no wonder that a child will rebel. Begetting children is the hope and prayer of every Jewish parent; raising them in the Torah way is a parent's overriding responsibility. Parents must set the standard by their own behavior. Children must see, and they must hear. While for some parents this might be a bit difficult, the alternative is disastrous.

You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (22:10)

The Sefer HaChinuch explains the shoresh, source/root, of this mitzvah in the following manner: Tzaar baalei chaim, afflicting pain on creatures, is forbidden by the Torah. Various animals and fowl by their very nature have a difficult time living alongside creatures not of their own species. To put two animals of various species together inflicts "mental" and physical pain upon each one. A wise person should derive from here that this idea certainly applies to human beings as well. To appoint two people from diverse backgrounds, personalities and perspectives to work together is incorrect. We should learn from the Torah's compassion for creatures and apply at least the same to our interpersonal relationship with humans.

In his sefer Min Ha'Meitzar, Horav Michoel Ber Weismandel, zl, relates a poignant story about a Hungarian Jew that demonstrates the true distinctiveness of the Jewish People. The Nazi war-machine invaded Hungary, and with meticulous precision the soldiers proceeded to round up the Jews from the villages and cities throughout the country. In one of the small towns in the lower Carpathian Mountains, the train was being "loaded" with the hapless Jews of the town. Its destination was by now well known - the Nazi death camps. The gentile supporters of the Nazi murderers made good use of this tragic moment to exhibit their age-old hatred of the Jewish People. As families were being torn apart, as Jews were being dragged to the death transport, the anti-Semites would stand in a crowd

jeering and laughing, adding their insult to the tragedy. As the train began to pull out of the station, the murderers and their accomplices began to clap and shout in joy.

On the other side of the tracks, a small group of Jews upon whom the death sentence had not fallen, stood. They watched silently with tears streaming down their faces, attempting to give some support to their frightened brethren. Suddenly, one of the Jews opened the window of the train and yelled to one of his friends on the street, "Chaim! I forgot to feed my chickens. Please go to my house and feed them."

How vast is the chasm that divides the Jew from the gentile. On one side, a group of Nazi collaborators stands, clapping and laughing as the Jews are being sent off to their death. On the other side, a Jew on his way to the gas chamber calls out, "Please feed my chickens." This is the definition of rachamanim bnei rachamanim, compassionate ones/sons of compassionate ones. This is the way a Jew understands the concept of tzaar baalei chaim. His compassion for Hashem's creatures transcends even his worries about his own predicament.

When you make your fellow a loan of any amount, you shall not enter his home to take security for it. You shall stand outside; and the man to whom you lend shall bring the security to you outside.
(24:10,11)

Rashi explains the term "masaas meumah" as referring to a loan of an insignificant amount. For a loan of very little or no value, one must remain outside and not infringe on whatever self-image the poor man has left. Incidentally, this halachah applies equally to a loan of significant value. Why then does the Torah select a term that emphasizes a loan of very little worth? The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains this pasuk as teaching us an important lesson in interpersonal relationship. Hashem also lends us something, which by its very nature is of immeasurable value. Yet, to Hashem it is nothing. Indeed, to take it back would be very simple. This loan/gift is our neshamah, soul, which is our life source. Every night, we go to sleep and our soul rises to Heaven. How easy it would be for Hashem to retain it "up there." He does not. He grants us back our life on a daily basis.

We should derive a lesson from Hashem's beneficence. He "waits outside" patiently until we arise, and then He returns the "mashkon," security. So, too, should we wait outside the borrower's home, not taking his security from his house. If the borrower has the security at home, he obviously needs it. He should be left alone. When the sun rises, the borrower will probably need the security so that he can earn a living. In other words, it is never correct to badger the borrower for a security or even repayment of the loan. If he has the money, he certainly will reimburse it. To pester him will only result in demeaning the poor man's self-esteem, which might be one more blow than he can handle. If Hashem has the compassion, shouldn't we?

When you go out to war against your enemies... And you will see among the captivity a maiden who is beautiful of form... If a man will have two wives, one beloved and one hated... A man will have a wayward and rebellious son...(21:10,15,18)

This pasuk presents three perspectives: the "yefas toar", the beautiful woman who arouses the soldier's desire; the two wives, one beloved and one hated; the wayward and rebellious son. They are

all linked to one another. Rashi explains that the juxtaposition of these laws upon one another teaches us an important lesson. An improper lust for a beautiful gentile catalyzes a chain reaction leading to one tragedy after another. We should learn from here that if an endeavor is not right, it will ultimately not provide any benefit. The Torah permits this particular relationship only as an avenue for the lustful soldier to cool his passion, to prevent him from acting inappropriately. Hashem has provided an outlet for the soldier who is away from home, under incredible duress; it is, however, only an outlet, a heter, dispensation, for a specific reason. In the end, one must realize that good cannot emerge from bad.

In Parashas Shelach, we read about the meraglim, spies, who went to Eretz Yisrael presumably to search out the land, only to return slandering the land and Klal Yisrael's leadership. Their disparaging remarks incited a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon, so that the people questioned the Almighty's "ability" to take them into Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, that night was to become a dark night in Jewish history. How did it all begin? The people sought to be like everybody else, to send spies to investigate the land which they were on the verge of conquering. Hashem did not lightly accept this seemingly innocuous request. He understood their true intentions. Yet, He told Moshe to send spies; sometimes it is necessary to yield to people in order to give them the opportunity to do what they want. Such acquiescence may enable them to see that they are wrong. Once again, what seemed to have been right resulted in tragedy. Good cannot come from bad.

We look for excuses to justify our actions. We ignore the warning signs in relationships that should be vilified, only to see them end in discord and tragedy. If something is not right, it cannot be justified; it will not produce a healthy result. Love does not conquer all. It does not rise above the Torah's laws. For those who think that it does, they have only to wait to see the consequences of their actions.

You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep or goat cast off... You shall surely return them to your brother. So shall you do for any lost article of your brother... You shall not hide yourself. (22:1,3)

One is forbidden to ignore the opportunity to help protect a fellow Jew from financial loss. The word "v'hisalamta," "and hide yourself," is appropriate in distinguishing different types of nature. One would never hurt someone - willingly. To hide oneself, to turn away one's eyes as if he does not see his friend's plight, has different meanings to different people. The Torah does not think so. The Torah understands human nature. Too often we do "not see" the poor man; are not aware of the senior citizen who is cooped up at home - alone, secluded from non-caring family and friends; just "forget" about the widow and her family; or overlook the boy or girl who is undergoing a family crisis at home. We would never knowingly, intentionally, hurt someone - but what we do not know does not seem to distress us. The Torah responds to this type of selective perception, saying, "You shall not hide yourself".

Horav Akiva Eiger, zl, offered a homiletic rendering of the pasuk in conjunction with another pasuk that contains a similar word. The story is told that when Rav Eigar came to Warsaw for a rabbinic function, he was welcomed by thousands of Jews from that community. The honor accorded the pre-imminent Torah scholar of his generation was truly magnificent. After the gaon attended to his business, he announced that he wanted to travel to a small village, a suburb of Warsaw, to visit with a cousin that he had not seen in many years. When he arrived at his cousin's home, he was greeted warmly, although the family was living amidst abject poverty. After a while, he returned to Warsaw. One of his students asked: why had he gone to the great trouble to visit his cousin. Why did he not wait for the cousin to come visit him instead? After all, it was more than a simple inconvenience for a man

of his stature to take the time and trouble to make such a trip.

Rav Akiva Eiger responded by first citing the pasuk that admonishes one against ignoring a lost article: "Lo suchal l'hisalem," "you may not ignore it". In the Talmud Bava Metzia 30, Chazal derive that there are times when one may look away and ignore the lost item. For example, if he is a Torah scholar for whom carrying this lost item in public would be a humiliating experience, he is exempt from picking it up. There is another pasuk in Yeshaya 58:7 in which the Navi exhorts us not to ignore our flesh and blood relatives: "Umibsarcha lo sisalem," "And do not ignore your flesh (relatives)."

Interestingly, regarding this pasuk, Chazal do not include an exemption for a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, as they do for returning a lost article. The same terminology is present, but different halachos are rendered. Regarding concern for a relative, one may not look away - even if confronting the people is humiliating. This is why Rav Akiva Eiger took the time and made the effort to visit his poor cousin.

While this is a beautiful lesson that applies to relatives, it should be relevant to all people. Why would we want to ignore someone just because they do not fit into our social sphere? Perhaps if we were on the receiving end of the humiliation, our attitude might be somewhat different.

In his Shaarei Teshuvah, Rabbeinu Yona writes that the mitzvah of "lo suchal l'hisalem" exhorts us not to ignore our friend's material needs. He adds that every community should have individuals who focus specifically upon the material and emotional needs of its members, who stand ready to offer assistance as soon as it is needed. We must search for opportunities to help others.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, notes that in the sequence of pesukim addressing the needs of the person whose animal is lost, the word "achicha," "your brother," is mentioned five times. Also, the Torah's choice of phrases is somewhat enigmatic. Rather than state, "you should not," it says, "lo suchal," which actually means, "you are not able to". How is not "being allowed" connected to not "being able"? Horav Solomon explains that concerning a brother one must do, he must help - regardless of his excuses, he simply cannot ignore a brother. So, too, should our relationship be with every Jew. We help everyone, because they are all our brothers. Simply put, to use the Yiddish vernacular, "es lost zich nisht," it does not lend itself to ignoring our fellow Jews' plight. We just cannot justify our lack of tolerance for a fellow Jew. The mitzvah of "lo suchal" is actually the Torah's enjoinder regarding "achvah," brotherhood. It teaches us the true meaning of brotherhood, as well as the ramifications.

The Shelah Ha'kadosh makes a profound statement. He questions the Torah's use of the word "hashavah," return, as opposed to the more common word, "chazarah," which has the same meaning.

He suggests that the reference here is not only to material possessions, but also to one's spiritual level. It is incumbent upon us to care about a fellow Jew's spiritual level. We must not ignore those Jews who are alienated from Torah either by choice or by lack of exposure. We must bring them back. Hence, the Torah utilizes the word "hashavah," as in "teshuvah." It is our moral obligation to see to it that those Jews who have not yet become baalei teshuvah do so. To paraphrase Horav Solomon, "There is no greater demonstration of "achavah," brotherhood, than to concern oneself with his brother who is estranged from Torah."

An Ammonite and a Moavite may not enter into the congregation of Hashem. (23:4)

Rarely do we find a punishment that is so "final" as the prohibition from accepting a member of

the nations of Ammon or Moav into Klal Yisrael. Every other gentile who is able to recognize the superiority of Klal Yisrael is accepted for geirus, conversion, if he is sincere and worthy. Everyone, except Ammon or Moav. Two cousins, Lot's sons, Avraham Avinu's nephews, are the only ones who are excluded - forever. Why? The Torah gives two reasons: First, they did not welcome us into their land with bread and water; second, they hired Bilaam to curse and lead us to sin and destruction. These are two interesting reasons, which are apparently extremely disparate from one another. One reason reprimands their lack of chesed, kindness. The other reason accuses them of attempted physical and spiritual destruction. Is there some relationship between the two?

The Dubno Maggid, zl, points out a practical link between the two. If Ammon and Moav were to attribute their lack of human decency to financial difficulty, if they had asserted they could not sustain such a large nation, we would ask them how they were able to procure the necessary funds to hire Bilaam. Certainly a prophet represented a financial burden. Obviously, they had fiscal priorities, and "being nice" to the Jews was not one of them. The fact that they hired Bilaam cast aspersion on them, highlighting their lack of kindness.

We have to ask ourselves: "Are we that different?" Is our attitude towards tzedakah or the support of our educational/spiritual institutions significantly different from Bnei Ammon and Moav? Is it not somewhat "strange" that we claim poverty when our educational/spiritual institutions are concerned, but when it comes to those areas removed from spirituality we suddenly seem to have money available? Time is another area of double standard. How often do we claim to have no time to attend a shiur, attend a meeting for a Torah cause, perform acts of loving kindness, but when it comes to attending a sports event, or becoming involved in an endeavor that will promote self gratification, we find the time? Obviously, human nature has not changed very much over the millennia. There is only one difference - They, at least, were pagans. How do we justify ourselves?

Remember what Amalek did to you. (25:17)

In our present galus, exile, surrounded by a world of gentiles, we really would be forbidden to perform the mitzvah of destroying Amalek - even if we could determine clearly who was Amalek. Why then does the Torah enjoin us to remember what Amalek did to us? Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, offers a practical, but profound, response. This mitzvah reminds us that it is conceivable for anyone to sink to such a nadir of depravity as Amalek. Anyone can become so evil that, although he clearly sees the Hand of Hashem guiding the world, he has the audacity to deny the Creator's existence. Amalek saw Krias Yam Suf, the splitting of the Red Sea, but he continued to be Amalek. He was aware of the many miracles that Klal Yisrael experienced, but he remained Amalek. He was willing to risk his life just to hurt Klal Yisrael. Chazal compare him to one who jumps into a scalding bath, thereby cooling the water so that others can now take the plunge. Nothing deterred Amalek, so great was his hatred. So degenerate was his evil that nothing held him back from attacking the Jews.

It could happen to us. Regardless of an individual's spiritual achievements, one can falter. He can be tricked by the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, into committing the most heinous sins. Remembering what Amalek did to us reminds us of how low a human being can fall. Not only must we distrust our ability to persist in mitzvah performance but we must also continually be on guard for even the most serious sins. When Chazal in Meseches Avos 2:5 admonish us, "Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death," they evidently had clear perceptions of human nature.

We suggest an alternative message to be gleaned from this pasuk: We are able to remember what Amalek did to us. It is unfortunate that so many of our brethren tend to divorce themselves from the evil that has been wrought against us by the sonei Yisrael, anti-Semites, who stop at nothing to destroy us. They think "er meint yenem," he means someone else - not them. What occurred thousands of years ago was an isolated case, which has no bearing on contemporary times. That is their first mistake. Amalek's outrage happened also to us. We must remember this lesson.

Horav Yosef Siegel, zl, who was a rav in Chicago many years ago, explains that Amalek attempted to do something else when he attacked us. He sought to put us down, to destroy our self-image. We had just been released from Egypt, a place where we had been treated lower than the lowest slave. We had been beaten and starved, persecuted and killed, and finally liberated. We were proud; we were enthusiastic; we were excited to be free people. We were human beings once again - until Amalek appeared. His goal was to destroy our feeling of self-esteem, our self-confidence. He was going to shatter our conception of pride. He almost succeeded then and His "descendants" are continuing his work until this very day. We are to remember this evil and its objective, so that it will not affect our sense of self-worth. We cannot permit Amalek to complete his diabolical plan in our day.

When you will go out to war...and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you will desire her, you may take her to yourself for a wife. (21:10,11)

The Torah offers a release for the Jewish soldier who is far away from his home and under the strain of battle. It provides a contingency for the soldier who, in constant fear for his life, gives in to an uncontrollable desire for a beautiful captive. The soldier may marry her after she has undergone a specific process. Knowing that she will be permitted to him later may encourage him to refrain from any inappropriate advances now. While this is a special dispensation, it still should be regarded as inappropriate and even sinful. Indeed, Chazal attribute the character of the rebellious son to a union with a yefas toar, beautiful captive, in which the Jewish soldier gave in to his base desires and made use of the Torah's dispensation. If Chazal view this action as sinful, undoubtedly it requires teshuvah, repentance.

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, derives this idea from an apparent contradiction in Chazal. We are taught that Reuven is considered to be the first one to have made an "official" teshuvah. Indeed, in this merit, his descendant, Hoshea was the one to admonish Klal Yisrael with the words, "Shuvah Yisrael," "Repent Yisrael." He led Klal Yisrael in teshuvah. The fact that Reuven was the first to repent seems inconsistent with another Midrash that attributes this status to Kayin. Kayin told his father Adam Ha'Rishon, "I repented and came to terms with the Almighty". Immediately, Adam responded, "This is the awesome power of teshuvah, and I was never aware of it." How are we to reconcile these two disparate Midrashim?

Horav Schlesinger explains that Kayin repented for a sin that any human being would realize is evil. Murder is a serious crime which demands an enormous amount of teshuvah. The human conscience is such that a murderer expresses contrition as a natural reaction to the most horrendous act possible. Such a response is not a free-will action; rather, it is an automatic human response. In contrast, Reuven acted in a manner that did not really reflect evil. He easily could have justified his actions as the expression of a son jealous for his mother's sake. It was a sin - but of a nature that most people would never recognize as a sin - and certainly would not condemn. Yet Reuven realized his error, and he proceeded to perform teshuvah. This was a truly remarkable act. He was the first person to

repent for an aveirah that many might even have mistaken for a mitzvah. That response represents the highest level of teshuvah - and Reuven was the first to come to this understanding.

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son. (21:18)

Thus, one of the saddest situations in halachah begins. Parents attempt to raise a child, hoping that they are doing the "right job." Unfortunately, this boy exhibits behavior for which the death penalty is imposed upon him. While this boy has not done anything yet that would warrant execution, Chazal say, "Let him die while he is innocent, and let him not die when he eventually becomes guilty of a capital crime." Halachah imposes so many requirements before a boy may be deemed a ben sorer u'moreh that it is virtually impossible for it to occur. Chazal have, therefore, inferred that the laws of ben sorer exist as lessons in child-rearing for parents. Regrettably, the parents who need these lessons the most fail to make the inference.

Chazal's statement that the Torah delved into the mind of the ben sorer and saw his eventual outcome implies a powerful lesson. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, derives from here that evil tendencies which manifest themselves early in a person's life can have a tragic effect over time. They grow with the person until they change the individual into an evil person. These traits must be addressed at the beginning of the young man's life.

The commentators wonder why the ben sorer's punishment is more stringent than that of the rotzeach, murderer. After all, the reason we execute the ben sorer is that his overwhelming lust to satisfy his physical desires will one day drive him to murder someone. If that is the case, his punishment should be equal to that of the murderer, but certainly not more! Horav Kotler explains that the Torah does not judge the murderer for the act of murder that he has perpetrated. He is not sentenced for individual or multiple murders which he has performed. The Torah assesses the ben sorer on the basis of what he will turn out to be. He will become a murderer who will commit violent crimes to satisfy his needs. When we judge the person, his nature and character, the punishment is much more severe than when we judge the specific act of violence which he has committed.

Regarding the ben sorer's future, we find the Yerushalmi in Sanhedrin 8:7, states, "Hashem gazed at the 'end' of this rebellious boy. To satisfy his lust, he would steal from people and even murder if anyone stood in his way. Ultimately, he will forget his Torah learning." Chazal have traced the ben sorer's increasingly destructive behavior, beginning with stealing from his parents. He continues his invidious behavior by stealing from others, to murder, -- ultimately to a total severance from his Torah learning. The sequence of events leading to his total spiritual extinction seems inconsistent. First, he abuses and steals from people; then he murders to satisfy his needs, and then -- the pinnacle of evil, the nadir of depravity - he forgets his Torah learning! This idea begs elucidation.

Horav Kotler explains that, indeed, his downfall begins with a simple distancing from Torah, a complacent attitude, an inappropriate perspective. His demeanor progresses downward until -- finally -- he forgets his learning. During this transition from bad to worse, the ben sorer's behavior also disintegrates. Nothing protects him from downfall, since he has begun to reject the Torah. As long as he had been exposed to Torah learning, as long as the Torah played a role in his life, hope reigned that "hamaor shebah machaziro lemutav," its spiritual light would bring him back to the correct path. Yes, his rejection of Torah symbolizes the end of his rope; nothing can protect him from the clutches of the yetzer hora, evil inclination. He is destined for doom without hope for recovery.

A person's spiritual status is determined by his Torah involvement. Once his dedication to Torah wanes, he is vulnerable to moral depravation with no safeguard to rescue him. Is it any wonder that the ben sorer has nowhere to go but down?

This son of ours is disobedient and rebellious; he does not listen to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.

The Torah deems the ben sorer u'moreh to be incorrigible. Consequently, he is put to death for his intractable behavior. What has he done that is so bad, that it is considered to be incorrigible? In his inimitable style, Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, analyzes the laws of ben sorer u'moreh as a primer for parents to learn valuable lessons in child-rearing. He defines "sorer" as turning away, implying a persistent straying from the prescribed path he is to follow. "Moreh," on the other hand, is a stronger, more aggressive term which implies a self-willed personality. An individual with this personality trait not only fails to do the right thing, but he persists in doing precisely that which he knows to be wrong.

Horav Hirsch cites the Sifri which defines moreh as being in open confrontation - as a matter of principle. The Sifri reinforces this thought with the notion that he responds to his father with passive disobedience, simply ignoring his requests. On the other hand, he reacts to his mother with blatant hostility. Likewise, he ignores the Torah, but reacts violently -- with open defiance -- to its spokesmen and disseminators. Interestingly, we note the divergent parenting roles attributed to the father and mother. The father is compared to the Torah, setting down the general guidelines of right and wrong. The mother is like the "dayanim" judges/teachers who adjudicate, teach and disseminate the law. After all, the mother performs the most important function, the basis upon which all ensuing learning rests, the practical daily training of the child.

The ben sorer u'moreh is purposely perverse and obstinate. Specifically at a time in a young man's life when he is to be maturing, developing a sense of seriousness, he is deliberately disobedient. Any other type of disobedience against Hashem or his parents at this time of his life -- or even this type of disobedience at any other period in his life -- would not comprise an indelible sign that he is beyond hope. Such rebelliousness as evidenced by zolel v'soveh, a glutton and a drunkard, occurring at a time when a young man should be cultivating moral posture, apparently indicates that any further efforts to reach out to this youth would only be futile.

A zolel is a full-blown glutton, so greedy that his desire for good food transcends any moral considerations. The zolel is an obvious drunkard. He personifies the worst kind of moral degradation. In order to be liable for the death penalty, the crime - itself and the manner in which it is committed - must manifest a total deficiency of the morality that ought to be inherent in a human being. His sense of human dignity should make him feel disgusted at the thought of gluttony. Thus, the death penalty is instituted only for gluttony unrelated to any kind of religious observance prohibition. There can be no extenuating circumstances, no external justification for his animalistic actions. If he ate treifah food, we can assert that his perversion led him to openly defy the kashrus laws and flaunt his newly-found progressiveness. Indeed, we see here that the son must indulge in gluttony in such a manner that his disobedience is directed only against his parents - not against Hashem. Moral depravity seems to be measured by rebellion particularly against parents, more so than against parents and Hashem.

As Horav Hirsch notes, the paradox of the ben sorer law finds a striking resemblance in "contemporary" society. (We must keep in mind that Horav Hirsch lived over one hundred and fifty years ago.) How often do we find people who would do anything for their parents, except obey Hashem? Children today would spend their last penny to provide for their parents. Yet, some of these same children have no compunction about selling their parents' happiness for the few dollars they will

make by working on Shabbos. The thought of the grief they cause their parents has no effect upon their lifestyle.

While such discrepancy in honoring one's parents may be enigmatic, is it any different than the previously discussed law of ben sorer? The law of ben sorer regards a willful act of disobedience against parents alone as a more serious crime than an act of disrespect towards parents that also defies the will of Hashem. Does that mean that our age is producing an attitude that is consistent with the ben sorer law?

Horav Hirsch attributes this moral degeneration to a moral hypocrisy in the home. Children who have more respect for their parents than they have for the Almighty must sense a lack of sincerity in their parents' voice when they ask them to carry out Hashem's command. This lack of earnestness translates itself into a serious double standard, of which the parent is unaware. Children are astute. They are able to read between the lines to perceive their parents' true inclination. Children are distressed when they are able to distinguish between the mood in which their parents asked them to do their personal bidding and that in which their parents asked them to perform Hashem's will. When we make Hashem's will our own, then our children will make His will - theirs.

You shall surely take away the mother and take the young for yourself. (22:7)

The mitzvah of Shiluach Ha'kein implies many lessons. The Rambam suggests that this mitzvah teaches us to demonstrate kindness and consideration to animals. If our search for food requires us to kill an animal, we must do it in the most humane and painless manner. The halachah distinguishes between a bird that is presently resting on her nest, protecting her young, and one that was sent away. We are forbidden to touch the mother that rests on her young. Horav Chaim Ehrentrau, zl, cites the Rambam as the basis for understanding this law. We are not permitted to take advantage of the mother bird who, because she is protecting her young, will not leave. We are not to make use of our superiority over animals to take undue advantage of her. The mother could have left and saved herself. Instead, she chose to remain to guard her young; she deferred to her natural maternal instincts, which to a certain extent she shares with man. Halachah takes this into consideration and grants her life.

We derive from this mitzvah the overwhelming importance to be considerate of others: those weaker than we are; those poorer than we are; or those who are just different than we are. If the Torah cares about a bird who is responding to her natural instinct, how much more so is it important that we be attentive to the needs of our fellow man. The Torah is not merely teaching us to show pity to animals. Hashem does not need us to protect His creatures. Rather, He wishes to imbue us with a refinement of character and a sensitivity to all mankind. Is that not exactly what a Jew is supposed to be like?

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