

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARASHAT VA'ETCHANAN

*My Lord/Hashem Elokim, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand.
(3:24)*

Let us consider Moshe Rabbeinu's statement in light of the individual who made it. Moshe received the Torah directly from the Almighty. He had been taught the entire Torah on an extreme level of incomprehensible depth. Indeed, Chazal teach us that every chidush, novel/original Torah thought, that a student presents had already been taught to Moshe. Moshe had been privy to all of Hashem's awesome miracles and wonders. He saw Hashem's might and strong hand first-hand. Nonetheless, despite all of these unparalleled achievements, Moshe stood at the entrance to Eretz Yisrael, proclaiming, "Hashem, You have (but) begun to show Your servant." In other words, all that Moshe had perceived of the Torah, his incredible knowledge of every facet and nuance of Torah, coupled with all that he saw of Hashem's wonders and miracles, was a haschalah, a beginning. Moshe had just begun learning. He was acutely aware that he had much more to learn, so much more to achieve. He had barely scratched the surface.

Veritably, as Horav M.L. Shachor writes in his Avnei Shoham, the more one learns in Torah, the greater his understanding of its concepts and depth, the more he becomes aware of how much further he must go to achieve that which is available in Torah. The more one learns, the more he realizes how deep and how wide is the sea of Torah. The true student of Torah understands that as much as he has been able to accomplish, he has only just reached the "beginning."

Horav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam, zl, the Klausenberger Rebbe, was the standard-bearer of Sanzer chassidus in the Twentieth century. His compelling life story is a lesson in: commitment to Torah study; meticulous observance of mitzvos; and profound awe of the Almighty. His inner strength was unmatched; his sole purpose in life was to serve Hashem and His people. So emotional was he, that when he davened, prayed, his prayers would send chills through his listeners' bodies. He would cry and groan while standing erect before Hashem, his face enraptured with love for his Creator.

Often, when he recited Ahavah Rabbah, the tefillah preceding the daily Shma Yisrael, he would repeat each word two or three times, as tears streamed down his cheeks, similar to the emotion expressed by a child pleading with his father. When he prayed, he was in a world all of his own. He was not on planet earth; he was soaring to the Heavens. At times, he would even change the words, as he choked with emotion, first reciting, v'haer eineinu b'Sorasecha, "Enlighten our eyes to Your Torah,"

v'dabeik libeinu b'mitzvosecha, "Attach our hearts to Your mitzvos," and then repeating, "Enlighten our eyes to Your mitzvos, attach our hearts to Your Torah." He followed this by throwing himself on the floor in humility and entreaty. To the one-time spectator, this may have seemed strange, but to those who knew the Rebbe, it was the zenith of sincerity. The Rebbe "lived" his prayers, davening in such a manner that demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that he was talking directly to Hashem.

When we speak about individuals who have embodied Torah study at its zenith, the name Horav Yosef Rosen, zl, the Rogatchover Gaon, comes to mind. Horav Pinchas Teitz, zl, Rav of the Jewish community in Elizabeth, NJ, was very close with the Rogatchover and was instrumental in printing his novellae. In his introduction to the 1985 edition of Tzafnas Paaneach, Bava Metzia, he writes about this gaon's relationship with Torah. I take the liberty of citing snippets from this introduction, as translated and recorded in the volume of biography, "Learn Torah, Love Torah, Live Torah," authored by his daughter, Dr. Rivka Blau.

"In his entire perception and his entire being there was only one Torah. It is not that he was cut off from the world of action - he was well aware of all the events and problems of the world. It is just that his approach to examine anything was through the Torah... We think of three dimensions for physical matter: length, width and height. The Rogatchover innovated that everything had a fourth dimension, the dimension of halachah that is found in everything... He could not possibly distract himself from Torah, so total was his bond with it... Indeed, the day he found most difficult was Tisha B'Av, when one is not supposed to learn Torah. By the afternoon, he was compelled to open a Gemara. He could not go on. When he had to undergo a surgical procedure, he instructed the doctor not to give him anesthesia, saying that he would simply concentrate on his learning and, thereby, not feel any pain.

"He lacked the ability to forget. Everything that he learned, thought, heard, conceived or wrote was always before his eyes. He saw what he had learned (similar to a teleprompter) - not just remembered it."

Rav Teitz notes that, in the Torah world, a sense of puzzlement concerning the Rogatchover's seemingly strange behavior vis-?-vis people and even rabbanim prevailed. He chose to remain in complete isolation, refusing to become friendly or draw close to anyone. Many even felt that this was out of disdain for others. Rav Teitz feels that this conjecture is far from correct. His conduct emanated from a sense of anxiety at wasting time from Torah which might occur if he were to become involved in relationships. He did everything in his power to protect himself from wasting time from Torah. He refused to become friendly with Torah luminaries who sought his friendship. His love of Torah encompassed every fiber of his essence.

But you shall greatly beware for your souls. (4:15)

Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, writes in his Michtav m'Eliyahu, that the natural inclination to live-- the love of life and fear of it ending-- has its root in a profound spiritual source within each individual. The understanding that every moment of life contains within it boundless spiritual opportunity is enough to imbue a person with a love of living. Thus, he explains that, commensurate with one's spiritual plateau, so will be his desire to live. One whose spiritual dimension tags along far behind his material/physical needs will have no problem endangering himself and putting his life at risk.

We live in a generation in which people risk their lives for very little - a little attention, a fleeting moment of public awe and acclaim. In contemporary vernacular, this is referred to as gevurah,

strength. These are people who have severed their relationship with the source of life. Spirituality means nothing to them. Therefore, their lives have limited meaning or value.

Rav Dessler notes that these self-proclaimed heroes refer to the Torah Jew as a pachdan, one who is fearful of everything, an alarmist, whose diffidence controls his life, causing him to be afraid to move. They have no understanding of the value of life; to them, it is worthless. For the Torah Jew, ahavas chaim, love of life, has a meaning which totally contrasts the meaning that it holds for these giborim, "strong men." They do not care about life. We do.

This idea helps us to decipher why some young people succumb to the desire to experiment with mind-altering drugs, living a lifestyle that is both dangerous and hopeless. They have not yet experienced a lifestyle of spirituality, a life of Torah, a life of value. If there is no spirituality, life is truly vacuous and without meaning. They view life from the perspective of the mundane. Life is short; let's have fun; let's live life on the fringe. How wrong they are. Regrettably, by the time some of them wake up, it is too late.

We question why certain individuals lack the attraction to spirituality, and we wonder how to go about addressing the problem. First, we must define spirituality, and then move on to the next phase concerning how to foster this experience in the minds and hearts of those who lack it. Spirituality is the relationship one has with Hashem. A spiritual person is one who maintains a strong bond with the Almighty, such that every act in his life is measured by how much it will benefit his relationship with Hashem and every negative activity is defined by how much it impinges upon this bond. In other words, these individuals mix up their priorities in life. The internal spiritual focus that one must possess in order to grow spiritually is often replaced by the concentration on the external impression they leave on others.

Spirituality focuses on: Who am I? Why am I here? And what am I doing in order to succeed in my mission to serve Hashem? The individual who ignores spirituality is more concerned with how he impresses others than the internal meaning and purpose of his life. A life of true spirit seeks an environment in which it is nurtured, so that it can grow and continue developing. The shul, where Jews of all ages and backgrounds gather to supplicate Hashem, is a critical place in which to experience spirituality. Thus, those who attend the services with the proper attitude will grow immensely in such an environment. Those, however, who are uncomfortable with focusing on the spiritual dimension of their lives, will do everything in shul - but daven. They will find every reason to talk and even to disturb others. It is frustrating for the individual who is impressed by externals to attend a service, which has very little meaning to him. Indeed, he will make sure to attend a shul which is more ritual-oriented than prayer-oriented. He cannot handle prayer, because this means turning inside and concentrating on the why and how of the prayer service, the emotions that are intrinsic to prayer and the sentiments it infuses within the person. He feels that acting is much easier than feeling.

This is not to say that the externals are insignificant. They should not be our primary focus, however, because they distract us from the real essence of Judaism. Likewise, it would be nice if, for a change, we stopped judging people by how they appear to us, but rather assessed them according to who they are. When we begin focusing on what is really important, we will become much happier people and much better Jews.

Hashem became angry with me because of you. (4:21)

The Torah seems to imply that Moshe Rabbeinu lost out on his chance to enter Eretz Yisrael as a result of the people's reaction to the spies when they returned from their mission and issued slanderous reports. This seems strange, since the decree refusing Moshe's passage into the Land took place much later, at the end of their forty-year journey. It was the *mei merivah*, waters of strife, that catalyzed this refusal. What role did the incident of the spies of forty-years earlier play in this refusal? The Ozrover Rebbe, Horav Moshe Yechiel HaLevi Epstein, zl, cites the Midrash in the beginning of Sefer Devarim, in which Moshe asks Hashem which of the phrases He will fulfill. Phrase one is, "Forgive now the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your kindness" (Bamidbar 14:19), which is a reference to the sin of the *meraglim*. Phrase two is, "Let me now cross and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan" (Devarim 3:5), which is Moshe's plea to Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisrael.

The dialogue that ensued between Moshe and Hashem was a discussion about "trading off" the consequences of phrase one for phrase two and vice versa. In other words, if Moshe had wanted Hashem to forgive the Jewish People, then Moshe would have had to relinquish his request of *Ebra na*, "Let me now cross." If he had wanted Hashem to permit him passage into the Holy Land, then Moshe would have had to forget about the *Slach na*, "Forgive now the iniquity of this people."

We derive from the Midrash that if Moshe had been willing to give up on his request to enter Eretz Yisrael, the Jews would have received forgiveness for their reaction to the *meraglim*'s slander. If he had insisted upon entering Eretz Yisrael, he would have had to give up the opportunity for the Jewish People to receive forgiveness for the sin of the spies. Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential leader, decided that *Klal Yisrael* was more important than his desire to enter the Land. Their forgiveness took precedence. He chose to remain on this side of the Jordan and die there, prior to his nation's entrance into the Land.

We now understand the meaning of *al divreichem*, "because of you." Moshe could have had the edict against him rescinded. He did not, because he cared about the people. Thus, the reason that he was not entering the land was "because of you." This is *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, at its zenith. We find individuals who sacrifice themselves for the tenets of our faith, for the opportunity to study Torah, to perform *mitzvos*, but we rarely find that one is *moser nefesh* for *chesed*, just in order to perform a kindness for another Jew.

During World War II, the Vaad Hatzalah, rescue and relief organization of Agudath Israel, played a dominant role in saving the lives of Jews who otherwise would have perished in the Holocaust. When we think of Vaad Hatzalah, the names of three *roshei yeshivah* come to the fore: Horav Avraham Kalmanowitz, zl, Horav Eliezer Silver, zl, and Horav Aharon Kotler, zl. Together with other *rabbanim* and lay leaders, they worked with incredible *mesiras nefesh* to save Jewish lives. Rav Aharon placed Vaad Hatzalah as a priority. Jewish lives were at stake. One night, in ill health and flushed with fever, he traveled to Washington and walked in rain and snow from government office to government office to rescue Jewish lives.

In his *hesped*, eulogy, for Rav Aharon, Reb Yitzchak (Irving) Bunim, zl, cried out at his funeral, *B'zos yavo Aharon*, "With these shall Aharon come into the Holy Place," which is a *pasuk* in the Torah referring to Aharon HaKohen, but in this sense serves allegorically as a testament to Rav Aharon Kotler. "Rav Aharon made a *korban* out of himself," R' Yitzchak declared. "The *korban* he brought by neglecting his family and his own children that he cherished so much. With these sacrifices, shall our

esteemed Rebbe enter into the Holy Place in Shomayim."

As busy as Rav Aharon was with the klal, general community, he did not in any way diminish from his involvement with the p'rat, individual. He would drop everything and throw himself into helping an individual. When helping a single Jew, he would show the same enthusiasm as he showed when trying to address the most demanding and crucial klal matter. He felt that ein b'klal ela ma she'b'prat, "the whole only consists of its individual parts." Klal Yisrael's value is equivalent to the value of its individual members. Thus, one may neither lose sight of the needs of the individual, nor may he ever lose his sensitivity towards the individual due to his involvement with the klal. That is the true mark of greatness.

You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal. (5:17)

Once a maskil - a member of the progressive, Enlightenment, anti-Torah element, that was scourging the Jewish communities of Europe-- came to the Sefas Emes with a question that had been troubling him for quite some time. "Rabbi," he began, "during Matan Torah, when the Torah was given, it is stated that v'chol ha'am roim es hakolos, "And all the people were able to see the sounds." Chazal explain that this was a miracle which enabled the people to see what was being heard. My question is: Was this necessary? Why would Hashem have made a miracle which does not have any significance?

The Sefas Emes understood that this miscreant was not looking for an answer. He just wanted to challenge the Torah. Thus, he disregarded him. Horav Avraham Mordechai, zl, his son, happened to hear the question and, knowing the source of the question and the individual's miserable attitude towards Judaism, he decided to answer the question. He said, "If they could not actually see what was being heard, they quite possibly could have conjured up an excuse that perverted the meaning of the admonitions of Lo sirtzach, Lo sinaaf, v'Lo signov. He could have replaced the alef at the end of the word lo, which means 'do not,' with lo with a vav, which would not mean, 'for Him,' implying that if it is for Hashem, then murder, immorality and theft are quite permissible. Now that one could actually see the sounds, there could be no question concerning the meaning of these prohibitive commandments."

And with all your resources. (6:5)

Me'odecha is translated as resources, implying that even if love of Hashem causes one to lose all of his money, he should be prepared to do so. There are those who would endanger their lives to save their wealth. They, too, must place love of G-d above all else. Ramban explains that the word me'odecha is derived from me'od, which means "very much." This means that one is obligated to love Hashem more than anything else which he favors. Since some people put their money in the fore of their lives, the Torah enjoins that love of Hashem takes precedence even over money.

The Chafetz Chaim added that just as money is referred to as meo'decha, since it is one's most valued possession, one who values Torah more than anything else must be prepared to sacrifice his me'odo, when the opportunity to express his love for Hashem or to sanctify His Name arises. Indeed, the Chafetz Chaim told his son-in-law, Horav Hirsch Levenson, zl, who was the Menahel, Director, of the Yeshivah in Radin, that, in order to run a yeshivah, one must be willing to sacrifice the time he normally apportions for Torah study.

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, was more than the Rosh Yeshivah of Baranovich; he was "everything" to the yeshivah. Thus, he would often take extended trips to various countries to raise vital

funds for the yeshivah. He would say that on these long, arduous trips he would, at times, want to steal himself away and return to his beloved Torah study. He thought to himself, however, "This is the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, talking. It wants me to study Torah specifically at a time when I must raise additional money for the yeshivah."

Horav Aryeh Zev Gurvitz related that when Rav Elchanan once visited England on a fund-raising mission, he visited with Horav Elya Lopian, zl. He began his visit with a Torah thought, and the two Torah luminaries were lost in the vast sea of Torah. Every once in a while, Rav Elchanan stopped the conversation with a fund-raising question. "Where can I find an individual who has the wherewithal and the will to support the yeshivah?" He would then immediately return to his question or answer. After this had occurred a number of times, to the consternation of those present, he explained, "This is what was taught to me by my rebbe, the saintly Chafetz Chaim: When a person is involved in carrying out a mission for a yeshivah, he is forbidden to allow his mind to wander to other issues. His primary focus must be the yeshivah - to the exclusion of everything else.

Bind them as a sign upon your arm, and let them be ornaments between your eyes. (6:8)

The Torah places the Tefillin shel yad, Tefillin worn on one's arm, before the Tefillin shel rosh, Tefillin worn on one's head. Other than the halachah which demands that the shel yad be put on prior to the shel rosh, the Viznitzer Rebbe, Shlita, of Monsey, feels that the Torah is alluding to an important principle in avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. Concerning the Tefillin shel rosh, Chazal apply the pasuk, V'rau kol amei ha'aretz ki shem Hashem nikra alecha, "Then all the peoples of the earth shall see that Hashem's Name is proclaimed over you" (Devarim 8:10). The function of the Tefillin shel yad is, as we say in the preparatory prayer before performing the mitzvah, "And that it be opposite the heart thereby to subjugate the desires and thoughts of our heart to His service." In other words, the Tefillin shel rosh symbolize our obligation vis-?-vis the outside world, while the Tefillin shel yad denotes our own personal battle with the desires of the heart.

This, explains the Rebbe, is the message of the sequence of the Tefillin. A person puts on his Tefillin shel yad to remind him that he must first triumph in his personal battle with the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, before he "goes out" to represent Judaism to the masses. The only way one can expect others to see that Hashem's Name is proclaimed over him is when he has demonstrated his own inner strength and convictions. Yes, there are those who erroneously feel that by working in the field of outreach, the person develops inner strength. It may work for some, but it is nonetheless the wrong sequence. In fact, when they see their mentors acting inappropriately, it can endanger the very individuals whom they are trying to help. One cannot teach others before he has taught himself.

ki tov zamrah Elokeinu ki naim naavah sehillah.

It is good to sing to our G-d, because it is pleasant when praise is fitting.

Elokim is the Name of Hashem which denotes Din, the attribute of Strict Justice. Why does David Hamelech use the Name which expresses Strict Justice - especially if he is lauding Hashem by "singing" His praises? Song and strict justice do not seem to "harmonize." In his Meshech Chochmah, Horav Meir Simchah, zl, m'Dvinsk distinguishes between two concepts that exist in Hashem's world. There is tov, good, and mo'il, beneficial. Just because something is inherently good does not necessarily mean that it will be beneficial. Likewise, something which is beneficial does not have to be good. For instance, an act of chesed, kindness, is clearly good, but it might not be helpful. Chazal say that aniyus, poverty, is considered by Hashem as something "good," but it does not mean that it is advantageous. Strict Justice is very mo'il, helpful, but that does not make it "good."

When it comes to the darkei Hashem, ways of the Almighty, everything is both good and beneficial. Both His acts of Chesed and Din are good and beneficial simultaneously. We just have to open our eyes a bit to perceive His acts through deeper perspective. Therefore, David Hamelech says, ki tov, "It is good to sing," Elokeinu, "to our G-d (Din)," ki na'im v'naavha tehillah, "Because it is pleasant to listen to His reprovment. Hashem's rebuke should be accepted joyfully, since it is to our advantage.

Beware for yourselves lest you forget the covenant of Hashem, your G-d, and you make yourselves a carved image, a likeness of anything, as Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you. (4:23)

This statement is puzzling. Not to make an idol of "anything that G-d has commanded you" seems a bit contrary to our understanding of the prohibition against idol worship. People create idols specifically in order to venerate the antithesis of Hashem's command. What does the pasuk mean? Rashi explains that the Torah actually abbreviates its enjoinder and should be read: "◆ anything that G-d has commanded you (not to make)." This sounds correct, but why would such an important prohibition be transmitted by inference, rather than directly?

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, explains the pasuk's message pragmatically. We are admonished not to distort Divine commandments to suit our own purposes and whims. We are to observe them exactly as Hashem has given them to us in accordance with the interpretation which Chazal have rendered. People think that they can be selective in mitzvah observance, picking and choosing those mitzvos which fit into their comfort zone and ignoring those which they determine are not relevant. When we do this, we are essentially creating a Torah of our own. Any Torah which is man's creation, rather than that which Hashem has given to us, is nothing short of idolatry. By creating his own version of Torah he ends up worshipping his own will, rather than that of G-d. The Torah is warning us not to make an idol of the mitzvos that Hashem has commanded to us. We should worship Hashem - not ourselves. Every mitzvah has its own designated time and place, as prescribed by Hashem and transmitted through the generations by those Torah scholars that have remained faithful to Him - not to the idols which some have created.

Face to face did Hashem speak with you on the mountain, from amid the fire. (5:4)

Moshe Rabbeinu recounts the awesome experience of the Revelation. As Sforno explains, Moshe was emphasizing that the Revelation was not a dream or a prophetic vision. It was a direct revelation, during which Klal Yisrael were in full possession of their faculties. Other than an unprecedented spiritual experience that has become part of the mindset of the observant Jew's psyche, what is the depth of the experience we call the Revelation? I think the answer lies in the Maharal m'Prague's explanation of the concept we refer to as the "truth." At Revelation, we experienced the essential meaning of truth, the ultimate truth.

Maharal defines truth as the entire picture. It is an image that includes everything: past, present, future; including the internal reality of something, together with its external counterpoint. It is a synthesis of the entirety of reality, a total harmony, in which every aspect of a given subject interplays in absolute harmony. For an idea to be true, it must be so on all levels: spiritual, physical, mathematical and philosophical. In order for an idea to be true, it must be so in all areas, under all circumstances.

Thus, as human beings, it is difficult for us to perceive truth in its purest sense. We are unable to

see the future, and we view the past through our colored interpretation. When we add our own subjectivity and vested interests to the equation, our view of the past is "clearly" not objective and, hence, not accurate. If so, what is real truth?

Maharal explains that the only real truth is transcendent truth, which by definition means a truth that either emanates from-- or is above-- time and place. Only once in our history did we have access to this transcendental truth: Kabbalas haTorah. When Hashem gave us the Torah amid a revelation unparalleled and unprecedented in history; when He opened up the Heavens and we saw and beheld a revelation of His glory never before and never after seen by mortal man - we experienced transcendental truth. We experienced the essence, the reality, of truth.

Finding truth is a quest in which we, as mortals, engage throughout our lives. In his sefer, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu E. Dessler, zl, asks: What is the essential characteristic which enables one to withstand all of the tests and trials throughout life successfully? Our forefathers did. With what ammunition can we do the same? He explains that we utilize our developed ability to bring our baser nature under the control of our higher yearnings. It is the power to confront the truth in the innermost depths of our hearts; to refuse to be swayed by falsehood which masquerades as the truth. This attachment to the truth in truth is the secret of success in the spiritual life. We inherited this ability from the Patriarchs.

Accepting the truth in the recesses of one's heart is not a simple endeavor. The yetzer hora works overtime to convince us that what is patently false is somehow true - and we all fall for it - because we want to believe it! It is so much easier to convince ourselves that something false is true, than to continue our quest for the truth. It is a quest that never really ends, if we search for the truth - in truth.

I close with a profound thought from Horav Nachman, zl, m'Breslov in his Likutei Moharan:

"Truth is one. One is always one. Before one, what do you count? If there are two, they are not one. It is the same with truth. It is only one. When you speak the truth, you can say only one thing. What you say is the truth, and that is the way it is. Falsehood, on the other hand, can be expressed in many ways. For instance, if you have a silver bowl, you can only say one true thing about it. You can say it is a silver bowl, but if you wish to speak falsely, you can say many things. You can say that it is made of gold, copper or any other material - each one deviating from the truth. Hashem, the Torah, and Klal Yisrael are, therefore, all one. Hashem is truth, the Torah is truth, and Klal Yisrael is truth. Since they are all truth, they are all one."

Who can assure that this heart should remain theirs, to fear Me, forever? (5:26)

When Klal Yisrael accepted the Torah, they reached a summit of spirituality never before achieved, a closeness with Hashem that has never been paralleled. Hashem declared His wish that this moment continue forever. "Who can assure that this heart should remain theirs, to fear Me forever?" Regrettably, Klal Yisrael did not respond correctly to Hashem's request. Forty years later, as they stood on the verge of entering Eretz Yisrael, Moshe Rabbeinu took them to task for not responding properly. The Talmud in Avodah Zarah 5a explains that they should have replied affirmatively: "Yes. Please Hashem grant us the purity of heart to serve You in this manner forever!" However, they did not. Why? Chazal explain that on some imperceptible level, Klal Yisrael were reluctant to feel gratitude to Hashem for bringing them to this point, to enable them to achieve such a spiritual plateau. They were not the only ones who did not acknowledge their error. Moshe himself was also unaware of their

mistake. He only realized it forty years later! This initiates an insightful comment from the Talmud that a student/person does not attain a full understanding of his rebbe/mentor until after forty years. It took Moshe, the quintessential leader of the Jewish nation and Hashem Yisborach's stellar talmid, disciple, to develop a clear insight of what it was that his Rebbe, Hashem, expects of the Jewish People.

The question which Tosfos asks is quite understandable. If Moshe, the greatest prophet who ever lived, failed to detect any failing on the part of the Jews for forty years, how could he criticize his flock for not realizing that they should have responded affirmatively to Hashem's request? Were they greater than Moshe? He had not realized it either!

Tosfos' answer gives us something to think about. They say that Klal Yisrael should possess a deeper awareness of what is expected of them - even more than Moshe. Klal Yisrael needed the prayer because they had sinned. They should have understood that they needed help from Hashem. Thus, their lack of response was an error. Moshe had not sinned. Therefore, he did not need a prayer for his spiritual welfare. Simply, someone who has once been ill should have the common sense to ask the doctor for help. One who has never been ill does not understand this need.

Horav A. Henschel Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that one who has sinned quite possibly may feel a greater need for closeness with Hashem - even more than a much saintlier or holier person. He explains that the neshamah, soul, of the sinner cries out from the abyss of filth created by his sin, as it grasps for the holiness and purity of which it has been deprived. The sinner has a stronger impetus for crying out to Hashem than the individual who has maintained a righteous and pious lifestyle. Sin has a powerful impact upon a person and, if he is cognizant, it can stimulate exceptional growth. It is very much like the survivor of a sudden illness. He realizes that if he is to continue living, he must make some drastic lifestyle changes. These alterations can spell the difference between life and a painful death. Klal Yisrael should have realized the spiritual trauma their infractions created for their neshamah. The impact of sin is powerful and stimulating, because, on some inner level, the sinner realizes his true greatness and his awesome potential for attaining sanctity. It is all in his hands. Falling down makes a person realize where he could and should be. Moshe did not share their sinful experience. Thus, he had to wait forty years to realize the error of their ways, and only then did he criticize Klal Yisrael.

Every Jew has a thirst for holiness. Every Jew wants to be close to Hashem. In some, the thirst is embedded beneath layers and layers of secular and physical habits. What matters most is one's awareness of the distance between him and Hashem. Once Hashem has been "invited" into the equation, He provides the opportunity and impetus for the sinner's return. Teshuvah is a spiritual reawakening, a desire to strengthen one's connection between himself and the sacred. Thus, the efficacy of teshuvah is often derived from one's sense of distance from the sacred. The greater the distance, the greater the potential movement toward renewed interrelation. I once heard that this distance might be compared to a rope that is cut and retied. It is now doubly strong at the point where it has been retied.

What drives a person to return, to awaken from his spiritual slumber? What motivates that thirst for holiness? It is his neshamah, soul. Each and every one of us has a neshamah which is a chelek Elokai miMaal, a part of the Divine in Heaven. Yes, we have a part of Hashem within us. He deposits it with us, and we have to return it in good condition. It is that spark that drives the thirst which stimulates our return. We all have it; some have buried it deep beneath years of misuse, but it is present.

I conclude with a powerful thought from the Chofetz Chaim. The sage once announced that he wanted everyone in his yeshivah to assemble at a certain time. He had an important secret to reveal. Obviously, the excitement ran high as everyone was trying to guess what it was that their revered rebbe

was going to tell them. This was unusual. Perhaps the Chafetz Chaim was about to reveal to them information concerning the arrival of Moshiach Tzidkeinu. Clearly, that is what it had to be. After all, what could be more important? At the appointed time, everyone assembled in the bais medrash, waiting eagerly to hear what their rebbe was about to reveal to them.

The Chafetz Chaim entered the room, took out a siddur and proceeded to read the berachah of Elokai neshamah she nasata bi tehora hi, "My G-d, the soul You placed within me is pure." We recite this prayer daily at the beginning of our morning prayers. It is an expression of gratitude to Hashem for restoring our vitality in the morning with a soul of pure, celestial origin, and for sustaining us in life and health. As the Chafetz Chaim read, he came to the part where one says, "Someday You will return it me." This same neshamah which you have within you will be returned to you. You will receive the neshamah which you possessed in this world. What you do with your neshamah does not affect you only for the duration of your life, for the fifty, seventy, even one hundred twenty years. It affects you forever, for eternity. Remember that!" Now we can understand what drives us - or, at least, what should drive us to greater spiritual heights.

You shall teach them thoroughly to your children. (6:7)

The Torah uses the word "children," but, as Rashi comments, it does not mean children exclusively. It refers to one's students as well, since the Torah considers an individual's students to be like his children. In other words, the Torah writes children, because it means children, but students are also considered children. Rashi cites a pasuk in Devarim 14:1, "You are children to Hashem, your G-d." Certainly, we are not Hashem's children simply because of His partnership with our parents. If so, members of the gentile nations would also be considered His children. The pasuk is clearly speaking only to members of Klal Yisrael. Apparently, we are Hashem's children because He is the Source of our influence. He is our inspiration, the Source of our perspective on life and living. This teaches us, explains Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, that the title av, father, is not linked to the physical form of the child, but rather, with the essence of the child. This title can equally apply to the talmid, student, who receives a similar influence from the rebbe as the child receives from his father.

The Mashgiach emphasizes the significance of Klal Yisrael as Hashem's banim. He cites the tefillah which we recite on Rosh Hashanah, Hayom haras olam, "Today is the birth(day) of the world. Today all creatures of the world stand in judgment - whether as children (of G-d) or as servants. If as children, be merciful to us as the mercy of a father for children." Rabbeinu Bachya in his Kad Hakemach comments, "We do not know if You will judge us because we are Your children, as it is written, 'You are children to Hashem, your G-d, or You will judge us because we are Your servants, as it is written (Vayikra 25:55), For Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me.'" Apparently, Rabbeinu Bachya understands this tefillah to convey two perspectives concerning Hashem's outlook during judgment. He can view us as children: Did we act as good and proper children? Did Hashem derive pleasure from us, as a father derives pleasure from his son? Did we give nachas to Hashem? He can also view us as servants and determine if we have fulfilled our role as such.

We now have to ask ourselves: What is considered nachas for a father? How do we determine a father's nachas? When a father perceives that his influence has inspired his child's positive development, he derives pleasure. When a father sees that his positive character traits, outlook, ethical and moral standards have been transmitted to his child, he has nachas. When a father sees himself in his child, he has pleasure. Are we giving Hashem the nachas that a father deserves? Do we act towards Him as a son should act towards his father?

While children are aware of a natural sense of love, students have to be made to feel loved. A student should feel that his rebbe cares about him as a person, as well as a student. He should sense that his rebbe views him as a father views a son. Then, a reciprocity in which the student feels like a son to his father follows.

Horav Mordechai Weinberg, zl, was such a rebbe. A rosh yeshivah who was known for his brilliance and erudition, his uncompromising position to preserve the sanctity and purity of Torah, he was an individual who would tolerate no infraction or corruption. Yet, he was the gentlest of souls with regard to his talmidim. Known affectionately in the Torah world as Reb Mottel, he represented the middos, character traits, of emes and rachamim, truth and compassion, kanaus, zealousness, and sensitivity, all developed into a harmonious blend, a phenomenon of Torah leadership at its zenith. He took leave of this world in the prime of his life, leaving talmidim bereft of a rebbe, orphaned of a father. In an appreciation of the Rosh Yeshivah's life, Rabbi Yaakov Feitman cites vignettes from his life, emotions that poured from students who felt that they had lost more than a rebbe; they had lost a father, a moreh derech, a guide on the path of life.

One mother wrote: "I am so and so's mother. My son was known as a trouble maker and non-accomplisher. The Rosh Yeshivah singled him out, infused him with self-worth and peeled away his rough exterior. No one else saw what was beneath the surface, but Reb Mottel did. He saved my son."

He would take students who had previously been labeled, boys to whose names epithets had been attached, and lead them personally to the bais hamedrash. He took his love for Torah and breathed it into them until he altered their consciousness.

A young man came to his yeshivah after a number of dismal failures in other yeshivos. Actually, he was about to give up on ever becoming a Torah scholar. The Rosh Yeshivah devoted a portion of his daily study time to learning with this young man for two years until he was confident enough to go on his own. Today, he is a respected talmid chacham who credits his success and that of his family to Reb Mottel.

Once someone learned Torah from Reb Mottel, it was the beginning of a lifelong bond - a relationship that was unbroken by time or distance. He would travel to their simchos, refusing to accept payment for his time and effort, declaring, "This is my nachas as well." Indeed, he participated in the simchah like a parent.

I conclude with a story which Rabbi Yisrael Besser relates in his, "Warmed By His Fire," which I feel defines the relationship between a talmid and his rebbe. A talmid recently called Reb Mottel's son-in-law, Horav Shlomo Altusky, Shlita, for advice regarding a yeshivah for his highly motivated son. When Rav Altusky commented on the young boy's exceptional attitude towards learning, the father said, "It is not our z'chus, merit. It is because of the Rosh Yeshivah."

He explained his comment with the following story. Apparently, a number of years had gone by since this young man's wedding, and the couple had not yet been blessed with children. When the talmid visited with Reb Mottel and lamented the couple's predicament, the Rosh Yeshivah told him not to worry. This was atypical of a man who was unusually warm and compassionate. The talmid alluded to this. Reb Mottel's response tells it all.

"Do you think that when I am mesader kiddushin, officiate at a wedding ceremony, it is a simple ceremonial honor which has no meaning? The reason that I always ask to be provided with hotel accommodations is simply because I want to be more comfortable? Absolutely not! It is because whenever I am mesader kiddushin, I sit and recite Tehillim for many hours, entreating Hashem that this

marriage be successful in all ways. I pray that my students build homes that are filled with joy, harmony and siyata dishmaya, Divine assistance. I was your mesader kiddushin. I prayed for you. Thus, you have nothing to worry about."

Hashem blessed the talmid and his wife with a child shortly thereafter. When the student called Reb Mottel to share the news with him, the Rosh Yeshivah commented, "You know, I am envious of you. Every parent must undergo tzaar gidul bonim, the various trials and tribulations that are so much a part of child rearing. You, however, have suffered enough prior to your son's birth. Thus, you will be spared any further pain."

The father concluded the story and said, "You see; the Rosh Yeshivah blessed me. My son's success is in the z'chus of the Rosh Yeshivah."

When a rebbe loves like a father, his students value him as a son.

I implored Hashem. (3:23)

Rashi teaches us that the term va'eschanan is derived from chinam, which means free. Thus, this form of prayer is a reference to a matnas chinam, whereby the supplicant asks Hashem for an undeserved favor. This is the method through which the truly righteous and humble approach Hashem. They never feel they have a claim on Hashem's mercy. They view everything that they have received as an unwarranted gift. Why is this? What would be so wrong for one who has devoted his life to Hashem-- who has lived a life of piety, virtue and righteousness-- to ask for something in return? Why should he have to ask for a favor, if he is able to pay for it?

Toras Maharitz explains that the righteous ask for a matnas chinam, not for themselves, but because of those who, regrettably, do not have the necessary z'chusim, merits, to assist them in "paying" for Hashem's positive response. This lack of merit can catalyze an individual to become depressed and give up hope, and, as a result, not daven at all. After all, davening is for those who have something with which to come to the "table." We are not worthy, so why should we bother? Therefore, the righteous also ask for an undeserved favor, so that others who must ask for a favor will also rise to the occasion by praying to Hashem. They do not think of themselves, but of others. Is that not what we are all supposed to do?

I implored Hashem. (3:23)

The Daas Zekeinim notes seven names given to tefillah, prayer. They are: tefillah, prayer; techinah, entreaty; tzaakah, shout; zaakah, cry out; nefillah, collapse; pegiah, encounter; rinah, joy. From among all of them, Moshe Rabbeinu selected techinah as the form of prayer of choice, because when he had previously asked Hashem, "Make Your way known to me," (Shemos 33:13) Hashem had replied, "V'chanosi eis asher achon," "I shall show favor when I choose to show favor." (Shemos 33:19) This indicated to Moshe that Hashem applies the attribute of chanun, pure favor, in directing the world. Everything that Hashem does for us is a form of matnas chinam, a gift asking nothing in return. Therefore, Moshe used the form of techinah to entreat Hashem to grant him a special favor, allowing him to enter Eretz Yisrael. In an alternative exposition, the Daas Zekeinim applies the gematria, numerical equivalent, of va'eschanan, 515, to emphasize how many times Moshe supplicated Hashem to be allowed entry into Eretz Yisrael.

There is a powerful lesson to be derived from Moshe. He never gave up. Regardless of how often he was told no, he continued to pray as if it were the first time. He neither tired nor gave up hope. It was only after he was told to desist, that he stopped and accepted his fate. The mere fact that he was told to halt his prayers indicates that one more time would have rendered success. Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, feels that Moshe is teaching us a lesson in emunah, faith, in the Almighty, a lesson that is substantiated by Chazal. "Even when a sharp knife is resting on one's neck, he should not despair from Heavenly mercy." It is forbidden to give up hope. It goes against the grain of faith. If there is life - there is hope.

The Brisker Rav, zl, explained Chazal's statement with the following incident that occurred in Brisk during his tenure as Rav. One year, shortly before Rosh Hashanah, the sexton of the large shul decided to change the location in which the choir would stand when they accompanied the chazzan during the service. They had always stood on his side. Now, consistent with so many of the progressive synagogues, the sexton had them placed in the gallery. The Brisker Rav was not made aware of this change until after the fact. Otherwise, he would have summoned the gabbaim, sextons, and vetoed their suggestion. While there was nothing forbidden about this change, the mere fact that they were emulating the temple of the free thinkers was sufficient reason to prohibit it.

The Rav entered the shul, went upstairs to the gallery and instructed the choir to return to their previous position in the shul. As soon as they had returned to their original place, the gabbaim instructed them to ascend to the gallery. The Brisker Rav once again went up the stairs and told them to return. After they had returned, the gabbaim insolently instructed them to go back to the gallery. This scene repeated itself a number of times. It became increasingly difficult for the Rav to ascend the stairs to the balcony. Yet, he continued. As he was about to go up one last time, the windows of the women's section were flung open, and the women, including the wives of the gabbaim, began to yell down to the choir, "How dare you not listen to the Rav! What chutzpah!"

The Brisker Rav added, "That which I could not personally accomplish, the righteous women of my shul achieved for me." Looking at his listeners, he said, "Now you certainly would have given up hope for success. After all, what more is there to do? The people were not listening. I went up to the gallery a number of times. What would one more time accomplish? I did it because Chazal teach us never to despair, never to give up hope - even when the sword is on one's neck. As long as the final decree has not been carried out, as long as the execution has not been performed, one can and should hope for mercy. Assur l'hisya'ish! It is forbidden to despair! Salvation can come supernaturally. Hashem is not bound by nature. What I continued to do was not destined to succeed, but since I sensed an obligation to fulfill Chazal's dictum, I merited Divine assistance. One must continue to believe and do. Hashem will do the rest. We are not permitted to give up for Him."

Rav Schlessinger cites another incident that occurred concerning the Brisker Rav which supports this idea. During the first World War, one of the members of the Jewish community of Brisk was accused of spying. The Rav did everything to save him, hiring the best lawyers and personally interceding on his behalf. It was all to no avail. The man was found guilty, and a date was set for his execution. According to Polish law, the accused was not executed unless his spiritual leader, be it a priest or a rabbi, confessed with him. It was only a formality, but one that was adhered to strongly. When the Brisker Rav was asked by one of his members if he would agree to confess with the condemned man, the Rav replied, "I will never do anything that will even indirectly cause the death of a Jew." Those who heard this statement were surprised. After all, what difference did it make what he was willing to do or not? The government would take him forcibly and compel him to listen to the confession.

The execution was to take place on Rosh Hashanah, and the guards came to the shul shortly before Mussaf to "accompany" the Rav to the execution place. The Rav motioned with his fingers that at present he was in the middle of prayer and could not speak. This went on for quite some time, and the guards began to lose patience with the Rav and his ruse. The members of the shul were concerned for the Rav's welfare as well as for their own. They brought over an elderly Jew to the guards, claiming that he was the assistant rabbi, who could perform the confession. This man accompanied the guards, listened to the confession, and the accused man was promptly executed. He returned to the shul just as a messenger from the governor arrived, absolving the accused of any wrongdoing. Apparently, he had been framed, and the guilty party had confessed.

When the Brisker Rav would relate this story, he would add, "One may never give up hope - even if a sharp sword is positioned on his neck. Why? What more can he do? He has prayed and prayed. It is over! Give up? No! That is not the Torah way." Chazal say, "Ein l'hisya'ish!" One may never despair. In the end, the least expected solution may surface, as apparently occurred with this man. Only, because man interfered, it was too late. If one truly believes, and he is worthy, he will merit *siyata d'Shmaya*, Divine assistance.

I implored Hashem. (3:23)

The Midrash focuses on the word *Va'eschanan*, "And I implored." They cite a pasuk in Daniel 2:21, "*V'hu mehashnei idanaya v'zimnaya*," "and He (Hashem) alters times and seasons." This is an analogy to a king who had a close confidante to whom he gave extraordinary powers for delegating positions in the government. One day, this confidante was noticed standing by the gate to the palace begging the gatekeeper to allow him to enter. People wondered at this sight, "Yesterday, he was appointing ministers. Today, he is begging by the gate. What happened?" They were told, "Yesterday, his window of opportunity was open. He was in power. Today, his reign is over."

Likewise with Moshe Rabbeinu. Earlier in the Chumash, we find him addressing Hashem authoritatively, using such phrases as "Arise, Hashem," "Return Hashem," and other terms that lend the impression that Moshe's power was permanent. Now, he was supplicating Hashem to enter Eretz Yisrael. What happened? His window of opportunity had closed. It does not remain open forever.

This Midrash teaches us a powerful lesson. One must seize the moment. When opportunity knocks - open the door and respond. Later might be too late. Life is filled with lost opportunities, marked by such phrases as, "I should have, would have, could have" - but, ultimately, "I did not respond" is the usual answer - always too late. Hashem sends us messages. Do we listen to them, or do we realize that they are messages after the fact? There are so many instances in each individual's life that even the slightest positive gesture would have made a world of difference. The individual, however, allowed the window of opportunity to close - and it did not reopen. The following story related by Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, was publicized over the years. For those who have not yet heard it, it is a classic that is worth repeating.

Rav Schwab once spent Shabbos with the saintly Chafetz Chaim, zl, in Radin. It was Friday morning, and, in the middle of a discussion concerning the function of Kohanim, the Chafetz Chaim turned to Rav Schwab and asked, "Are you a Kohen?"

"No," replied Rav Schwab.

"Perhaps you have heard that I am a Kohen," the Chafetz Chaim said.

"Yes, I have heard," Rav Schwab quietly responded.

"Perhaps you are a Levi?" the Chafetz Chaim asked.

"No, I am not," was Rav Schwab's reply.

"What a shame! Moshiach is coming, and the Bais Hamikdash will be rebuilt. If you are not a Kohen, you will not be able to perform the avodah, service, in the Sanctuary. Do you know why? Because 3,000 years ago, at the incident of the Golden Calf, dein Zayda, your grandfather, is nisht gelafen, did not run forward, when Moshe Rabbeinu called out, "Mi l'Hashem eilai!" "Whoever is with Hashem should come to me!" Now take heart and listen. When you hear the call, "Mi l'Hashem eilai!" come running!

This was the Chafetz Chaim's message. When the call from Hashem comes, we must respond immediately, because that window of opportunity will not stay open forever. The Leviim responded 3,000 year ago, and it transformed their lineage forever.

Not because you were more numerous than any nation did Hashem desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all the nations. Rather, because of the love of G-d for you. (7:7,8)

Rashi explains the words, "Not because you were too numerous," to mean "Because you do not aggrandize yourselves when I supply you with goodness. Therefore, He desired you." "For you are the fewest of all the nations" means, "You minimize yourselves like Avraham and like Moshe and Aharon." Our ability to minimize our good fortune to walk humbly before G-d is what earns us His favor and love. When we think about it, the fact that our size does not go to our collective heads is not really a virtue. After all, we are the smallest nation in size and number. What is there about our census that would catalyze haughtiness? Furthermore, the fact that we act with humility is consistent with who we are. We have been persecuted and put down for so long, it has become natural to us. When we see an individual who is humble, we are impressed. The idea has limits. It is virtuous and commendable, but let us not get carried away. Yet, the Torah presents our collective humility as the primary reason for our being worthy of Hashem's love. Why?

Horav Gershon Liebman, zl, Rosh Hayeshivah of Bais Yosef/Novardhok in France, derives from here that one's primary virtue is his ability to minimize himself to the extent that when he deprecates his achievements and derogates his worthiness and positive features, he actually elevates his character and posture before Hashem. Hachnaah, downplaying oneself, is the key to distinction. Underrating oneself is a true indication of one's status as an oved Hashem, servant of Hashem. In other words, a person's stature is determined not by how much kavod, honor, he receives from others, but rather, how he handles this prestige. One whose head is turned by adulation demonstrates his true weakness. He shows that he has no clue, no concept of the truth. A great man is not one who tolerates abuse, but rather, one who accepts tribute and recognition and does not allow it to go to his head.

Members of Klal Yisrael distinguish themselves in their ability to accept who and what they are and, with great humility, minimize themselves before Hashem. While maintaining a low profile is important, a low self-image can be destructive. One should seek to establish a sense of balance between a positive attitude, in which one feels able to perform better and stronger, and avoiding arrogance. Chazal teach us that, as Jews, we are to maintain an almost paradoxical stance. They cite the pasuk in Shir HaShirim 2:14, "My dove in the cleft of the rock." Hashem said, "I call Yisrael dove, as in the pasuk (Hoshea 7:11). 'Efraim is like a foolish dove without understanding.' To Me they are like a dove, but to the nations of the world they are like wild beasts." The Midrash in Shemos elaborates. Hashem

said, "To Me they are a seduced dove, for everything which I decree upon them they accept and carry out. To the nations of the world, however, they are as tough as wild beasts. When the idolators ask them why they observe Shabbos, why do you observe Bris Milah, they respond with resolution and conviction," thus reflecting a parallel to tough beasts.

The Shem MiShmuel derives from Chazal that every member of Klal Yisrael must possess two simultaneous self images, each dependent on circumstances. With regard to Hashem's infinite power and all encompassing wisdom, we are to be as doves- soft, gentle, bashful, aware of our very puny and limited capabilities. On the other hand, when we stand up for ourselves against the nations of the world, we must be resolute and outspoken. Veritably, there are forces out there in the world that would rather we did not exist. There are also those who maintain an implacable hatred for us and whose goal and purpose in life is our destruction. Our nationhood: our relationship with the Almighty-- our commitment to His mitzvos-- is a thorn in the eyes of many. We need great internal resolve to resist these forces, to focus on our mission-- regardless of the external and internal pressures. This is the meaning of being "tough as wild beasts." Successful Jewish life demands a synthesis of these two traits: pliability and bashfulness in our relationship with Hashem; and unswerving and uncompromising dedication to our stance within the outside world.

These two traits are characterized by the well known pasuk in Tehillim (34:15), "Sur meirah v'asei tov," "Turn from evil and do good." In turning away and shunning evil, one must display tremendous strength by being pugnacious and intractable. In one's quest to do good, however, a tender and humble heart will serve him well. The primary goal of a Torah lifestyle is, of course, the "do good" aspect, for it is that which enhances one's relationship with the Almighty. The Maharal teaches us that the mitzvos lo saasei, prohibitive mitzvos, are intended to ensure that we remain within the parameters of humanity - that we are mentchen. A breach in these mitzvos indicates that we have fallen below the standards of humanity. The positive mitzvos are intended to elevate us beyond this situation and guide us to develop into spiritually oriented and holy people. Thus, there is a reward for performing a positive mitzvah, while abstaining from the negative commands does not carry a reward. Hashem has chosen us for two reasons: first, because we abstain from evil; we are sur meirah; we preserve our essential dignity and human worth. This, however, does not establish a special relationship with Hashem. Second, in order to develop that relationship, we must perform positive mitzvos - we must be aseï tov. Through the "do good" aspect of our service to the Almighty, by minimizing ourselves, we indicate that we appreciate everything that He grants us, despite the fact that we are unfit for, and undeserving of, His favor.

From there you will seek Hashem, your G-d, and you will find Him, for you will seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (4:29)

Hopelessness is a dangerous and destructive condition. The Torah is teaching us that this condition is all in the mind. One who feels hopeless, who is falling into the brink of despair, should know that it is all a ruse. Regardless of how bitter and dreary the future or the present may seem, his feeling of despair is nothing more than a delusion. Horav Nachman zl, m'Breslov was wont to say, "Despair does not exist." Sure, there are many people walking around depressed, but that is only in their minds. They should not be that way. No matter how low one has sunk, he can still return and establish a relationship with the Almighty. This is the pasuk's message. Regardless of where we are, how depressed we are feeling, we can still find Hashem.

Furthermore, he who thinks that he cannot find Hashem in his life should remember the words of the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, who supplemented our pasuk, "You will seek Hashem  and you will find Him." Seeking Hashem is to find Him. The actual search has profound meaning and is not in vain. Unlike the search for a treasure, which is fruitless if the treasure is not located, the search for Hashem is a goal in itself. The yearning to come closer to the Almighty, to work on oneself as a means of getting closer to Hashem, is in fact an aspect of discovery. The process of seeking is in its own right a function of the discovery and the mark of success.

Yearning and seeking, whether in order to get closer to Hashem or in order to develop a greater depth and understanding of His Torah, are what makes the difference in ascending the ladder of success. The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, refer to this process as bakoshas chochmah, seeking wisdom. In order to acquire wisdom, one must yearn for it and overcome every obstacle in his quest for wisdom. The symbol of the true mevakesh, seeker, is Yehoshua, Moshe Rabbeinu's successor. In Bamidbar 27:18, the Torah records Hashem's instructions to Moshe, "Take to yourself Yehoshua bin Nun, a man in whom there is spirit." Sforno comments: "He is prepared and ready to accept the light of the Countenance of the Living King, as it says, 'And I have endowed the heart of every wise-hearted person with wisdom.'" (Shemos 31:6). Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, derives from here that Yehoshua was singled out due to his overwhelming desire to acquire wisdom. One who is a mevakesh, who is prepared to absorb the eternal verities of the Torah, deserves success.

During the forty days and nights that Moshe was on Har Sinai, Yehoshua camped at the base of the mountain waiting for his rebbe to return. He did not want to lose a minute. As soon as his rebbe descended, he would be there waiting, prepared and ready to serve him. And what would have been so bad if he would have waited the few minutes it would have taken Moshe to walk to camp? No! Bakoshas chochmah demands that every minute is important, every minute has something to teach, every minute provides us with something to learn.

Logic dictates this point. It makes sense that something is given to the individual who appreciates and values it. Otherwise, it does not achieve its potential. One who values Torah knowledge will do everything to acquire it. Such a person is worthy of being invested with Torah. He will appreciate and care for the gift of Torah.

For Hashem, Your G-d, is a merciful G-d, He will not abandon you nor destroy you. (4:31)

Hashem is a compassionate and merciful G-d, whose sensitivity to our needs goes beyond anything we can possibly fathom. Yet, we see activities that clearly seem to contradict this statement. We have only to peruse history or to look around any community to observe the tragic incidents that have occurred. Which community has not had its share of grief? Who does not know someone that has suffered a loss? This is only a reference to the overt incidents that reach the public. What about those who suffer in silence, because they have no one with whom to share their pain? Yet, we refer to Hashem as all-merciful and compassionate. How are we to understand this?

Since Parashas Va'Eschanan corresponds with Shabbos Nachamu, I take the liberty of citing Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, who relates the following words of nechamah, consolation, which were shared by a Rosh Yeshivah who came to comfort a young family that had sustained a tragic loss. A number of years ago, Hashem called to one of the fine and pure neshamos, souls, in Heaven and notified it that the time had come for it to descend to this world. When the neshamah heard this announcement, it shuddered with fear. "How can I descend to such a world? How can I leave such a world of purity and sanctity to live in a world where moral decay is a way of life and spiritual

contamination is acceptable - and even laudatory? Who knows in what image I will return? Please, Hashem, do not make me go!" the neshamah begged.

It made no difference; Hashem's decision had been made. "I promise you that I will place you with a wonderful family, with loving, righteous parents, Torah scholars who are replete in yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. They will provide you with an excellent Torah education and see to it that you remain within a strong, positive Torah environment. When you become an adult, I will see to it that you marry a Torah scholar who will devote his life to the pursuit of Torah knowledge. Together, you will merit to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael, a home true to the eternal values of Klal Yisrael."

Yet, the neshamah refused to descend to this world, for fear that it might become spiritually tarnished. Hashem then promised that she would be here no longer than thirty short years. This short lifespan would not allow for much opportunity for a spiritual breakdown. This was still not enough, however, to calm the neshamah. "Just in case something goes wrong, I request that the last four years of my life be filled with illness and excruciating pain, so that whatever indiscretions I may have performed will be cleansed for me," demanded the neshamah.

Hashem agreed, and this very special neshamah was sent down to this world. "This neshamah was the soul of your wife/daughter," said the rosh yeshivah. "She was so special and so unique that she acquiesced to descend to this world only on the condition that her tenure here be short and that she go through a process of purification prior to her return. You have been blessed and entrusted with a very special neshamah whose time to return has come."

We now have a different perspective on the "behind the scenes" activity concerning one who leaves this world as a young age. Another perspective is shared by Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, who was asked to speak to a group of yeshivah students who had suffered the loss of one of their close friends. The student was an incredible young man who had been raised in a non-observant home and had developed into a distinguished Torah scholar. The students of the yeshivah were devastated by the tragic loss, and they could not cope. Rav Sholom, the venerable Maggid of Yerushalayim, was well-known for his ability to find the right words to say. It was felt that he could reach the students about their loss to console them.

Rav Sholom related the following story. It was Yerushalayim in the late 1920's, and poverty was rampant. It got to the point that the rabbanim decided to send one of their own to America to raise funds for the many Jews and organizations that were falling prey to abject poverty. Rabbi Volk was charismatic and a powerful, inspirational speaker. He was asked to represent the Jews of the Holy Land. After covering the major communities on the east coast, he traveled to the midwest. Chicago was his first stop. It was a wealthy community that responded to his oratory. His words melted their hearts, and many individuals opened their wallets to help the needy of the Holy Land. Among the major contributors was Rav Yerachmiel Wexler, who, besides writing a sizable check, was so moved by Rav Volk's sermon that he decided to sell his business in the states and relocate to Eretz Yisrael. There he planned to purchase a number of fields and orchards to provide food for the needy.

It was the winter of 1929 when Rav Yerachmiel left for Eretz Yisrael together with his twenty year old son. Upon visiting Yeshivas Chevron, he was impressed by the student body, especially with a number of American boys who were studying there. The students related to him how wonderful it was to study Torah in the Holy Land. Why not allow his son to remain in the yeshivah for a while. It would certainly change his life. It was decided: Yechezkel Wexler would remain in Chevron. He was determined to grow spiritually in Torah and mitzvos. All went well for the duration of the winter, until that summer when, on Av 18, the yeshivah was attacked by maniacal Arab hordes, and a number of

yeshivah students were slaughtered Al Kiddush Hashem. Yechezkel Wexler was one of them.

It was a terrible tragedy, one that reverberated throughout the world. Rav Volk felt a taint of responsibility. After all, his inspirational sermon had catalyzed the process of the family's aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. He just could not face Rav Yerachmiel Wexler. Indeed, he did everything possible to avoid contact with him. Although Rav Volk did not go to Chicago, Chicago came to him. One day, as he was walking to an appointment in New York, he was confronted by Rav Yerachmiel Wexler. "Why do we not see you anymore in Chicago?" Rav Yerachmiel queried. Rav Volk was not very adept at covering up the truth. "I have not come, because I was afraid that you blame me for the tragedy that befell your son," responded Rav Volk.

"Why should you be afraid of me? What did you do? On the contrary, it is I who owe you a debt of gratitude. Indeed, you have no idea of the wonderful kindness that you did for my family and me," Rav Yerachmiel countered.

"Let me explain," he continued. I had a son, Yechezkel, whom I loved very much. Forty days prior to his birth, it had been decreed that he would only live to be twenty years old. That decree was unalterable. Now, had he not gone to Eretz Yisrael at your suggestion, he might have lived and died just as any other American boy - with little Torah, less mitzvos and hardly any yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. Luckily, you inspired us to go to the Holy Land where, as a yeshivah bachur, he died Al Kiddush Hashem. Thanks to you, my son died as a yeshivah bachur!"

Rav Sholom explained that the length of a person's stay on this world has been decided by Hashem even before the individual arrives here. How he lives, and on what spiritual plane he will be at the time of his passing, are determined by his actions. He makes that decision. Baruch Hashem, the young yeshivah student that had passed away in the prime of his life was ensconced in a Torah environment, steeped in yiraas Shomayim and totally committed to Hashem. His neshamah left this world while he was climbing the ladder of spiritual success. He was one of the lucky ones.

You shall love Hashem your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. (6:5)

If we explore the text of Krias Shema, we note that in the first passage, we are enjoined to love Hashem "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." In the second passage, however, it states, "If you listen to My commandments to love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, then I shall provide" (11:13-14). The third phrase, u'bechal me'odecha, and with all your might, is deleted in this passage. Why is there a change between the first and second passages?

In order to understand this distinction, we must first bear in mind that Chazal render a different translation to b'chol me'odecha. They interpret it to mean, "with all your money." We are enjoined to love Hashem, even if it involves a financial loss. One more distinction between the passages to be considered is that in modern English we do not distinguish between the singular "you," and the plural "you." In the Shema, the first paragraph is written in the singular, while the second paragraph is written in the plural.

The Torah commands us to love Hashem with all our heart and all our soul (our very lives). This concept applies both on individual and communal levels, thus appearing in both of the passages of the Shema. With regard to one's obligation to love Hashem with all of his belongings, even if it means incurring a financial loss, the Torah makes demands only on the individuals. It is not something that can be invoked upon the entire community as a whole. Giving up one's possessions out of love for the

Almighty is an individual requirement. It cannot be imposed collectively.

You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart ♦ and you shall teach (the words of Torah) to your children. (6:5,7)

People declare their unswerving commitment to Hashem constantly. Do they mean it or is it just an overstatement? In a letter to Horav Yissachar Dov Teichtal, zl, Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, writes the following observation. The Torah commands us to love Hashem with all our heart and all our soul. How does one actualize this love? How does he express it? The Torah responds to this question by juxtaposing the mitzvah to teach Torah to one's children, upon the mitzvah to love Hashem. By raising our children to study Torah, we demonstrate our love for Hashem.

We often make declarations affirming our commitment to and love, for, the Almighty. When we look at it realistically, however, do we really mean what we are saying? Do we sincerely love Hashem? If we did, we would want our children to spend their lives immersed in Torah study. Our greatest hope would be to see our children shine as Torah scholars. Is this true? Are we like that? Yet, we have no qualms about declaring our love for the Almighty. Perhaps, it would be wise to think before we speak or to act before we declare.

And I pleaded to Hashem at that time, saying. (3:23)

Moshe Rabbeinu relates how he entreated Hashem to permit him to enter Eretz Yisrael. Chazal underscore the power of Tefillah. Because no one exemplified the performance of maasim tovim, good deeds, more than Moshe, Hashem listened to his pleas and allowed him to ascend to the top of the cliff and gaze at Eretz Yisrael. His prayers catalyzed the fulfillment of part of his request. What is there about prayer that is so effective? In his Nesivos Olam, the Maharal writes that when one prays to the Almighty, he indicates that he is totally dependent, unable to exist without Him. This is the attitude one should manifest when he prays.

Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl, taught that an essential component of the prayer service is the prior preparation. While one's external behavior demonstrates who is an earnest Torah scholar, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to Tefillah. The length of his prayer service is no indication that the petitioner takes his prayer any more seriously than one who prays quickly. It is all in the preparation. Rav Shraga Feivel would compare one who is praying to a mountain climber, who exerts great effort to make it to the summit. Once he is there, however, he strolls around with ease. So, too, is it with prayer. When a person prepares diligently for his encounter with the Almighty, his prayer will then spring forth unimpeded from his heart. No foreign thoughts will enter his mind. Indeed, one's alacrity in prayer might even be an indication of his devotion.

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, was well known for his impassioned prayer. From deep within the recesses of his heart, he would supplicate the Almighty like a humble servant looking up to his master for salvation. He meticulously enunciated every word. When he would recite those sections of the prayer that praised Hashem, his enthusiasm was palpable. His focus was consummate; his worship was sincere and fervent.

He was particular to daven with a minyan. If he could not find a minyan, he still felt that one should pray in a shul, rather than pray at home. The synagogue is a place specifically designated for prayer, and its ambience is conducive to prayer. This environment stimulates greater devotion and

concentration. Rav Moshe Aharon would cite the following incident which he heard from the Chazon Ish, zl. A young couple, who were about to be married in a week, met for the last time prior to the customary seven-day separation before the wedding. They met before shkiah, sunset, and did not part until late into the night. Before taking leave, the bride reminded the groom to remember to daven Maariv. He responded that he had already davened. This struck the girl as odd, since they had been together for the entire evening, and it is improper to daven before sunset. Disturbed, she told her father about the incident when she came home that night. Her father decided to consult the Chazon Ish in regard to the matter. The Chazon Ish advised him to break the engagement. This was no simple matter, especially in light of the fact that it was a week before the wedding, but how can one marry someone who does not pray?

When it was pointed out to Rav Moshe Aharon that one cannot compare not praying with simply not praying with a minyan, his response was unequivocal, "You are right. If my daughter was engaged to a boy, and we discovered one week before the wedding that he does not daven with a minyan, I would not break the engagement. Would I have known ahead of time that such was the case, however, I would never have agreed to the match in the first place. A boy who does not daven with a minyan is not serious about davening!"

Horav Elya Lopian, zl, frequently urged his students to pray with devotion. "Heartfelt prayer," he said, "can rend the Heavens, especially if accompanied by tears." He would quote the Sefer Chassidim who writes, "The Almighty answers the requests of some individuals solely due to the intensity of their entreaties and the copious tears they shed. Even though they might possess neither merit nor good deeds, Hashem accepts their prayers and fulfills their desires."

We often think that prayer is connected to a specific time and place. Undoubtedly, it is more propitious to pray the specific prayers outlined by Chazal and to do so in a proper shul. Yet, Tefillah is not bound by time or place. One may pour out his heart to Hashem with devotion and fervor whenever he chooses, wherever he is. Horav Simchah Bunim, zl, m'Peshicha writes that one is mistaken if he thinks that in order to pray one must wrap himself in a Tallis and seclude himself. It is not so. Wherever a person might find himself, providing it is a clean place, he may pour out his heart to Hashem, because He is always there and He always listens.

I recently saw a poignant story on Tefillah in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's *Touched by a Story*, which is well worth reading. It is about a survivor of World War II's ravages. Hitler, Stalin, the persecution in the camps, and the loneliness and bitterness filled with deprivation and pain had all taken their toll. His name was Siberiate, and he was speaking to a group of survivors who, like himself, had suffered and were now prepared to go on. He began his short speech in the following manner:

"I always thought that the most valuable commodity was money, until I came to Siberia and worked eighteen hours a day mining gold. I figured that I could always smuggle a little bit into my pocket, and in a short while I would be rich. What a fool I was to think that my gold had value in Siberia. In the cold misery of the slave labor camp, money was worthless. It was food that we needed. What good was gold if there was nothing to buy!

"As the hunger pangs gnawed within me, my focus turned to food. No longer did gold hold any significance. I needed food if I were to survive. The bitter hunger overwhelmed me until, one day, a passing guard walked by smoking a cigarette. The aroma of the cigarette filled the air and captivated me. Suddenly, my hunger pains became secondary to my cravings for a cigarette. The feeling of calm and relaxation that permeated my body after a cigarette lasted much longer than whatever food I would be able to scrounge.

"A cigarette became increasingly difficult to procure. While tobacco was not an elusive commodity, the paper in which it needed to be wrapped was very scarce. Even the guards were hard-pressed to find paper in which to wrap their tobacco. Now, it was no longer gold, food, or cigarettes that were of great value. It was plain paper which became my focus.

"I would yearn for days for that elusive cigarette, and the pleasure that I derived from it lasted me for the next few days until I could obtain my next cigarette. One day, my good fortune changed. An elderly peasant approached me and asked me if I knew how to read. His son was a soldier in the Soviet Union's Army; stationed hundreds of kilometers away. He would periodically write a letter to convey his personal news to his father. The father, an itinerant peasant, could not read, so he made a deal with me: I would read him his son's letter and, in return, he would give me the envelope to use as a wrapper for my cigarettes.

"I was overjoyed. This envelope had enough paper to roll at least three cigarettes! As I was preparing the envelope, however, I noticed that there was some lettering on the envelope. After closer perusal, I realized that it was Hebrew lettering! Reading the letters carefully, I saw that the writing was from davening. It had been years since I had davened, but I knew what I was reading. I picked up the envelope, folded it and put it in my pocket.

"One of the men in our labor group was learned. When I showed him my discovery, he exclaimed excitedly that this was a page from a Siddur. He was overjoyed. Hashem had not forgotten about us. How could we forget about Him? So we started a Minyan. Three times a day, the shliach tzibbur, reader, stood up and read from the envelope. Our one-page Siddur served as the primer for a group of depressed inmates to find solace and strength through the medium of Tefillah.

"This prayer meeting created a transformation that was incredible. The wretched souls who previously had nothing left for which to live, now had hope. Their lives now had meaning and purpose, and they looked forward longingly to daven together every day. It suddenly dawned on me that I had now discovered the most valuable thing in the world. It was not gold, nor was it food or cigarettes. It was prayer. The ability to connect with Hashem, to reach out and speak to Him, gave us hope. Without hope, we had nothing. With hope, we had everything.

"There was another aspect of this discovery, however, that was mind-boggling. The page of the Siddur contained a message that was both compelling and timely. The page began with the declaration in Az Yashir of, Hashem yimloch l'olam v'aed, "Hashem will rule forever!" With the small lettering on the page, the heartfelt plea of Ahavah rabah, Avinu! Av HaRachamim Ha'Meracheim racheim aleinu, "Our Father, our Compassionate Father, Who is merciful, have mercy on us!"

Do not add to the word which I command you and do no subtract from it. (4:2)

The sequence of these commands is enigmatic. One would think that the admonition against subtraction should precede the one against adding to the Torah. First, we should be taught not to remove anything from the Torah that Hashem has given us. Then, we should be exhorted against attempting to be more pious than the Creator by adding mitzvos to His Torah. Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, explains that the command against subtracting from the Torah is actually an explanation of why we are not permitted to add to the Torah. Whenever one attempts to add to the Torah, he is really subtracting from it, because, in effect, he is disputing the Torah's completeness. He indicates that it needs more. By taking the liberty to add, one is detracting from the Torah's perfection.

It is not uncommon for members of the Torah community to be questioned concerning their

ability to compromise. We are called intractable and inflexible, because we are not willing to concede our position on Torah and mitzvos. There is a famous incident that occurred with the Bais HaLevi that is compelling. It took place during a rabbinical assembly in Russia when a number of Torah's greatest leaders were gathered to discuss the pressing issues of the day. One of the free-thinking, wealthy, lay people posed a question: "Rabbis! There are gathered here some of Judaism's greatest leaders. It would be only proper that you convene to discuss the possibility of "easing" the load of mitzvos on contemporary society. As you know fully well, many of the mitzvos of the Torah are outdated and not in tune with modern society."

The Bais HaLevi rose, responding to this contemptuous individual with the following mashal, analogy. "There was once a businessman who succeeded in only one thing: amassing large debts. He purchased large amounts of merchandise on credit and could not pay his bills. Understandably, his reputation waned as his debts rose. One night, shortly after midnight, he knocked on the door of one of his biggest creditors, someone whom he owed 100,000 ruble. He told the creditor that, given that it had been a number of years since he had last given him any payment on his debt, he wanted to make an exact accounting of the debt.

"The creditor was not really interested in meeting with the man at that time of the night, but the hope of collecting his debt motivated him to pull out his ledgers and go through the entire bill. They haggled back and forth, perusing every bill, every detail, until the debtor was able to adjust the debt to 50,000 ruble. The creditor was understandably upset, but he realized that even at fifty cents on the dollar, he was doing better than nothing at all. So he agreed to the compromise, expecting to receive a check immediately for the balance. We can only imagine his dejection and disgust when the debtor bid him good-night as he sauntered towards the door.

"You are not paying me?" the creditor exclaimed.

"No, of course not," the debtor replied, "you know I have no money."

"Why did you bother to go through the entire bill, inferring that you were going to do something about it?" the creditor screamed.

"You do not seem to understand," the debtor responded. "Every time I borrowed money, I felt bad that I was taking someone else's money, when I knew I would not be able to repay. This feeling lay like a stone on my heart. I knew I had to do something about it. That is why I came here tonight to go over the bills. At least now I feel better. I no longer owe you 100,000 ruble. I only owe you 50,000 ruble. This brings joy to my heart, since I feel that I have at least placated you somewhat."

This Bais HaLevi concluded the analogy, as he looked with piercing eyes at the arrogant skeptic, "You do not seek compromise for the purpose of strengthening your service to Hashem. Even if you only had the Ten Commandments to observe, you would find a way out of it. For people like you, no compromise will suffice; you seek one thing and only one thing: to abolish the Torah - totally and unequivocally. You have no desire to pay your debt. You only want to alleviate your conscience. The Torah is immutable and unalterable. It is perfect and complete. Accept it in its totality, with devotion and self-sacrifice, as your ancestors have done. You will never receive from us a dispensation to diminish your holy debt to Hashem."

You shall teach them to your sons and you shall speak of them while you sit in your home and while you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise. (6:7)

Rashi explains that word v'shinantom is a lashon chidud, a word which expresses sharpness, implying that the words of Torah should be sharp in one's mouth. This way, if a person were to question you in a matter of Torah, you will not hesitate, but rather respond immediately. The Boyaner Rebbe, zl, Rav Avraham Yaakov, rendered the pasuk in the following manner. Once a wealthy businessman approached the Rebbe with regard to his son. It seems that as the man was climbing the ladder of success in the world of commerce, he became slightly delinquent in his relationship with the Torah and mitzvos. As he was becoming more modern and distant from the traditions of his forebears, his attitude towards his son's Torah education became equally alienated. The yeshivah was replaced by the secular school. His friends were free-thinking and free-spirited, and slowly the son looked at Torah, mitzvos and Yiddishkeit in general as archaic and foreign. What was the father to do?

The Rebbe invited the man to attend the Tisch, festive meal, together with his son that Friday night, and he would offer his reply. The man came to the Tisch that night together with his son. The Rebbe greeted him and assigned him to a prominent seat at the Rebbe's side. The Rebbe commenced to deliver his divrei Torah on the parshah with the pasuk, V'shinantom l'vanecha v'dibarta bam. Focusing on the sequence of the text, he questioned the Torah's placing the exhortation, "And you shall speak of them," directly following the enjoinder, "You shall teach them to your sons." Should not one first become personally proficient in Torah and then teach his sons Torah? Moreover, the "when you lie down, etc." is part of one's own Torah study. First, one should address his own Torah lessons in whichever place or position he may find himself and then concentrate on his son's Torah study.

The Rebbe explained that the Torah is teaching us a practical lesson. When one teaches his son Torah, if he fulfills the "V'shinantom," then he will have no problem with the "V'dibarta bam." He will then be able to speak divrei Torah with his son. If, however, he has neglected to teach his son Torah, if he has indicated that there are other more important areas of intellectual endeavor to which to devote one's time, then he will have nothing about which to speak to him, since they will, regrettably, have very little in common - spiritually. The son does not fathom his father's language, because their vernacular is no longer the same. This is underscored by the continuation of the pasuk, "While you sit at home, and while you walk on the way, etc." Everywhere you go, under all circumstances, you will have the same ideology as your son, and, thus, you have something with which to converse with him. If you send your son to places that teach material that is antithetical to Torah perspective, then you can expect the scope of your relationship with your son to be extremely limited.

Safeguard the Shabbos day to sanctify it. (5:12)

Shabbos is more than a mitzvah in the Torah; it is a staple of our religion. Yet, it is one of the first mitzvos that was reneged during the waves of the European immigration to America. "Shabbos was important," the immigrants agreed, "but if you cannot make a living, its significance takes second place to survival." Consequently, shemiras Shabbos, Shabbos observance, was identified with the European shtetl. Much of Orthodoxy and the moral, ethical and social behavior that was endemic to Orthodox Judaism in Europe was discarded along with Shabbos. They were, however, wrong then as they are wrong today. A Jew identifies with Shabbos as Shabbos identifies with the Jew. It sustains him

physically and spiritually. I recently came across a story that emphasizes the protective power of Shabbos Kodesh.

It is a story about a twelve-year-old girl at the beginning of the twentieth century, leaving Europe for America. Of her nine siblings, she was chosen to come to the goldeneh medinah, golden land. Life in Poland was difficult, hunger a constant companion. After much scraping and penny-pinching, her family saved enough for a single, one-way ticket. Miriam, as the youngest in the family, was chosen to go.

It was not easy to send away a child in those days. Who knew if they would ever see each other again? Furthermore, would she remain faithful to her religion? With trembling hands and a breaking voice, Miriam's father said, "Miriam, mein kind, my child, remember that Hashem is watching you every step of the way. Remember His laws and keep them well. Especially observe the Shabbos. Never forget that Shabbos protects the Jewish People. It will be difficult for you in the new land. Never forget who you are. Keep the Shabbos - regardless of the sacrifices you must make."

They both wept as she ascended the steamship. As the ship steamed away from the shtetl life in Poland, for many it was also the end to their religious observance. For this young girl, the trip was crammed with questions and uncertainty. Would her relatives extend themselves to her, or would she be all alone in a strange land? Would the new land fulfill its promise of hope, freedom and wealth? Would her relatives meet her, or was she now homeless?

Miriam should not have worried. Her family was there waiting for her. They welcomed her to their home with love. It was not long before she found a job as a sewing-machine operator. Life in America was quite different from her European home life. Polish mannerisms, together with religion, were quickly shed. Modesty, kashrus and the Torah were slowly abandoned.

Miriam's relatives insisted that religion was simply not in vogue; it was an unnecessary accessory in America. The young girl, however, never forgot her father's parting enjoinder. She was prepared to dress the part of an American, but she would never give up Shabbos.

Every week she gave a different excuse to her employer. Once, it was a stomach ache; another time it was a toothache. After a few weeks, the foreman, an assimilated Jew, grew wise. He called her over and said, "Miriam, you are a nice girl and I like your work, but this Shabbos business has got to stop. You are in America. Shabbos is a European holiday. In America - everybody works on Shabbos, or they do not eat. Either you come to work this Shabbos, or you can look for a new job." Miriam's relatives were adamant. She must work on Shabbos. They applied pressure, but in the back of her mind her father's words kept echoing in her head. What could she do? The week went by in a daze. Back and forth, she argued with herself. Should she listen to her father? After all, what did he know about America? On the other hand, how could she give up the beauty that her father had taught her?

Back and forth, the questions, the answers - they all kept gnawing at her! By Shabbos morning, she had decided. She was not going to turn her back on thousands of years of commitment and dedication. Jews had sacrificed their lives for the Torah. She was prepared to sacrifice her livelihood. It was a cool day. She walked all over the Lower East Side, and continued on towards Midtown. She finally stopped at a park and watched the pigeons for the rest of the day. She was not going to desecrate the Shabbos. Her father said that Shabbos would protect her. She was sure that it would.

Three stars had risen in the sky. She made a Baruch Hamavdil, the blessing said at the departure of Shabbos, and prepared to face the scorn of her relatives. She trudged homeward, dreading the nasty scene that was sure to greet her when her relatives learned that she had not been to work that day.

As she neared home, a shout broke her reverie, "Miriam, is that you? Oh, how are you? Thank G-d, you are alive!" Miriam looked up at her cousin Joe with a sad expression. "I am sorry. I kept Shabbos, and I lost my job. Now everyone will be angry and disappointed. They will think I am ungrateful. I could not let my father down. I will keep Shabbos!"

Joe looked at her strangely. "Miriam, didn't you hear what happened at the factory?"

"Hear what? I did not go to the factory. I kept Shabbos," she said.

"Miriam, there was a terrible fire at the factory, and only forty people survived. There was no way out of the building. People even jumped to their deaths." Suddenly, Joe's voice became quiet and he began to cry. "Miriam, don't you see? Because you kept Shabbos, you are alive. You survived because of Shabbos!"

Out of 190 workers of the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire on Saturday, March 25, 1911, only 44 workers survived; 146 immigrants who came to this country in search of a new life perished. Because it was Shabbos, Miriam was not at work. After all, her father had taught her that the Shabbos would always protect her.

Honor your father and your mother, as Hashem, your G-d, commanded you, so that your days will be lengthened. (5:16)

Rashi says that the commandment to honor one's parents was first given at Marah. Does it really make a difference where Hashem first commanded Klal Yisrael in regard to this mitzvah? Perhaps this teaches us that our entire approach to the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim is wrong. There are those who think that we have an obligation to honor our parents out of a sense of gratitude for what they have done for us. They bring us into the world, clothe and feed us, arrange our education and provide for our basic material needs. This is not the Torah's perspective on the mitzvah. One is obligated to honor his parents, regardless of the benefit - or lack thereof - that he has received. We are enjoined in the mitzvah because "it was commanded to us at Marah." What occurred in Marah that was so unique, yet endemic to the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim?

In Marah, Hashem began sustaining us - miraculously: water from a stone; quail from Heaven; our clothes did not become ruined, the manna descended from Heaven. In short, everything came to us "special delivery" from Hashem. There was no need for the medium called "parents." They did not have to labor to earn a living to support their children, because everything was served to them on a silver platter from Hashem. They were commanded in the mitzvah of honoring their parents, specifically in Marah - in a place in which their parents did not have even a supporting role in sustaining their children. Hashem's miracles were overtly manifest, so that all would see and benefit from them. Our relationship to our parents has nothing to do with what we receive from them; it has to do with Hashem. He commanded us to honor them.

This thesis is especially crucial in today's society, when some children might feel that their parents neglect them. Let us ask ourselves; Are they really wrong? Do we spend as much time with our children as our parents spent with us? Today's society makes great demands on our time. The economy leaves much to be desired, making it much more difficult to earn a living. The result is less time at home, and a father and mother who are under greater pressure - with less patience for their children. In the larger communities where Judaism flourishes, we sometimes have a wedding, Bar-Mitzvah, parlor meeting or Chinese auction every night of the week. For those who are not that socially inclined, or simply cannot afford the expense, being "stuck at home" becomes a source of depression. Then there is

always a shiur to attend, a chavrusa with whom to study, a lecture that will change our life. There is always something. Who loses out in the shuffle? Our children. While it is indeed true that Kibbud Av v'Eim is a mitzvah, when we are in need of their time and good will, our children will remember how much time we had for them.

Rarely does the Torah emphasize the concomitant reward for performing a mitzvah. Kibbud Av v'Eim is an exception. The Torah tells us that for honoring our parents, we will merit longevity. The word used by the Torah is *yaarichun*, lengthen [your days]. Interestingly, the Torah does not write *yosifun*, which would mean adding days. Is there a significant lesson to be derived from here? I recently heard a practical explanation for this choice of words from my uncle. To lengthen one's days is to maintain the youthful vibrance that one had when he was younger. To add days, however, means to add years to one's life. Growing "old" is not the same thing as growing "older."

The aging process can be invigorating, challenging and satisfying. It can also be depressing - both physically and emotionally. *Arichas yamim* should be defined as lengthening one's days, giving added life to the youthful exuberance of one's youth. When you see an octogenarian who is both healthy in mind and body, whose visage and perspective on life bespeaks a man twenty years younger - that is *arichas yamim*. His days of youth were lengthened. This is a reward for a son or daughter who has dedicated him or herself to serving their parents appropriately, to seeing to it that their parents were able to maintain their own youth without being overwhelmed with responsibilities and obligations.

What does *kavod/kabed*, honor, really mean - especially in the context of contemporary society? Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, suggests that *kavod*, which is also related to the word *koveid*, heavy, is the expression of the spiritual and moral worth of a being. Thus, *kabed* would mean demonstrating our estimation of the value of our parents. The mitzvah of *Kabed es avicha v'es imecha* instructs us to demonstrate in every way in our entire demeanor to our parents how thoroughly we are permeated by the great significance that Hashem has given our parents in our lives. Parents, as Hashem's emissaries for carrying out His wishes in regard to their offspring, are granted importance by virtue of this transmission.

We suggest that *kabed* goes one step further. With the same idea in mind, I think the Torah is teaching us to add weight to our parents by seeking to raise our estimation of them. All too often we hear of children commenting derogatorily about their parents in comparison to someone else. "My father's job is not as important as his neighbor's." "My mother does not do very much" and so on and so forth. We are enjoined to look for the good, the significant, the praiseworthy, the honorable aspects of our parents, so that we can add weight to them. Thus, as they increase in the weight of our esteem and estimation of them, we give them *kavod*.

Quite possibly, the most difficult aspect both physically and emotionally of giving proper respect to parents is when they age, become ill, or infirm. For a child to view his once strong, proud parent in a situation of extreme pain, weakness, or infirmity can be devastating. The pain is magnified when the illness is of an emotional nature. That is the price, however, we pay for love - the love we have received and the love we are to give. It is not a duty that we are allowed to renege, regardless of the pain associated with it. When I once returned from an exhausting trip to Chicago to spend some time with my mother, AH., a friend once told me, "Remember, your children are watching you." When we carry out our responsibility towards our parents with a sense of gratitude, reverence, affection and admiration, we can aspire that our children will do the same for us - someday.

And it shall be, when Hashem, your G-d brings you into the land ♦ to give you great and goodly cities that you did not build, and houses ♦ which you did not build, and wells dug, which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees, which you did not plant ♦ Then beware lest you forget Hashem. (6:10,11,12)

The Torah seems to emphasize that Eretz Yisrael is a land of abundance, for which we can take no credit. The cities are great, but we did not build them. The houses are filled with all sorts of good things, but we did not fill them. The wells, vineyards, olive trees are all great and wonderful. Material abundance is everywhere, but we had nothing to do with it. Does it really matter whether we had a hand in preparing this incredible abundance? The primary problem is that when people have too much, they might forget about Hashem, the Source of everything. What difference does it make whether these cities and houses were acquired from others, or whether they were created by the people themselves?

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, explains that one who works to develop the world around him is acutely aware of the many obstacles and challenges that he has had to overcome in order to succeed with his endeavor. He has plans and he is willing to toil, but he is confronted with life's challenges. Without warning, all of his plans are for naught. He finds himself unable to solve the problems which he has encountered. Unanticipatedly, a solution appears out of the clear blue, and his problems are solved! In such a situation, a person with the slightest modicum of intelligence can readily recognize the Yad Hashem, Hand of the Almighty, guiding, directing and assisting him in overcoming the difficulties he had faced. In such an instance, there is no ambiguity in perceiving that Hashem has guided his destiny.

However, when a person is handed everything on a silver platter, without having to confront the difficulties, the frustrations and the threat of failure, he lacks the clarity of vision to see the hand of G-d. Just as he lacks the challenges, so, too, does he lack the opportunity to feel the triumph that comes with Hashem's direct intervention on his behalf.

The Torah alludes to this danger when it tells us that when we arrive in Eretz Yisrael, everything will be prepared for us. Fields, houses, cities filled with goods - what more can one ask for? Consequently, there was a direct concern that the people would not appreciate the "Hashem factor" in all of their bounty. The very fact that the gifts were to be obtained without any effort of their own could result in their overlooking the fact - and eventually forgetting - that it all has come from Hashem. This is often the case: we forget Who the Benefactor is until we almost lose the benefit.

For inquire now regarding the early days. From the day when Hashem created man on the earth ♦ Has there ever been anything like this great thing or has anything like it ever been heard? (4:32)

Horav Nissan Alpert zl, offers an anecdote in explanation of this pasuk: A Jew once stood before a gentile magistrate, attempting to describe to him the greatness of the saintly Chafetz Chaim zl. He told how the Chafetz Chaim's prayers penetrated the Heavens to implore the Almighty's blessing for those in need. He described the Chafetz Chaim's spiritual eminence and his ability to have miracles made for him. The judge brushed him aside, refusing to believe all of the stories. Hearing the disdain in the gentile's voice, the Jew looked into his eyes and, in an accusing voice said, "My lord, if the stories about the great Chafetz Chaim are not true, then why do they not relate such stories about you? We must, therefore, assume that the stories are true."

This is what the Torah is saying to us. If we need some "proof" of the validity of the Revelation and the Giving of the Torah, we have to take into consideration that we are the only nation about whom

history records the Revelation at Sinai. The fact that this magnificent occurrence is not attributed to any other nation, in itself provides indisputable proof of our selection as the chosen people.

Guard the Shabbos day to sanctify it, as Hashem your G-d has commanded you. (5:12)

Rashi explains that Hashem commanded us to observe the Shabbos in Marah, even before the Giving of the Torah. Likewise, in regard to the mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Eim, honoring one's parents, Rashi cites Chazal who assert that we were commanded to honor our parents in Marah. This is enigmatic, since in the parshah that tells about the manna, the Torah also details the laws of Shabbos. Why do they not say, "kaasher tzivcha," "As He commanded you," in the parsha of the manna?

Horav Tzvi Hirsch Ferber zl, gives a practical response to this question. The mitzvos of Shabbos and Kibud Av v'Eim have one common thread between them: They each comprise an example of the type of mitzvos which coincide with common sense. Shabbos is a day when one rests; he eats good meals, he dresses in a manner unlike his usual weekday dress code. Indeed, observing Shabbos is not necessarily an indication that one is overly pious, because it is a mitzvah that is truly relaxing and enjoyable. Kibud Av v'Eim is, similarly, a mitzvah that human nature would demand we observe. Parents go through so much to raise a child. They sacrifice everything for the physical, spiritual and educational development of their children. The very least we should do in compensation is to grant them the respect they deserve. This is the very reason that Hashem gave Klal Yisrael these mitzvos in Marah, a place that derived its name from the Marah, bitterness, exhibited by the Jewish People when they arrived there.

It is comfortable to observe Shabbos and Kibud Av v'Eim when life is flowing easily and there are no challenges to overcome. What about a situation in which observing Shabbos means great difficulty in securing a job? Or honoring parents in the proper manner demands great expense that one cannot afford? What about a circumstance in which one feels no appreciation towards his parents because he matured despite the miserable home life they provided for him? Does Kibud Av apply here also? Is Shabbos to be observed under trying physical and material conditions?

Yes! This is what "Marah" teaches us. We are to observe these two "common sense" mitzvos - regardless of the circumstances, even if they are bitter. This is specifically why the Torah does not add that Klal Yisrael was commanded concerning Shabbos in the parshah of manna. People might suggest that Shabbos was given to those who eat manna, who have no concerns about earning a living. It was given to everyone, under all conditions. Regrettably, some of us have a difficult time reconciling ourselves to this concept.

Do not kill and do not commit adultery, and do not steal, and do not bear false witness against your fellow. And do not covet. (5:17 - 18)

Noting the order of these prohibitions, we may assume that they are written in a logical, descending order. The prohibition against murder, clearly the most grievous sin, is first, followed by the other "lesser" sins. In this manner, the Torah tells us that all of these acts are prohibited - not only the more serious ones. We wonder why the Torah joins these transgressions with the prefix "vav," - "and"?

Horav David Feinstein Shlita, explains that the Torah emphasizes to us that all mitzvos have equal significance. Had the Torah not used the "vav", "and" prefix, we might think that some mitzvos are less stringent than others. The "ands" convey to us that all mitzvos require the same exact level of

zealous commitment. An individual who covets can one day kill someone who stands in the way of his obtaining the object of his desire. Similarly, one who rejects murder because it is Hashem's edict will also take meticulous care not to transgress any other prohibition. By connecting these prohibitions, we learn that they are all equal expressions of Hashem's will and, consequently, all maintain equal significance.

You shall love Hashem your G-d, with all your heart, and with all your soul and will all your possessions. (6:5)

Throughout the millennia, Hashem has tested the Jewish nation. He has challenged us collectively as a nation, as well as personally as individuals. We have been subject to the most cruel and inhuman ordeals, and we have survived. We have maintained our faith in the Almighty with all of our heart and all of our soul. Today, most of us live in areas where threats to our physical survival rarely present themselves. There is, however, another area in which the committed Jew is tested: in the area of material advancement. We live in a society in which people are regrettably measured by their material success, where the challenge of earning a livelihood is, for some, overwhelming. Under such duress it is quite possible that the challenge of "b'chol meodecha," "with all your possessions," takes great prominence. If, and to whom one gives charity, are not the only important issues. Indeed, how one uses his money clearly defines where he stands in regard to how he values Torah and mitzvos. The following two narratives provide insight for us into the true level of one who serves Hashem with all of his possessions.

It was Yom Kippur night, and a huge crowd had assembled in the Berditchever Shul where the saintly Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, was preparing to usher in the holiest day of the Jewish calendar year. The Berditchever motioned to the chazzan to wait a while; he was not quite ready to begin the Kol Nidre prayer. The minutes passed by as the packed congregation began to silently whisper, "What could be holding up the rebbe?" Soon, Rav Levi Yitzchak turned to his shammes, attendant, and asked, "Is Reb Mottel from Zhitomia here?" The shammes looked around and, after noticing Reb Mottel, told the rebbe that he was in attendance. "Please ask him to come here," said Rav Levi Yitzchak.

When Mottel came over, Rav Levi Yitzchak began to question him, "Tell me, do you not live on land owned by a certain gentile landowner?" "Yes," responded the surprised Mottel. "Does he not own a dog?" asked the rebbe. "Yes, rebbe, he owns a very fine dog," answered Mottel, not having any idea why Rav Levi Yitzchak would be asking such questions prior to Kol Nidre. "Do you know how much he paid for the dog?" the rebbe asked. "I surely do," answered Mottel proudly. "He said it was a special dog with a distinguished pedigree and that he had paid four hundred rubles for it." This was a huge sum to pay for anything in those days, certainly for a dog. Hearing the amount, Rav Levi Yitzchak was thrilled, exclaiming "Four hundred rubles! That is fantastic!" He quickly summoned the chazzan to begin the Kol Nidre prayer to usher in Yom Kippur.

It was no surprise that everyone who was privy to this entire episode was bewildered. First, why would the saintly rebbe care about a gentile's dog? And what difference did it make how much it cost? After Maariv, a close group of the rebbe's disciples gathered around him and worked up the courage to ask him to explain to them what had occurred.

The rebbe related to them the following incident: A melamed, tutor, came to our town this past year to earn enough money tutoring to repay the many debts that he had accumulated in his hometown. After awhile, he had earned enough money tutoring to repay his debts and still have sufficient funds to support his family for the coming year. On his way home, he stopped overnight at an inn. You can

imagine what happened. He was careless with his money bag and it was stolen. He woke up the next morning to discover the terrible thing that had occurred, and he became hysterical. He screamed and cried. He was crushed, months and months of his work was lost, gone forever.

Mottel's gentile landowner, was staying at the same inn. Upon hearing the melamed's wailing, he inquired about the commotion. He listened to the melamed broken-heartedly relate the entire story: how he had worked hard for months to pay off his debts and support his family, and now it was all gone. The landowner was moved by the story. After hearing how much the melamed had lost, he took out four hundred rubles - the amount that had been stolen - and gave it to the melamed."

The rebbe continued, "As we were about to begin Kol Nidre, I became concerned about the episode and its far-reaching effect on us as we stand in judgement before Hashem. Do we deserve that Hashem should look at us favorably? Let us ask ourselves: 'Are we deserving of His favor? Did any of us do an unusual act of chesed, kindness, that would stand in our behalf?' If a gentile could commit such an exemplary act of kindness, Hashem's nation should do no less. Can we say that we did?"

"I then remembered the dog - the dog for which the gentile spent so much money. When I discovered that he spent four hundred rubles for a dog, a simple pet, it indicated to me that this gentile does not really value money very highly. Thus, while the act of giving the melamed four hundred rubles was clearly a remarkable act of chesed, it surely did not represent an act of sacrifice on the gentile's part. A man who can spend so much money on a dog does not truly appreciate the value of money."

Horav Sholom Shwadron zl, cited by Rabbi Pesach Krohn, sums up this story with the following thought. The way we spend our money is relative. We take pride when we spend a large sum of money for an esrog or pair of Tefillin. We feel good when we give a large check to tzedakah, charity. These acts are, however, all relative. If we spend twice as much on ourselves, on a new car, a home, clothes, trips and various forms of "fun," then the money we spend for the mitzvah is not really that great of a sacrifice. We must spend for our spiritual objects at least as much as we spend for our material objects.

Another dimension of "b'chol meodecha" is indicated by the following episode: Horav Nachum zl, m'Tchernobil once came to a small town that had a proportionate small number of Jewish inhabitants. When he expressed his desire to immerse himself in the city's mikveh, he discovered - to his chagrin - that the city did not have a mikveh. He was told that since the city stood on high ground, it would be too costly to dig so deep in the ground in search of water. The Jewish community was not financially able to undertake such a project. The Tchernobler Rebbe turned to the community's leadership and asked, "Is there a wealthy man in the community who would fund this project and maintain the mikveh in exchange for my portion in Olam Habah, the World To Come?" When word went out that the famed Tchernobler Rebbe was selling his Olam Habah for a mikveh, a wealthy man immediately appeared, with sufficient funds for the building and maintenance of a brand new mikveh for the town. The deal was made, and the Rebbe made a bonafide sale of his portion in Olam Habah. The Rebbe was ecstatic. "Now I can truly say that I serve my Master out of love - not for a reward." When he was later asked how he could give up his eternal life in exchange for a mikveh, Rav Nachum responded, "On the contrary, tell me how could someone like me, without money and who finds no interest in material possessions, ever fulfill the mitzvah of 'b'chol meodecha,' 'with all your possessions?' I have no possessions! How could I twice daily utter falsehood, when I recite the Shema Yisrael? All I have is my Olam Habah. This is my most prized possession. I feel honored to give it up for Hashem."

Two different approaches to "b'chol meodecha": one reflects on the relative value of material sacrifices;

the other indicates the zenith of sacrifice. They both represent a deeper understanding of the commitment necessary for the individual to serve Hashem.

Honor your father and mother ♦ so that your days of your life will be lengthened. (5:16)

Who is lengthening the days? Ostensibly, Hashem; who grants life, is the one who determines the length of one's days. The pasuk should have read, "Lemaan yaarich," "so that He lengthens" (your days). The plural "yaarichun," seems to imply another approach. The Viznitzer Rebbe, zl, the Imrei Chaim, asks how we are to understand this. The story is told that in 1910, shortly after the Rebbe came to Vilchovitz, members of a family whose father had recently passed away approached the Rebbe to render judgement regarding the division of their father's estate.

The Rebbe was aware that while their elderly father lay sick on his deathbed, some of the heirs had given him prepared cards to sign. These cards divided up the properties according to the heirs' preferences. Now it was after the fact, and there were differences about the division of properties. The Rebbe listened to their statements and said, "I will render my judgement on Shabbos during Seudas Shlishis."

The Rebbe's response was enigmatic, astonishing the members of the community. First, before one renders judgement, he should listen to each of the litigants claims. Second, Shabbos, especially during Seudas Shlishis, was certainly not an appropriate time to render an opinion. What was the young Rebbe planning?

The answer to their query soon became clear. During Seudas Shlishis, the Rebbe asked the above question: Why does the Torah employ the plural form for "lengthening the days?" If it is a reference to Hashem, it should be written in the singular. The answer is that, in accordance with the course of nature, people grow old and feeble. They become sick, and someone must care for them. A person is very fortunate to have children who care about his health, not his death. These children turn to a physician; they purchase the medicines necessary to provide for their father. When a father sees this overwhelming love, this devotion to his health and well-being, he is encouraged; he is given succor to go on to fight his illness, to continue living. The grandchildren who observe this display of Kibud Av v'Eim and its consequences are inclined to follow suit when the time comes to respond to their parents' needs.

In the tragic circumstance, however, when instead of calling a doctor, children react in haste to divide up their parents' possessions, to take advantage of their parents' incapacitating illness, they catalyze their parents' premature death. From where should a parent's will to live emanate? Witnessing their children fighting over their possessions surely is not a motivating factor for longevity. We can well imagine what the unsuspecting grandchildren will glean from their parents' Kibud Av v'Eim. Indeed, they will encourage them to take as much property as they can, so that they will have more to inherit when their Kibud Av shortens their own parent's life.

"We now understand," said the Rebbe, "the meaning of the pasuk. If you honor your parents in such a manner that increases their longevity, then your reward will be that your own children will increase your life-span. Obviously, a blemished attitude towards honoring one's parents will generate the opposite: a shortened life-span. We must always remember that our children watch and observe they way we relate to our parents. Our greatest reward or punishment will occur when their treatment of us coincides with what they have perceived from our behavior."

You shall teach them thoroughly to your children. (6:7)

Rashi says that the words, "your children," apply equally to one's students, because the Torah views one's students as his children. Horav Gadel Eisner, zl, interprets Chazal's dictum, "He who teaches his friend's son Torah, it is considered as if he caused him to be born." In other words, he becomes like his natural son. He suggests that when one is about to punish his student, he should stop and ask himself: Would he act in a similar manner if it were his son, or does the rule of the student double standard reign in his life? Do we treat our students as children, or are we simply paying lip service to this halachah? Second, Rashi ponders: If the pasuk is referring to students and our attitude towards them, then the Torah should have said so. It should read, "V'sheenantam l'talmidecha," "You shall thoroughly teach to your students." He explains that the Torah is teaching an important maxim of education: View your students as if they were your children. If our lessons are to shape and mold our students, developing them to become like our children, then we must perceive them as such.

In a thesis on education, Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, derives many meaningful lessons from the language and maxims of Judaism. He begins first with the word, "lamod," which denotes the most select method of education: learning by practice and habituation. In the training of the intellect, lamod is a constant process of perception, comprehension, delineation and judgement. In the development of creative skills, it is a constant process of forming, creating, shaping and producing. In both situations the process is constant, repeated over and over until it becomes second nature. A requisite for this pursuit in patience is more than simply a virtue for the educator; it is an essential quality that must be either inborn or acquired.

Next, there is "shanen," which is the optimal form of communication for the educator. This term best describes the terse, precise and incisive manner in which a good teacher can impress upon his students, in the clearest, simplest, and most definitive way possible, the ideas and values he wants them to acquire. There are no ambiguities, no questions, no doubts as to the teacher's goals, objectives and demands of the student, or how the subject matter is to be understood. The constant redundancies and verbosity that present only a glimpse of the subject matter are replaced by well-defined images. This is accomplished only after the teacher himself has developed a clear understanding of the material he is presenting. He must also be sure of the ideas he seeks to convey. Last, he himself must represent the paradigm of these ideas. One whose knowledge is not supported by his own genuine conviction cannot expect his students to assimilate his lessons into their lifestyle.

The student who absorbs his teacher's message is "taking" it to himself. Hence, the Hebrew word "lekach," which defines Torah doctrine -- or teaching -- not as a tradition passed on by rote, but as a process of the student "taking," "grasping," as he integrates the lesson into his mind and essence. That is Torah!

The word "rebbe" or teacher is derived from the word "rabah." It characterizes the teacher/rebbe, not as one who is "more" or "greater" than his student, but rather as one who increases his student's knowledge. This indicates that the teacher's objective should be to reproduce aspects of himself in his students, to mold the character of his students in his own image. He thereby "increases" the student. This idea is accompanied by enormous responsibility. The teacher who understands his obligation toward his student makes it his first duty to work tirelessly on developing his own mind and character. If he is to impart Torah and middos tovos, positive character traits, to his charges, then he must mold himself, both intellectually and spiritually, to become the kind of person whose "reproduction" would enhance another persons' well-being. Indeed, he has a moral obligation to guard

himself scrupulously against any deficiency in character.

Keeping in mind the educator's mission, we understand the joy inherent in successfully executing one's mentoring experience. After all, how often can one say that he has been directly involved in shaping the spiritual and moral future of another human being? To paraphrase Horav Hirsch, "Even if he is unknown, unsung and unappreciated among men, such an educator becomes immortal already here on earth in the eyes of G-d. For with every seed of goodness and truth that he has sown, with every skill that adds to human happiness and prosperity that he has contributed to the intellectual and spiritual assets of his students, the teacher has inscribed his own name before G-d into his student's book of life." What a beautiful and meaningful legacy for a person to bequeath: to have himself, his work and character "reproduced" in his students, so that he lives on even after his actual work has ceased.

There is one term left that quite possibly best describes the art of teaching in terms of its aims and methods. This term incorporates in one word the essence of the profession of teaching, the type of subject matter imparted by the teacher, and the teacher himself. The word is "horah," the transitive form of "harah," which literally means "to become a mother." This is also the root of the word "Torah", which simply means, "teaching." This word defines the profession of teaching as an act of spiritual transmission. Hence, the term, "moreh" is used both for the "teacher" and the "early rains" that soften and fertilize the soil. This analogy should give the thinking teacher something to consider. He is to view himself as the spiritual progenitor of his students, enriching the spiritual organism of each individual student with the seeds of Torah and middos, character refinement, that will develop and yield fruit as the student matures.

The function of teaching is defined conceptually as an act of spiritual seed-planting or "horaah." We may not teach by rote, but rather with vibrancy and enthusiasm, stimulating the student's heart and mind to absorb the material. The subject matter must be presented with regard to the student's cognitive ability and maturity level. The two go hand in hand; material that coincides with the mind and ability of the student, creatively presented in a manner that bespeaks verve and passion, excitement and feeling. The teacher loosens up the soil of the mind and prepares it for the seed that will develop with nurturing.

Viewing himself as a gardener in Hashem's nursery of mankind, the teacher will be patient, availing each student the opportunity to grow at his own pace. He will carefully study the personality of each particular student and his background, including family, friends and circumstances in their lives, responding to each one individually. He will be fair, seeking to earn the respect of his students, so that they relate to him out of love and admiration - not fear and resentment. Last, but not least, we may add that just as the gardener looks up and prays to Hashem for His Divine grace and assistance, so too, should the teacher implore Hashem that he succeed in his efforts to raise a "dor yesharim," a generation of upright Jews, who will be mekadash shem Shomayim, sanctifying the Name of Heaven.

*For you are a holy People to Hashem, your G-d. Hashem, your G-d, has chosen you to be for him a treasured people not because you are more numerous than all the peoples did Hashem desire you.
(7:6,7)*

The Chosen People is a term which is applied to Klal Yisrael. Obviously, not every nation on the face of the earth agrees that this term is appropriate and applicable. Why, really, are we the Chosen People? What did we do to deserve this unique appellation? The Ramban explains that our extraordinary history earned us this distinction. Hashem loves us because of our ability and devotion; because of our ability to withstand the onslaught and devastating persecution to which we have been

subjected, because of our boundless devotion to Hashem. We have been "soveil" Hashem, bearing the heavy yoke of justice upon our heads, regardless of what decrees emanate from this justice.

To paraphrase the Ramban, in explaining the meaning of "choshak" "desire" (you): "Hashem has bound Himself with you with a mighty bond that He will never be separated from you. He saw in you to be worthier than all peoples to be loved by Him and to be chosen for love for he who is chosen to be loved, is known to be ready to suffer whatever comes upon him from his lover, and the Jews are more qualified for that than any other people. Indeed, when challenged by the nations, Klal Yisrael has stubbornly declared, 'O' Yehudi, O' tzlav,' 'Either (we remain loyal) Jews, or (we will be) nailed to the stake.'" These are powerful words which define the essence of the Jewish People --a nation that despite all of its hardships remains steadfastly committed to the Almighty. Is there still a question regarding our chosen status?

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, derives from the Ramban that Klal Yisrael's attribute, the sole reason for Hashem's choosing them as the am ha'nivchar, is their ability to tolerate, accept and justify Hashem's hanhagah, manner of dealing with them. A true friend is there in times of bad, as well as good. A true friend is there even when he is seemingly mistreated, when the going gets rough, because he has a true love for his friend. This is the meaning of zechus avos, the merit of our ancestors. They were moser nefesh, served Hashem amid self-sacrifice, their conviction remaining resolute, their commitment unwavering throughout the most cruel and painful persecutions. We follow in their footsteps, accepting the good with what might seem to be the bad. This is why Hashem chose us, and why He will continue to choose us.

And He declared unto you His covenant... And He wrote them upon two tablets of stone. (4:13)

The Aseres Hadibros, Ten Commandments, are supreme among the Torah's precepts. This is the result of two factors. Primary is their fundamental and overwhelming importance. Second is the awe-inspiring, majestic manner in which Hashem revealed them to the entire nation of Klal Yisrael. The Revelation was undeniably the most incredible event in the history of the world. It gave birth to Klal Yisrael as a nation - a Torah nation, whose license to nationhood consists of its acceptance of, and adherence to, the Torah. The Torah is a Divine synopsis of our duties toward Hashem and our fellowman. The two work cooperatively. One cannot be a good Jew without maintaining his Torah-dictated relationship with Hashem and his fellowman. The Ten Commandments are all-encompassing. They are unequalled in their simplicity, comprehensiveness and solemnity. They were Divinely engraved on two tablets of stone, which seems anti-climactic. One would think that such an unparalleled charge to Klal Yisrael be transmitted on a more impressive medium.

Horav Moshe Swift, zl, cites a beautiful Midrash that reveals the origin of these stones. They were stones of special origin, not chosen arbitrarily for their task. One tablet was the stone upon which Yaakov Avinu lay down his head. Yaakov gathered stones upon which to lay his head. When they vied with each other to serve as his pillow, Hashem miraculously melded them all into one. It was on that unified stone that Yaakov lay his head, and it was upon that stone, representing harmony, that half of the Ten Commandments was written. The other stone was the one upon which Moshe Rabbeinu sat with his hands held high as Klal Yisrael defended itself against its archenemy, Amalek. This stone, too, represents unity, a harmony of all Klal Yisrael focusing their hearts and minds towards their Father in Heaven. By doing this, they were able to triumph over their enemy.

These two stones symbolize the two types of conflicts which we confront: as individuals and as a nation. The first stone, the stone of Yaakov, originally consisted of twelve stones, reflecting the diversity in Klal Yisrael. Twelve tribes, twelve unique approaches to the Divine - but all focused towards one goal - to serve the Almighty. Only such stones - such conflict - such diversity, can be transformed into one stone, can serve as the parchment upon which the commandments can be inscribed. Unity in diversity - not unity in adversity. They must share a common goal, a common mission, a common objective.

The other stone represents our external conflict, our never-ending challenge from the nations of the world, who have one intention - to do away with us. While some have openly declared their animus, seeking to destroy us, to forever be rid of the Jew, others are more subtle; they only desire to thwart the growth of our religion, to put an end to the Jew's message to the world. In any event, these challenges demand a response. We must not yield; we must go forward and fight our battles, but the Torah must be inscribed upon the stone. Hashem's word must guide and inspire our every move. Both stones, both conflicts, the one from within and the one from without, must have at their beginning the words and profound message, "Anochi Hashem Elokecha", "I am Hashem your G-d."

And this is the law which Moshe set/placed before the Bnei Yisrael. (4:44)

Chapel suggest that the word, "sam", "placed," with the Hebrew letter "sin" alludes to another Hebrew word with a similar sound, whose meaning is completely different. Sam ha'maves and sam ha'chaim, a potion whose effects are either therapeutic or deadly in nature. That is like Torah. To the one who is zocheh, merits, it is a potion that can engender life, that can have far-reaching benefits. For the one who is not zocheh, an encounter with Torah can be fatal. Moreover, Chapel say that it is the actual Torah which is "naasis lo," becomes for him a deadly potion. Imagine, the Torah itself is transformed into a pollutant that will destroy his system.

Horav Refael Hakohen, zl, m'Hamburg explains that there are three levels of Torah study: The zenith of study is manifest by the individual who studies Torah lishma, for its sake. His love of Torah permeates every moment of his devotion to it. The other extreme is displayed by the who studies l'kanter, to dispute, disdain and find areas that he can question and ridicule. The middle level is demonstrated by the one who studies Torah as a medium for achieving honor and fame. His goals are personal, his intentions are self-gratifying. He realizes that one receives true esteem for Torah scholarship; distinction is what one achieves for Torah erudition. He is willing to work for that kavod, honor. That is what is referred to as shelo lishmah.

Thus, we see that one who studies for personal gain stands at a dangerous crossroads. He cannot vacillate back and forth. He must decide either to go to the right and work on his Torah study, so that it becomes lishmah, or go to the left where he will have the opportunity to scorn and disdain. Regarding him, Chazal say, "If he merits and decides to ascend to the level of lishmah, then Torah is therapeutic. If he does not merit, and instead chooses to go left to disparage Torah, then that actual Torah which he has studied until now becomes a sam ha'maves, deadly potion. We see that the Torah that he has studied until now, the Torah that was seemingly studied simply shelo lishmah, with intent only for personal gain, was actually motivated by the wrong reason. The end result reveals the true motive behind his Torah study. Better had he not studied, for he might not have fallen to such a nadir.

Horav Boruch Ber Leibowitz, zl, suggested Chazal's statement as an explanation for Acher, the famous scholar turned apostate, following that path. After all, why didn't the Torah that he had studied protect him? Chazal explain that when he would get up, sifrei minim, books expounding heresy, would

fall down from his lap. In other words, he was studying Torah while simultaneously reading heresy. Yet, we may wonder why the Torah that he studied did not protect him. He was a scholar - so obviously he must have studied quite a bit. Where was the Torah to which he so diligently applied himself? The answer, claims Rav Boruch Ber, is that Torah study that goes hand and hand with heresy is not limud haTorah. On the contrary, he is in a worse situation because he had studied, for now he is manipulating that which he learned to support his distortion of Torah. The Torah has become his fatal potion in more ways than one.

You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart. (6:5)

"With all your heart" is a strong term, but one cannot serve Hashem in any lesser manner. Rashi cites Chazal who interpret "b'chol levavecha" as "bishnei yitzrecha," with your two inclinations, your yetzer tov, good inclination, as well as your yetzer hora, evil inclination. We must endeavor to understand the meaning of loving Hashem with one's good inclination. Certainly, there is nothing challenging about the yetzer tov. It encourages mitzvah observance and good deeds. What quality of the good inclination might be considered a challenge to overcome?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that at times, by following the intimations of his good inclination, an individual can be doing the wrong thing. Let us take the mitzvah of tzedakah, for instance. One feels compelled to contribute to a certain charity - but this charity is not considered halachically charitable. It would be better that he does not lend assistance to this organization. How often do we feel a desire to show compassion to someone who not only does not deserve our help, but help might even be detrimental to him. This applies to every good deed and every good character trait. Just because one's heart tells him that it is "right," he does not have license to act. That is the job of gedolei Yisrael, our Torah leadership. They determine what is correct and what just "seems" to be correct based upon their supreme and unbiased knowledge of Torah. Thus, we see that it might conceivably be more difficult to overcome our yetzer tov than our yetzer hora.

And you shall teach them diligently unto your children. (6:7)

In a departure from the literal translation, Rashi defines "banecha," which is usually translated as "your children," to mean "talmidecha," your students. Why is this? We are taught that the respect for a rebbe, Torah teacher, takes precedence over respecting one's father. One is obligated to show a greater degree of respect towards his rebbe than towards his father. Why would the Torah analogize a rebbe's Torah-teaching to a father and son relationship? Moreover, we find that Elisha referred to his rebbe, Eliyahu Hanavi, as "Avi, Avi," "My father, My father." If a rebbe is to be held in greater esteem, he should have called Eliyahu, "rebbe, rebbe."

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that just as a father bequeaths his natural physical and emotional characteristics to his son, so, too, should a rebbe inspire and influence his students to be like him - naturally. His personality and character, his middos tovos, positive character traits, devotion to and love for Torah and virtue should be innately imbued in his students. The rebbe should be like a father, not only in his love for his students, but also in his influence on them.

When your son will ask you tomorrow saying, "What is the meaning of the testimonies, and the statutes, and the ordinances which Hashem, our G-d has commanded you?" (6:20)

Chazal suggest that this question is asked by the "wise" son of the "four" sons of the Haggadah. We are taught that the Torah "speaks" to each of the four sons, representing four perspectives or types of Jews. Each one has his own focus, each one has his own perspective, analogous with his chosen way of life. What is the distinction of having four sons? It would seem that Chazal are lauding the fact that these "four sons" truly exist.

Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, distinguishes between secular studies -- in which the text is divided according to one's age or level of skill and aptitude - and Torah studies. As one progresses in his knowledge and ability, the text changes and a more challenging, definitive text is used. Torah is different. The same text, the same Torah, the identical Chumash and Rashi studied by the young child will also be used by the Torah scholar. Each person will delve into the same material. In accordance with his level of erudition, each will discover profundities unknown and unattainable to one of lesser ability and knowledge. "Blessed be Hashem, blessed be Him," corresponding to four sons the Torah speaks. The same Torah is studied by various levels of students, each one according to his individual level of learning.

Go say to them: "Return you to your tents." (5:27)

Prior to the Giving of the Torah, the prohibition against intimacy between husband and wife was emphatically expressed: "Do not go near to a woman" (Shemos 19:15). Now, however, when they are permitted to resume their family relationship, it is alluded to with the words, "Return to your tents." Ostensibly, if one applies himself to the statement, the message that the Torah is conveying is apparent. We may wonder why the message is clear and emphatic when the goal is to prohibit, while only hints are provided when the purpose is to give permission. Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, explains that the Torah is addressing human nature. People tend to listen better to a heter, permission/dispensation. We look for heterim, opportunities that permit us to perform activities that heretofore have not been allowed. Our ears are finely tuned to any form of heter. When it comes to issurim, prohibitions, we suddenly become hard-of-hearing. The prohibition must be spelled out, clearly placing emphasis on every aspect. It must give a reason for the prohibition, not allowing for any excuse or dispensation that will allow one to escape the issue. Would it only be that people would listen to issurim that are clearly articulated the way they acquiesce to heterim that are only hinted.

Not because you were more in number than any other people did Hashem set his love upon you, nor choose you (but) because you were the fewest of all peoples. (7:7)

There is something special about being Jewish. There is a uniqueness about our People which Hashem sought and for which He selected us as His nation. It certainly was not because of our size. Chazal add something in their interpretation of the pasuk that sheds light on this uniqueness. In the Talmud Chullin 89a, they say, "You are the fewest; you are the smallest in numbers" - "You are the ones who hold yourselves small." Avraham Avinu said, "I am but dust and ashes." Moshe and Aharon asked, "What are we?" Our People have long realized that the material assets we amass, the riches we possess, are transitory. They have no lasting value unless they are put to good use. We are a people with an attitude - an attitude that declares, "We are nothing by ourselves. Our greatness lies in our relationship with the Almighty."

Our greatest tzaddikim rose from obscurity, from humble beginnings, from roots that some would scorn. But as Horav Moshe Swift, zl, says, "Is not gold extracted from the earth - not from the skies; do not trees grow from the soil - not from the heavens?" Our distinctiveness lies in our ability to negate ourselves and sublimate ourselves to the Almighty. The greatness of the Jew is not in what he possesses, but in who he is. It is not about size, but about attitude.

Let me now cross and see the good land that is on the other side of the Yarden...And Hashem said to me, "It is too much for you! Do not continue to speak to me further about this matter." (3:26,27)

Moshe was not permitted to enter into Eretz Yisrael regardless of the sincerity of his abundant prayers. It just was not to be. The Midrash adds a profound insight into Hashem's refusal to sanction Moshe's request to enter Eretz Yisrael. Rabbi Levi comments, "Moshe Rabbeinu said to Hashem; Ribbono Shel Olam the bones of Yosef Ha'tzaddik shall enter Eretz Yisrael (for burial) and I shall not?" Hashem responded, "He who acknowledged his land merits to be buried there; he who did not acknowledge his land is not buried there." When Yosef was falsely accused of making advances to the wife of Potifera, she said, "See he brought to us a Hebrew man." When Yosef was questioned regarding his origins, he said that he had been kidnapped from the land of Hebrews. He did not deny his Jewishness. On the other hand, Yisro's daughters referred to Moshe as "an Egyptian man (who) rescued us," a description which he did not disclaim. Consequently, Yosef, who was not afraid to acknowledge a connection to his land was buried there. Moshe, who seemingly evaded this connection, was denied burial in Eretz Yisrael.

The Midrash apparently condemns Moshe for not demonstrating greater allegiance to his land. Horav Avraham Kilav, Shlita, suggests a unique interpretation of this Midrash, which presents Moshe in a totally different light. Yosef and Moshe were charged with two disparate missions as Klal Yisrael's leaders. Yosef, as the viceroy of Egypt, was to prepare Bnei Yisrael for the Exodus, so that they would leave with remarkable wealth and material possessions. He was to mold the physical dimension of Klal Yisrael. Moshe was charged with developing Klal Yisrael into a mamleches kohanim v'goi kadosh, a nation of priests and a holy people. He was enjoined to prepare them for their eternal destiny.

Moshe's mission as developer of Klal Yisrael's spiritual stature prompted him to request access to Eretz Yisrael. After all, should he not have taken precedence over Yosef, who focused only on Bnei Yisrael's material issues? Hashem explained to Moshe that it was precisely because he was charged with caring for Klal Yisrael's spiritual destiny that he had no reason to enter Eretz Yisrael. Yosef acknowledged Eretz Yisrael: This means that Yosef viewed the land in a fundamental way. Klal Yisrael were to leave Egypt and go to their Promised Land - Eretz Yisrael. This was his goal, his focus; this is what he achieved. Consequently, he was awarded a place in the land that was an integral part of his mission. Moshe transmitted the Torah specifically in the wilderness, as an indication of the Torah's character; it held no connection to a specific place. The place is not primal in Torah; rather, the law is dominant in Torah. Moshe, therefore, had no concern with the reference to him to as an Egyptian. Moshe would be able to enter Eretz Yisrael only when his mission was accomplished, when the land had reached the pinnacle of holiness, when Yerushalayim was rebuilt and the Bais Hamikdash was functioning in its consummate spiritual majesty. The Bais Hamikdash can attain its spiritual zenith only when Klal Yisrael are similarly at their spiritual summit. After the sin of the Golden Calf, which was followed by the sin of the spies and other incidents demonstrating their spiritual shortcomings, Hashem told Moshe that, regrettably, his mission had not been successfully completed. He would not be

permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael.

And make known to your children and your children's children - the day that you stood before Hashem at Choreiv. (4:9,10)

In the Talmud Kiddushin 30A Chazal infer from this pasuk's command to teach Torah to one's grandchildren that one who does so is considered as if he received the Torah from Har Sinai. This is derived from the juxtaposition of the revelation at Har Sinai to the mitzvah of talmud Torah. In a lecture in Hilchos chinuch, Horav Reuven Grosovsky, zl, explains that one who teaches Torah becomes a shaliach, agent, of Hashem to transmit Torah to future generations. He parallels Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential teacher and lawgiver, who transmitted the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

This unique relationship gives rise to Chazal's statement in the Talmud Nedarim 37A, that those who teach Torah should do so for no charge. Since Torah educators are agents of Hashem who taught the Torah to Moshe "free of charge," they should follow suit.

Being Hashem's agents for transmitting His Torah creates enormous responsibility for the teacher. He must be conscious of his character, degree of spiritual intensity, indeed, his total demeanor. Chazal assert that only if one views his rebbe, Torah teacher, as an angel of G-d should he study Torah from him. After all, since he is Hashem's agent, he should be G-d-like.

Horav Grosovsky continues, to pose the dilemma of the director of a Torah oriented school who is faced with the moral dilemma of choosing between two teachers. One is an experienced pedagogist whose level of yiraas Shomayim is limited. The second teacher, although lacking in experience and pedagogical skills, is a devout yarei Shomayim and talmid chacham. It is obvious whom he should choose. While it may be obvious to Rav Reuven, is it obvious to us? What is the obvious answer? Based upon the premise that a rebbe who teaches Torah is a shaliach of Hashem, his pedagogical skills, although yet unrefined, necessarily take a secondary position to his fear of Hashem. When a person is ill, he chooses a doctor, regardless of his level of competence, not a lawyer. The Chofetz Chaim once said that if a person must choose between two trains which are traveling to a specific place, he should not take the faster train if it is not headed in the right direction. He will obviously select the train that is traveling his way, regardless of its lack of speed or shabby interior. Likewise, while some of us might be inclined to have a greater sense of confidence in the teacher with impressive pedagogical skills, he, however, may not be going in the direction we hopefully seek for our children. Pedagogic competence in Torah is impossible without Yiras Shomayim.

Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes beheld, and lest you remove from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children. (4:9)

We are admonished to retain focus on Torah study, lest we forget any part of it. It is not easy to remember everything that we learn. After all, we are only human, so we forget. A chasid once came before the Chidushei Ha'rim with such a complaint. How was he to be expected to remember everything that he had learned? The Rebbe responded, "Tell me, my dear friend, did you ever forget to do something that your life depended on, such as eating or sleeping?" The chasid responded emphatically, "Of course not!" The Rebbe countered, "Eating and sleeping are functions upon which your life depends. Consequently, you would never forget to do them. Is the Torah any different? Your life also depends upon it. Without Torah you have no life!" Our problem with remembering what we

learn is not associated with memory, but, rather, with our attitude towards the indispensability of Torah to our lives.

Horav Chaim M'Krasna, zl, who was a close confidant of the Baal Shem Tov, once told the story of a man who came to his city. He declared that he would walk across a tightrope suspended across a river, if he would be given one hundred gold coins. As is to be expected, a large crowd assembled at the banks of the river to see the tightrope walker perform this most daring feat. Indeed, even Rav Chaim was among the spectators. He stood in complete awe, solemnly observing every step of this daring exhibition with unusual intensity. His close friends were taken aback at the rav's extraordinary engrossment in the man's bold walk. When they asked him for an explanation, he said, "I looked at the man who was risking his life to walk across a tightrope, and I realized that he was doing this for a bag of gold. He was risking his life for money. Nonetheless, while he was walking across the rope, in danger of losing his life with every step, his mind was completely, totally and unequivocally upon one thing - his next step on the rope. Once he had begun his trek, the money no longer had any value, nothing mattered but his performance. He maintained absolute concentration upon his act. One wrong move, and he would plunge into the river. All of this undivided attention, this total abnegation of any unrelated thought, was directed for one purpose- money. If someone can divorce himself from any extraneous thoughts in order to amass money, how much more so is it demanded of us that we maintain total concentration and devotion when serving Hashem? Nothing should be able to sway our minds, nothing should penetrate and compromise our relationship with the Almighty."

In a thoughtful play on the text of the pasuk, Horav Y. Trunk M'Kutna, zl, infers a practical and timely message. The primary concern of some people is the education of their children. They do everything to provide the finest rebbeim and chavrusos, study partners, for their children. They, regrettably, forget that they still have a responsibility to themselves. They must also study Torah. Indeed, if the father does not learn Torah, he will not appreciate it. The Torah tells us, "Beware for yourself - lest you remove from your heart - and make known to your children." One must realize that it is incorrect to concern oneself only about his children's Torah study, while neglecting his own. For, if he does not learn, his value judgment regarding his child's Torah study will be impaired.

Only beware of yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld, and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children - the day that you stood before Hashem, your G-d, at Choreiv. (4:9,10)

During Matan Torah, the receiving of the Torah, Klal Yisrael reached an unparalleled spiritual level - the level of Adam Ha'rishon before he sinned by eating of the Eitz Ha'daas. This level, however, was short lived. The sin of the Golden Calf mitigated Bnei Yisrael's spiritual stature. After Adam sinned, Hashem asked him, "Ayeca?" , literally translated as, "Where are you?" but interpreted by Chazal as "How were you?" This infers that Adam was constantly to reinforce his original persona in his psyche. He was never to forget what he was, how high he had reached, his spiritual level of refinement and his closeness to Hashem, as well as his presence in Gan Eden. Horav Yitzchak Hirshovitz, zl, posits that this is the underlying meaning of our pasuk. We are cautioned to remember what it was like, who we were, the spiritual zenith to which we had climbed, and the awesome revelation we had experienced at Har Sinai.

The Torah does not admonish us to remember the words that we heard, but rather, the things that we saw. We are to etch the epoch experience of that day into our minds and hearts. While we did

not merit to remain on that level, we must not permit ourselves to forget it. It should serve as an impetus for us, a goal to achieve, an objective to realize. As long as our past stands before us, our future is hopeful. Alas, many of us have relegated the past to antiquity and integrated what we might have become in the future into the culmination of a vacuous present.

This article is provided as part of Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Permission is granted to redistribute electronically or on paper,
provided that this notice is included intact.

info@shemayisrael.co.il

<http://www.shemayisrael.co.il>

Jerusalem, Israel

972-2-532-4191