

inspiration

*inspiring words and
encouraging thoughts*

*Based on talks delivered by
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Dedicated in memory of

ר' יעקב ב"ר חיים יצחק הלוי ז"ל גראסמאן
כ"ה שבט תשס"ד

האשה רייזל בת ר' יצחק גראסמאן
י' כסלו תשס"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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An Urgent Plea

To our great sorrow, it has become publicly known that due to the state of spiritual lowness that holds sway in the world and day by day sinks further and further, many of our youth, and among them members of distinguished G-d fearing families, have left Yeshivos in their teen-age years, and are caught in the pull of the current secular trend, and continue to fall lower and lower to the point of adopting completely a secular lifestyle, turning away from Judaism and throwing off completely the yoke of Torah and Mitzvah. Woe is to them and woe to their fellow Jews who observe their plight and do not know how to return them to the straight path that has been bequeathed to us by our forbearers and spiritual leaders of blessed memory.

For this reason, Rav Shaya Cohen, Shlita, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh, has girded himself with strength and established a place of Torah learning designed specifically for these young men, named **“Torah Academy of Lawrence-Cedarhurst, a project of Priority-1,”** in order to gather in, and bring near those who have stumbled and strayed, and return them to the straight and good path, and this, in an atmosphere of love and patience and understanding of all their problems, in a surrounding of Bnei-Torah and Talmidei Chachomim. He sets them back upon their feet to see the light of Hashem in the ways of life, through the hands of expert teachers and guides who are experienced in such matters.

They have already succeeded and their efforts have some fruit, to return young men to Yeshivos of higher study, to the point of excelling in all areas.

At this time, it is extremely urgent and it is a great obligation

upon every individual, without exception, to assist and financially support those involved in this work, for their work is the work of holiness and the responsibility that it be done is the responsibility of the entire nation.

We hereby turn to whoever has a feeling of concern in his heart, to understand the matter fully, and to come with great assistance and in every form and with all types of efforts, and in the great merit of the saving of our Jewish brethren from spiritual annihilation they will be blessed with all that is good, until we merit the return to our place to the Holy Land through the coming of Moshiach speedily in our day. Amen.

Rav Avraham Yaakov Pam

Rav Yaakov Perlow

Rav Henoch Leibowitz

Rav Avraham Chaim Levine

Rav Shmuel Kaminetzky

Rav Reuven Feinstein

Rav Yosef Yitzchak Feigelstock

א' אב תשנ"ח

אברהם יעקב פאם / יעקב פרלוב / יעקב לייבוויץ / אברהם חיים ליבוביץ / שמעון קאמינעטזקי / רעווען פיינשטיין / יוסף יצחק פייגלשטאק

PRIORITY-1

BRINGING OUT THE INFINITE POTENTIAL IN JEWISH YOUTH

Founded in 1987, Priority-1 has been at the forefront of innovative programs in Jewish education for over a decade. Its mission has always been to facilitate Torah education in areas and populations where it is sorely lacking. Our organization has been instrumental in the establishment of outreach centers in many communities throughout the United States, as well as pioneering a Kiruv seminar movement that has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish men and women. In addition, Priority-1 has developed intensive Kiruv and teacher training programs to aid in our pursuit of spreading Yiddishkeit.

Our **Kollel Ner Yehoshua** was founded in memory of Horav Yehoshua Silbermintz, *zt"l*, for just this purpose - to train energetic young men in

the sensitive art of Kiruv, while completely surrounding them with a learning environment. **Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh** was established as a rigorous, post-high school Yeshiva program, preparing and inspiring Torah educational leadership for the next generation.

One of the most significant and innovative accomplishments of Priority-1 is the **Torah Academy of Lawrence-Cedarhurst**, a unique alternative to the traditional Yeshiva high school. Small group instruction with emphasis on building self-esteem, maturity and teamwork has yielded, in our experience, a young adult better equipped personally and socially to deal with life's challenges. Through the warm and dedicated attention of hard-working teachers and guidance personnel, our students are encouraged in a positive and constructive manner, forming a classroom atmosphere teeming with the singular satisfaction that comes from true accomplishment. Workshops for parents and open sessions with students help bring key issues to the forefront, where they can be discussed in an unfettered and proactive forum. Mentors from Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh afford kids incomparable understanding and encouragement to view the future with hope and pride. This role-modeling structure has proven to be highly effective in our alternative

environment, giving kids the inspiration so vital to their reconnection to Yiddishkeit, as well as to the successful maintenance of healthy lifestyles. Further participation of the community through the development of partnerships with our students will help them gain the confidence and acceptance they rightly deserve.

At Priority-1 we believe that every Jewish child has infinite potential. Our number one priority is finding this potential and bringing it to the surface.



**UNLOCKING THE INFINITE POTENTIAL OF
JEWISH YOUTH IS PRIORITY-1**

Transforming Alienation Into Validation Emptiness Into Fulfillment

Priority-I is a multifaceted educational movement that addresses the needs of youths who risk being lost to the world of Jewish life and learning. Since 1987, Priority-I has helped Jewish youths overcome their feelings of apathy, anger, and disenfranchisement. Success comes by introducing validation and fulfillment into their lives, and by finding and unlocking the power of their innate potential.

Prevention, Detection, and Early Intervention

By advocating and providing the appropriate tools to prevent, detect and intervene, Priority-I's innovative educational programming and comprehensive family support services help parents and educators.

Our programs include:

TORAH ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL - An innovative Yeshiva High School for students not fitting the mainstream yeshiva mold

YESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH – An advanced post-high school yeshiva, whose students serve as mentors for Torah Academy high school students

KOLLEL NER YEHOShUA – An intensive, post-graduate learning and teacher-training program

PRIORITY TRAINING INITIATIVE – A movement to provide and assure appropriate training and continued education for all educators and parents prior to assuming their responsibilities

NER YEHOShUA PRIORITY TEACHING INSTITUTE – Training educators to prevent, or detect and intervene appropriately regarding issues that lead to the alienation and estrangement of Jewish youths from their heritage and community

PRIORITY PARENTING INSTITUTE – Helping parents develop skills to prevent life challenges from becoming at-risk situations, and teaching them how to effectively intervene when problems spiral out of control

PRIORITY CONSULTATION & CRISIS INTERVENTION – Free family, educational and religious counseling services

PRIORITY RESOURCE CENTER – An unrivaled collection of print, audio, and video resources related to improving parenting, teaching, and outreach skills, such as positive parenting, educational methodology and techniques, and child/adolescent psychology

SHABBOS

THE ETERNAL SOURCE OF STRENGTH

Shabbos is the most enigmatic of Jewish religious experiences. Not only can an entire people adhere to such a restrictive doctrine, but the Jewish nation, through the very difficulty of Shabbos observance, has derived such conviction, faith and love for the Creator, that even under the most torturous conditions, survival has been not only possible, but inevitable.

The observance of Shabbos is a testimony to the creation of the world by a single G-d in six days and its completion on the seventh. This testimony was given to us by G-d Himself, as a sign of His special relationship to His people.

It is not just for those lacking in spiritual vision that Shabbos plays an important role. Any Jew, no matter how pious, must constantly reinforce within himself the realization that there is a Creator constantly watching,

judging and protecting him. It is in this capacity, as a reminder of G-d's current activity and concern in our world as well as His activity at its inception, that Shabbos is so vital.

The message of Shabbos is driven home by abstaining from the thirty-nine melachos of physical activity that were performed in the Mishkan. Rabbinic laws also exist as a means of protecting the sanctity of the day. However, the correlation between refraining from these activities and commemorating Hashem's rest remains ambiguous when examined against the fact that Hashem's rest was anything but physical in nature. The "rest" of the seventh day was a state of completion, not relaxation. Only after His creation was complete did Hashem rest, as we say in the Shabbos prayers: "On the seventh day He arose and sat on His Throne of Glory." Hashem existed as the King and Creator of the entire universe only with the completion of creation.

By living in a state of total preparedness and completion on His day of completion, the Jew indelibly imprints upon his mind and heart the belief that Hashem completed the world on the seventh day. The thirty-nine

categories of melacha are constructive acts of preparing and completing. Food to be eaten must be previously harvested and cooked. Garments to be worn must be previously woven and sewn. Even objects needed in one place must be brought there prior to the Shabbos. By emulating Hashem and living in a state of completion, the Jew testifies to the world and to himself the truth of Hashem's creation.

Affecting not just our physical state, abstaining from work on Shabbos succeeds in putting every Jew in a unique and coveted state of mind. Rashi tells us that through the observance of the Shabbos laws we are able to actually feel that the work we have to do is completed. We might toil for six days, but when the Shabbos candles are lit on Friday afternoon, we can transform our world into one of peace and tranquility. So great is this inner calm that the Torah tells us a person awaiting execution should not be killed on Shabbos so that he too should enjoy the serenity of Shabbos before departing from this world. Despite the fear and anguish that no doubt grip a person on the verge of death, the Shabbos is still able to penetrate his heart and put him at ease during his final day on earth. It is in this special state of both physical and mental "rest" that all Jews have

the potential to go far beyond their previously conceived spiritual capabilities.

The real deterrent to spiritual growth on the part of any sincere Jew is the clouding of the mind by the mundane, albeit important, activities of the week. It is only on Shabbos, when no worldly interference is allowed to enter our thoughts, that we are able to expend all our energies on spiritual pursuits. This is why Shabbos has been designated as a day for increased Torah learning and spiritual growth. In fact, the Jew actually lives the greatest lesson of Bitachon when he stops pursuing his livelihood on Shabbos. What greater way to demonstrate his belief that all is from Hashem than by abandoning his livelihood for a full day. It's no wonder that so many Jews anxiously, almost desperately, await the Shabbos, so that they may once again serve G-d with a joy and vibrancy that could not possibly exist during the rest of the week.

This point is vividly illustrated by the following story:

A wealthy German official would often visit the residents of his community to maintain his popularity among the

townspeople. One Friday night, he came to the home of a destitute Jewish family, their tattered clothes and meager meal bearing witness to their desperate situation. The official, expecting the mood of Shabbos to be somber at best, was privileged instead to see a family filled with joy and exuberance befitting the most royal of households. When he heard the old father, so weak after six days of fruitless labor, sing the Shabbos zemiros with a kind of love and dedication he had never seen before, he was inspired to offer this old man anything he wanted. In response, the old man paused suddenly from singing his beloved song, Menucha V'Simcha, and asked the officer if he would straighten out a bent candle that threatened to blow out early and disturb the peace and light of the Shabbos meal.

Within the old man's grasp was the opportunity to alleviate all his pain and suffering but it was incomprehensible to him that anything was lacking in his world of totality and serenity on Shabbos. The only thing to be rectified was the bent candle that he was forbidden by the laws of

Shabbos to move; a bent candle which might disturb his tranquility by burning out too early.

Originally written by a famous poet, this story demonstrates the extent by which one can feel the serenity of Shabbos. Even as we face hardship and uncertainty during the week, on Shabbos we can experience such completeness that all we can ask for is more Shabbos. Of course, this poet did not know that even asking a non-Jew to fix a bent candle is forbidden by the laws of Shabbos, but the message of the story is still true: observing Shabbos has the ability to put us in a unique state of mind. It is a state of mind that has us feeling that our lives lack absolutely nothing and longing for that feeling not to end.

TZEDAKA

KEY TO THE GATES OF MERCY

“On Rosb Hashbana it shall be written and on the Day of Atonement it shall be sealed. How many are to pass on, how many are to be born... Who shall live and who shall die...”

In what is quite possibly the most moving and dramatic prayer of the High Holiday services, the inherent frailty of man is brought into sharp focus, causing even the most stoic of individuals to experience the inexorable fear associated with a confrontation with one’s own mortality.

The precious gift of life, a commodity taken for granted more than any other, cannot be guaranteed. Great wealth is powerless to acquire even a second of added existence, and a clean bill of health from the doctor’s office does not ensure longevity. It is Hashem alone who judges mankind

and His verdict is utterly concealed from man's view.

Yet, the G-d of Justice is a G-d of Mercy and in His benevolence He has given man the means to control his own destiny, to become a partner in determining his very fate. The epilogue of this most solemn prayer is one of hope and inspiration, for it reveals the existence of three keys that unlock the gates of mercy: "But Teshuva (Repentance), Tefila (Prayer) and Tzedaka (Charity) can avert the severe decree."

So man, grateful for the opportunity to merit a reprieve from harsh judgment, sets his mind and heart to the task at hand. Three, only three small hills to climb for yet another year of life and prosperity. With no alternative options available, it would seem to be a foregone conclusion that each and every believing Jew, sincerely concerned with his and his family's future, would strive for and achieve his goal of Teshuva, Tefila and Tzedaka.

Sadly, more often than not, man falls far short of his intended destination. Teshuva, Tefila and Tzedaka are not mere hills but rather formidable and imposing mountains that defiantly challenge the essence of man's courage

and integrity.

Teshuva, literally translated, means “return.” It is insufficient to merely regret the iniquitous act performed against G-d, for that only succeeds in demonstrating the extent of remorse, not change. In order to consummate a true “return” one must reach a state of being that will prevent a recurrence of the same wrongdoing, should the opportunity to sin once again present itself. Therefore, only Hashem knows whether or not a person has accomplished real “Teshuva” in his Yom Kippur prayers (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva), for only Hashem can gaze into the heart and see if indeed this transformation has occurred. So not only is Teshuva a most difficult endeavor, it leaves the “returnee” unsure as to whether his Teshuva is genuine enough to alter or defer a harsh decree against him.

Tefila is described by the Torah as “*Avodas Halev*,” a duty or service of the heart. While all commandments are measured by Hashem for the degree of feeling and sincerity that accompany them, Tefila is by definition, exclusively a process of the heart. Thus, Tefila seems to fall within the same category as Teshuva, in that it can only be evaluated by

Hashem. The mere mouthing of words is by no means security that the standard of *Avodas Halev* has been reached.

While it is imperative that every Jew strive for true Teshuva and Tefila, to fail in the performance of the third category, Tzedaka, would be virtually tantamount to criminal neglect. Specific guidelines governing the laws of charity do exist and therefore it is a mitzvah that can be measured and evaluated. One need not struggle with doubt and uncertainty as to whether “Tzedaka” has been achieved. One need only study the law and contribute the necessary amount of Maaser to the types of worthy causes outlined in the Shulchan Aruch. With so much at stake, literally a matter of life and death, it would be folly to ignore the golden opportunity presented by the Almighty, to merit the promise of life that Tzedaka assures.

The following essays outline the requisite of giving Maaser, a tenth of one’s income, to Tzedaka. If this formula is adhered to, one can be confident that the blessing “*Tzedaka Tatzil MiMaves* – Charity saves one from death” (Mishlei 10:11) shall be granted to him.

A Responsibility and an Investment

Giving Tzedaka is popularly perceived as an act of benevolence toward those in need or in disfavor. It is viewed as something an individual does beyond the call of duty or perhaps it is the response of those who, being pained at the misfortune of others, empathize with their less fortunate brethren by conferring upon them some of the material benefits that they enjoy. Although taken within this context, the individual who gives charity certainly demonstrates a nobility of soul and character, to the Torah-oriented Jew the concept of giving charity includes an added and more meaningful dimension. Giving charity is more than a reflection of one's generosity; it is an educational experience that beckons an individual to the fundamental truth that he lives in a world that belongs to G-d. We are simply the executors of the Divine plan to confer upon others the same kindness that Hashem has showered upon us. The world and all its components are Hashem's and man receives only to give to others and further the sanctification of His name. The heightened awareness of this fact will foster a social climate permeated with a feeling of love and concern for our fellow human beings. A person is reminded

that he does not live in a vacuum. It is not only his needs that become the focus of his energies. He earns a livelihood not only for his family but also for neighbor's family because, after all, we are all the children of G-d, and who would willingly close his hand to one of G-d's children in need? If we become sensitized to the fact that we are all G-d's children, we will take heed to respect the rights and feelings of our fellow man in order to please our Divine Father in heaven.

The Talmud (Bava Basra 10a) relates a fascinating dialogue between Rabbi Akiva and one of the tyrannical Roman rulers under whom many Jews had been mercilessly subjected. With scathing cynicism the Caesar asked Rabbi Akiva, "Why do Jews take care of the needs of their poor? If a king banished one of his subjects and decreed that hardship and pain be inflicted upon him, which loyal subject would dare extend him compassion or assistance? If G-d has ordained that certain individuals live deprived lives, how dare the Jews endeavor to alter His Divine master plan?" Rabbi Akiva immediately responded, "If a father were to expel his son from his home, wouldn't he nonetheless feel profoundly indebted to one who offers his incorrigible son food and shelter? We are all G-d's

children,” continued Rabbi Akiva, “and we only comply with the Divine plan when we answer the pleas of those who seek our help.”

In the Book of Devarim, when Moshe exhorts the Jews to organize and establish a judicial system within the local communities of Israel, he proclaims, “*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof* — you shall surely pursue justice.” Interestingly, the word “tzedek” in this instance denotes justice, yet “tzedek” is the root of the word “Tzedaka”, commonly understood to denote something beyond the call of duty, and not simply justice in its strictest sense. The truth is, however, that the acts of charity we perform are in fact the justice that legitimizes our claim to the possessions and wealth we enjoy. We are faithfully acknowledging the will of our Creator to share with others what He has bestowed upon us. Performing the mitzvah with this perspective will inspire and uplift a charitable benefactor and spur him on to continue his pious and generous deeds.

Give and You Will Receive

Rabbinic literature tells us that poverty is a phenomenon that escapes no one. This means that even the wealthiest of families will eventually be

stricken and left to the mercy of others. If it doesn't occur to the grandfather, it will undoubtedly occur to his grandson or perhaps his great-grandson. It is a cycle that affects all, knowing no biases. Our Rabbis assure us that those who give Tzedaka will ensure that years later a needy relative will be the beneficiary of someone else's generosity. The great Rabbinic commentators point out that the word "*Venasnu*," meaning they shall give, referring to the obligation of the Jews to contribute to the Holy Tabernacle, is spelled the same way whether written forward or backward. The idea thus expressed is that an act of giving actually results in an act of receiving. Aside from the eternal bliss earned from the great mitzvah of giving charity, one's descendants gain the help they need in difficult times, becoming the recipients of goodwill because of the thoughtfulness of their ancestors. It is in this vein that the Talmud (Shabbos 151) relates that the great Rav Chiya would remind his wife to offer food and alms to the poor, and assure her that the kindness that she displayed would alleviate the difficult times that might befall her children and grandchildren.

King Munbaz, a king during the Talmudic era, once spent the entire royal

fortune plus all his inherited wealth during years of famine to help the needy. His family approached him to question his actions. They protested, “Your forefathers built up this magnificent treasury and you are squandering all the money!” He answered, “My forefathers had a worldly treasure; my treasure is a spiritual one. Their treasure sees no fruition. My treasure has its rewards. They saved money while I save souls. They saved for others while I make a treasury for myself. My forefathers made a treasury in this world. I am preparing a treasury in the world to come.”
(Bava Basra 11)

“The law says that Tzedaka is a high duty and the repudiation of this duty can bring serious consequences, even death. Nobody becomes poor through Tzedaka and G-d has proclaimed, ‘Never will Tzedaka become the cause of any grave suffering or misfortune.’ To him who has compassion for the poor, G-d will also show compassion; as you wish G-d to hearken to your prayers, so shall you hearken the prayers of the poor. Give, and neither to your children nor to your grandchildren, not even to your remotest descendants will help be refused when they are in

need, for riches and poverty come round in their circle and there is never a whole succession of generations that entirely escapes poverty. It is your finest deed. As long as you practice it, misery and suffering, hunger and death will not come near you. Even the custom of vowing Tzedaka in memory of the dead makes sense. If they have been charitable in heart and deed and you feel yourself spurred on to good works by their memory, you are enabling them to do good even after their passing; and by continuing their good work, which had come to an end, you render them immortal. The surest way to get rich is to do good with that which is in your keeping, for then G-d is glad to make you the custodian of His gifts.”

(Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch - Horeb)

It has been suggested that to strengthen the observance of this important mitzvah, groups be organized to meet each month, where one can attend lectures and hear words of inspiration concerning Tzedaka. If only a small nucleus, of a few dedicated individuals, would commit themselves to

regular attendance to these groups and at their conclusion write out their charity checks for ten percent of their income to the charity of their choice, they would generate within the Jewish community a new wave of commitment to the holy task of caring for the needs of our people.

The laws dealing with giving charity in its most precise and halachically prescribed manner are very complex, varying with a multitude of situations that may arise. The best approach is to calculate and set aside 10% of one's income for Tzedaka, commonly known as Maaser.

The following guidelines and suggestions for properly determining and distributing Maaser funds have been taken from "Ahavas Chesed," the monumental classic of the great Chofetz Chaim that deals with laws of charity. They should prove useful for those who have not yet had the opportunity to give proper time and attention to the study of these laws.

How To Fulfill One's Obligation

1) At the time one undertakes to observe the mitzvah of giving Maaser, he should declare that he is not binding himself to any vow. This will save him from a Torah transgression if he inadvertently miscalculates or

misappropriates his Maaser funds.

2) To begin, one first sets aside 10% of his total capital for Maaser. After that, he separates 10% from all future earnings. Those who begin by setting aside 10% from only their profits, without first separating 10% from their present assets, are not properly fulfilling their obligation. For individuals finding it difficult to put out 10% of their capital, it is advisable to set aside that money for interest-free loans for those in financial straits. He may even lend the money to himself on the condition that should someone in need approach him, he can borrow the amount he has lent to himself and advance it to the needy individual. However, there are some stricter opinions that permit this practice only if this condition was expressly stipulated when he originally began separating Maaser.

3) In general, it is advisable to distribute $\frac{2}{3}$ of one's Maaser for charitable gifts and $\frac{1}{3}$ for interest-free loans.

4) One should keep a meticulous tally to assure an accurate record of the Maaser funds he is obligated to dispense.

Order Of Distribution

1) Poor relatives take precedence over strangers. As such, one may allocate Maaser funds for his older children, whom he no longer is obligated to support, if they have no means of supporting themselves. He may do so even if he can provide for them from other sources.

3) If his own relatives are not in need, it is preferable to use Maaser funds to support those who study Torah.

4) Maaser funds can be used to enable a groom and bride to marry, if they could not do so otherwise. The same applies to a Bris Milah or the purchasing of seforim to be lent to others who otherwise could not afford them. You must indicate that these books were bought with Maaser funds so that the donor's heirs cannot claim them after his death.

5) According to all opinions, one may buy the right to be called to the Torah or any other honor, if the money will be used for the needs of the poor. According to the Aruch HaShulchan, he may even do so if the funds will be used for the Bais HaMedrash or those who serve it.

6) One may not deduct tuition payments for his children's education from Maaser funds. However, donating Maaser funds to defray the tuition expenses of the needy is permitted and considered a great mitzvah.

7) Some authorities declare that although the contribution of 1/5 of one's earnings is regarded as exemplary, but not strictly required, this applies only where there are no immediate cases of poor people in need of food and clothes. However, if one knows of widows, orphans or the like, one is duty bound by law to separate 1/5 of his possessions. This is the opinion of the Vilna Gaon. This responsibility is only in effect if the donor is capable of contributing such a proportion of his earnings. One need not experience undue hardship to give this second tenth.

As we perform our charitable acts with a newfound sense of enthusiasm and purpose, let us remember the eternal words of the prophet Isaiah, "ציון במשפט תפדה ושביה בצדקה" – Zion shall be redeemed with justice and they that return to her with the merit of Tzedaka."

THE SEFER TORAH

The Sefer Torah is referred to by the Torah as “The Testimony.” Rashi explains that it serves as a testimony between G-d and the Jewish people that He commanded them the laws therein.

How does the Sefer Torah testify to its own authenticity? The answer is simple: To the Jew it bears real testimony. When we merely gaze upon the Sefer Torah, it touches something within us powerfully. It is as if the millions of people who actually witnessed that fateful day at Mount Sinai thousands of years ago were to come and offer sworn testimony of its authenticity. It penetrates the Jewish heart with unparalleled confidence in the truth of its eternal message.

This is the power of the Sefer Torah and the extent of its influence upon us. Throughout the ages, its mere presence has inspired and strengthened the Jew as a written testimony that G-d Himself has commanded him the

Mitzvos. It has inspired him to limitless spirituality and helped overcome the most insurmountable difficulties.

The Torah instructs every Jewish man to write a Sefer Torah. If he cannot write one, he must have one written for him or at least purchase a Torah. Traditionally, everyone is given the opportunity to fulfill this great mitzvah when a Torah is dedicated to a community institution, either by finishing a letter or word or by purchasing the same.

Interestingly, the Halacha indicates that even if one has inherited a Sefer Torah from his father, he is nonetheless obligated to write another Torah himself. Imagine a person inheriting a Torah from his father. Imagine that this Torah was a family heirloom, passed down from father to son for many generations. With it, this person inherits the knowledge that his ancestors believed in these same truths that he is living today. Could any Sefer Torah bear a more powerful message of authenticity?

Yet, the Torah, in its infinite wisdom, tells us that even under such circumstances, the greatest effect will only come to this person when he personally writes one for himself. When the Jew writes or purchases a

part of the Torah himself, his personal involvement expands the ability of its testimony to affect him.

The Torah is read in public every Shabbos, Monday and Thursday, so as not to allow three days to pass without hearing its words. The Talmud tells us that we derive this practice from an incident that took place just as the Jewish people left Egypt. After having seen the greatest of miracles in Egypt and the Red Sea, three days passed and they found no water to drink. These great people, who had achieved such spiritual heights through the miracles they had witnessed, began to complain to Moshe about the lack of water. For people of their stature this was considered improper.

The Rabbis indicate that the cause of their improper action was that for those three days they were without Torah study (which is compared to water). Therefore, the Rabbis instituted that the Torah should be publicly read on Shabbos, Monday and Thursday so that three consecutive days never pass without hearing its words.

The people who witnessed the greatest revelations of all times and whose belief was so complete, were not strong enough to withstand the effects of three days without Torah. A fixed schedule had to be established to constantly reinforce its lessons. We see that the few lines that we read from the Torah every week seem to carry more meaning than even experiencing the greatest miracles.

The words of Torah that we hear and study call out to us with the message of Sinai and sustain in us an unswerving loyalty to our Creator. The words of the Sefer Torah can reach the Jewish heart in a way that nothing else can.

THE SECRET OF TRUE HAPPINESS

by an anonymous author

I live in the land of Disney, Hollywood and year-round sun. You may think people in such a glamorous, fun-filled place are happier than others. If so, you have some mistaken ideas about the nature of happiness.

Many intelligent people still equate happiness with fun. The truth is that fun and happiness have little or nothing in common. Fun is what we experience *during* an act. Happiness is what we experience *after* an act. It is a deeper, more abiding emotion.

Going to an amusement park or ball game are fun activities that help us relax, temporarily forget our problems and maybe even laugh. But they do not bring happiness, because their positive effects end when the fun ends.

I have often thought that if celebrities have a role to play, it is to teach us that happiness has nothing to do with fun. These rich, glamorous individuals have constant access to upscale parties, fancy cars and expensive homes, everything that spells “happiness.” But in memoir after memoir, they reveal the unhappiness hidden beneath all their fun: depression, alcoholism, drug addiction, broken marriages, troubled children, and profound loneliness.

Yet people continue to believe that the next more glamorous party, more expensive car, more luxurious vacation, or fancier home will do what all the other parties, cars, vacations and homes have not been able to do.

The way people cling to the belief that a fun-filled, pain-free life equals happiness actually diminishes their chances of ever attaining real happiness. If fun and pleasure are equated with happiness, then pain must be equated with unhappiness. But, in fact, the opposite is true: *More times than not, things that lead to happiness involve some pain.*

As a result, many people avoid the very endeavors that are the source of true happiness. They fear the pain inevitably brought by such things as

marriage, raising children, professional achievement, religious commitment, civic or charitable work or self-improvement.

Ask a bachelor why he resists marriage, even though he finds dating to be less and less satisfying. If he's honest, he will tell you that he is afraid of making a commitment. For commitment is, in fact, quite painful. The single life is filled with fun, adventure and excitement. Marriage has such moments, but they are not its most distinguishing features.

Similarly, couples that choose not to have children are deciding in favor of painless fun over painful happiness. They can dine out whenever they want, travel wherever they want and sleep as late as they want. Couples with infant children are lucky to get a whole night's sleep or a three-day vacation. I don't know any parent who would choose the word *fun* to describe raising children.

But couples that decide not to have children never experience the pleasure of hugging them or tucking them into bed at night. They never know the joys of watching a child grow up or of playing with a grandchild.

Of course I enjoy doing fun things. I like to play racquetball, joke with kids (and anybody else) and I probably have too many hobbies. But these forms of fun do not contribute in any real way to my happiness. More difficult endeavors – writing, raising children, creating a deep relationship with my wife, trying to do good in the world – will bring me more happiness than can ever be found in “fun,” that least permanent of things.

Understanding and accepting that true happiness has nothing to do with fun is one of the most liberating realizations we can ever come to. It liberates time: now we can devote more hours to activities that can genuinely increase our happiness. It liberates money: buying that new car or those fancy clothes that will do nothing to increase our happiness now seems pointless. And it liberates us from envy: we now understand that those rich and glamorous people we were so sure are happy, because they are always having so much fun, actually may not be happy at all.

The moment we understand that fun does not bring happiness, we begin to lead our lives differently. The effect can be, quite literally, life-transforming.

WHAT CAN I DO?

We live in very unusual times. So many of our people have drifted from Yiddishkeit, due to the lack of proper Jewish education, yet so many are coming back to Judaism that the terminology “Teshuva Movement” is appropriate.

This phenomenon is promised to us in the Torah (Devarim 4: 25-31) and in truth it almost defies any explanation other than, “It says so in the Torah, so therefore it is.”

The need is great; so many of our people are the victims of assimilation, intermarriage, missionaries, and cults, but the extent of the Teshuva Movement proves that so much can be done. Shortly before his passing, Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zt”l*, wrote that today, since we see such an amazing return to Torah, we are *obligated* to do everything possible to influence our not-yet-committed brethren. Since it is definitely within our power to

do so, the halacha of *arvus* (responsibility for one's fellow Jew) therefore applies to obligate us to help our lost brothers and sisters return to Yiddishkeit.

Knowing the halacha that we all have an obligation to reach out to our unaffiliated brothers and sisters inevitably evokes the question, “What can I do? I am not an outreach professional, I am not trained, I don't know what to say and I am afraid that I won't know how to answer all of the questions that I will be asked.”

The following is a brief attempt to deal with this concern.

As a layman interested in assisting the Kiruv process, your goal should be to bring your fellow Jew into contact with a mentor in an ongoing program of Torah study, or to eventually see to it that he or she attends a long-weekend Kiruv Seminar. These seminars, developed by Arachim in Israel and presented by a number of different organizations in the U.S., have brought tens of thousands of Jews throughout the world back to a life of Torah observance. They are the primary way to inspire an amazing desire to embrace Judaism anew.

There are three steps along the way:

- Establish a relationship and a friendship.
- Try to make your friend feel comfortable with religious people and practices.
- Help your friend develop an appreciation for the importance of Torah (depth, relevance, truth, wisdom, etc.)

When these goals are achieved to some extent, the next step is to arrange an ongoing Torah study situation for this individual. At that point your responsibility is to simply maintain your friendship. If we truly wish to accomplish in this area, Hashem will undoubtedly crown our efforts with great success.

The following points should be kept in mind while you are involved in this process:

1. Just be yourself - warm, friendly and genuinely concerned for the other person's welfare, not just his religious affiliation.
2. When some type of relationship develops, invite the person for

a Shabbos or a Shabbos meal.

3. Just make him or her feel comfortable.

4. Don't push for observance.

5. Don't rush the process. It takes time.

6. Don't sermonize, preach, or try to convince him or her of anything.

7. Show respect for his views and try not to argue.

8. Offer brief explanations of what you are doing.

9. You are not expected to know all the answers to his or her questions so don't be embarrassed to say, "I don't know, but we can ask someone or look it up."

11. Explain that since you have full confidence in the truth of Torah, questions are not debilitating, but you too would enjoy more insights.

12. Remember again and again that your goal is not to make him instantly religious, but rather to be a friend and make him

comfortable so that eventually he will appreciate the importance of Torah enough to want to learn further.

13. After a friendship is established over a period of time and some degree of comfort develops, brief attempts to inspire him with the importance of Torah are appropriate. Divrei Torah which show the beauty or sensitivity of Torah to man's relationship with his fellow man should be helpful.

15. It can also be useful to show insights from the Torah that show the great wisdom or relevance of its teachings in light of modern society.

16. The more the use of these insights is directed at other people present, rather than your not-yet-religious friend, the more effective they can be.

17. When you have the opportunity to share Torah insights and you see some sign of respect or interest, gently suggest that you are willing to study with him on a regular basis (if you feel properly equipped). If you do not feel properly equipped, you

can recommend a convenient class, *chavrusa* or outreach program with a sensitive mentor.

19. You should make available appropriate literature, tapes, videos, etc., to expand his Jewish knowledge (see list below).

20. Even if you are not successful in getting your friend to learn more, you must remain friends. You never know when the right moment may arrive and at that time your friendship may be the crucial link between him and Yiddishkeit.

21. Don't wait for someone to assign a person to you — go out and begin the process yourself. You will be amazed at how receptive not-yet-religious people are to a Shabbos invitation or the like.

There are some additional ideas that can be used either to stimulate interest or to respond to an expression of interest on the part of your unaffiliated acquaintances.

- An evening of study and discussion in your home or office, with a specially trained dynamic teacher (see note).
- A gift of a book, video or the like (see list below).
- Provide his phone number to an organization equipped to call him and follow up or, alternatively, give him an address and phone number where he can get further information. (This is sometimes appropriate when you meet someone only for a short time and it is impractical to develop an extended relationship.)

Priority-1 can help anyone get involved in Kiruv by providing information, advice, tapes and resources to help with the process. Contact our office at 516-295-5700 for more information or visit www.priority-1.org for online resources.

PLEASE NOTE: Sending people to an Arachim-style Seminar should be a primary goal since they have the most powerful track record of influencing its participants to become observant. A home study group, where you invite some not-yet-religious friends to meet with a dynamic, specially trained mentor, is probably the best way to spark interest in the Seminar. Priority-1 can provide such speakers or train qualified people to become home-study mentors.

RECOMMENDED READING

The following books are appropriate for a non-observant person and can also be helpful to religious people guiding not-yet-religious friends:

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>
Prophecy & Providence	Sokolovsky
My Friends We Were Robbed (Ch. 11 & 12)	Zohar
Final Resolution (Ch. 2 & 10)	Allswang
Permission to Believe/Receive	Kelemen
Fingerprints on the Universe	Pollack
A Tzaddik In Our Time	Raz
Pathways	Wolbe

Life's Difficulties

Dear Friend,

Needless to say, I was very saddened and disturbed by the problems that you shared with me. They certainly are enough to upset anyone, and together not only pose formidable difficulties, but also cause great pain.

We know that everything is from Hashem and everything that Hashem does is for the good. We also know that the problems and challenges of life are all part of a process spurring us on to greater Bitachon. This Bitachon can then turn situations around dramatically, and in the merit of our enhanced Bitachon and deepened relationship with Hashem, we can merit even greater kindness and assistance from Him.

Maybe a few words about suffering are in order. After that we can suggest to Hashem that we have benefited from the difficulties and then turn our Bitachon to Him to get us out of these problems.

The challenges of pain and suffering fall into two broad categories: The irrevocable finality of tragedy, and the pain and suffering of a work in progress. The ability to see Hashem's goodness and kindness in the former enhances our capacity to rely on Him in the latter. The more deeply and thoroughly we recognize His love in the most tragic of situations, the greater our awareness of His loving kindness, which helps us to rely on Him that He will extricate us from life's most difficult challenges.

About two days after we spoke, a young man, a teenager, approached me with a question. For about a week before a snowboarding trip, he prayed to Hashem that he should not get hurt. However, he did get into a painful accident. "How does Hashem expect me to continue Davening to Him, if He does not show me some response?" he questioned. We know that Hashem is the *שומע תפלה*, the One who hears and answers our prayers. We also know that *תפלה עושה מהצה*, prayer always accomplishes at least a partial result. Yet, when we pray with a specific request, and we should do so, and we do not see any apparent response, it can be discouraging. Especially when one Davens over and over again and there are still no

visible results, it can become more and more difficult to continue. When these feelings are compounded by a sense that one really trusted that Hashem was going to help him, and still he is left disappointed, it becomes a serious challenge to his faith to be able to continue praying and trusting.

Yet, this challenge seems to be an integral ingredient to the Tefila/Bitachon human development system. The perseverance in prayer and trust, despite the apparent lack of results, spurs one onto even higher and higher levels of closeness to Hashem, bringing the relationship to new heights and deeper feelings of hope and reliance.

This lesson is even relevant after the fact, as in the case of the young man's accident. Bitachon and Tefila are part of an infinite continuum. The more we develop and grow in them, the more assured the results, since their purpose in the first place was to bring us closer to Hashem.

Our Rabbis in the Medrash express this concept in the following comments: "Why were our matriarchs, Sara, Rivka, Rochel, and even for a while, Leah, not able to bear children? Because Hashem craves the prayers

of the righteous.” It certainly does not mean that Hashem uses their prayers for His need. It can only be for the benefit that the prayer affords those who Daven. It seems that Tefila performed again and again has a profoundly beneficial impact on the one who prays. It brings the person ever closer to Hashem regardless of the results.

A question arises: Why didn't Hashem arrange that Sara, for example, could pray until she was 60, have a child, and then spend the next 30 years thanking Hashem for answering her prayers after so many years of being childless, instead of praying until she reached 90 years of age and then having a child? It seems that Tefila in need brings us closer to Hashem than Hallel, thanks for granting our requests. When we are in need, we keep at it again and again, until we see some results. With Hallel, first we are very thankful, and then as time goes on we tend to forget the kindness that was given us. It therefore cannot enhance our relationship with Hashem as much as does prayer in need.

We know that the Tefila that is most irresistible to Hashem, נביטול, so to speak, is the Tefila born of an intimately close relationship with Him.

Therefore, the Tefila that must be repeated over and over again to bring us closer to Him is also more powerful and effective. So it may well be that the continued repeated Tefillos are not only necessary to bring us closer to Him, but the enhanced quality of the latter Tefillos may be the merit needed to achieve our difficult goals.

A similar dynamic applies to the system of Bitachon, placing our total and complete trust in Hashem that He will come through for us and not disappoint those who rely solely on Him. Sometimes, we really feel trust in Him and confidence that He will not let us down, and yet, nothing seems to be happening. One of many such situations comes to mind. I remember an occasion when I needed \$30,000 for a payroll with absolutely not more than a day deadline. I recall not being concerned that day, because I felt an unusual surge of Bitachon and confidence that Hashem was not going to let me down. By the next day, nothing had happened. I was perplexed. I never felt such strong, real Bitachon, and yet, nothing happened. I finally had no choice but to try to borrow the money. The individual I called on had only \$10,000 to lend for one week. When I explained to him my confusion as to why my Bitachon was being

disappointed, a realization hit me. It went like this: If I did not really have true Bitachon, rather, I was fooling myself in thinking that I did, then the question of why there was no response falls away. I really don't have true trust and confidence in Hashem. If, however, my Bitachon is, in fact, more real than ever before, then I bet that Hashem is giving me an even harder test to force me to an even higher level of Bitachon.

With this inspiration, I reviewed every insight and concept about Bitachon that came to mind for seven minutes, to strengthen even further strengthen my level of Bitachon. I then entered my office. In walked a young man who was dealing with some merchandise that the yeshiva had inherited. He informed me that he just closed a deal with a company in another city to purchase \$30,000 worth of our merchandise. They would mail a bank check for \$20,000 to arrive early the next morning, and would pay the remaining \$10,000 as soon as they received the merchandise. This is unheard of in normal business dealings. I borrowed the \$10,000 for one week, and they paid the rest in time.

In short, if we recognize Hashem's loving kindness even in the face of irrevocable tragedy, we can come to rely on that loving kindness in the face of crises and challenges. This can allow us to continue to grow in sincerity of Tefila and true Bitachon.

The elevated levels of Tefila and Bitachon can undoubtedly serve as a powerful merit, to be able to witness the positive answers to our Tefillos and the reward for our Bitachon, in the fulfillment of our hearts' desires.

With best wishes for continued heartfelt Tefila, and complete trust in Hashem leading to the fulfillment of our hearts' desires.

Sincerely,

Your Friend

Would you like to have a powerful device that you can use to help you really enjoy life, be more successful financially and socially, and assist you in developing your *ruchnius*?

Seven qualities that Hashem has that ensures our trust in Him:

1. Hashem loves you.
2. Hashem is with you wherever you happen to be, and He is ready to help you.
3. Hashem is stronger and smarter than everyone in the world (and can find solutions to problems that seem impossible to solve).
4. Hashem knows what is best for you, even better than you know yourself.
5. Just as Hashem has helped you many times in the past, He will help you again now.
6. Nobody can do anything to help or harm you other than Hashem, who has total control over everything.

7. Hashem wants and seeks to do Chessed, more than the most wonderful, kindhearted and generous person you can imagine.

If you could picture a person with these seven qualities, you would feel quite secure being with him, and all your worries and concerns would melt away. In reality, the greatest person cannot be perfect in even one of these qualities, but Hashem is perfect in all of them.

אין עוד מלבדו!

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Based on Chovos HaLevavos, Shaar Habitachon.

TRAGEDY

We are a nation experienced in tragedy. Our people have suffered the severest pain and persecution on both the personal and communal level, yet miraculously, we have endured, persevered and even flourished, despite these brutal conditions. Should not the reaction of a constantly suffering people have been one of demoralization, of rejection, of shattered faith? The answer to this question captures the very essence of Klal Yisroel with its unique understanding of the meaning and purpose of life and its special relationship with the Almighty.

In the Song of Songs (Chapter 5), King Shlomo describes the saga of the rejected lover seeking to reunite with his beloved. “Open the door, my beloved.” He pleads to be allowed entrance but is rejected, “I have removed my garment, must I get up and get dressed? I have washed my feet, must I get up and dirty them?” Despite his most ardent pleas, the

woman remains cold, aloof and unmoved. Yet, suddenly, she observes his hand through a crack in the door and immediately her emotions stir. She rises from her bed and hastens to let him in.

We know that the entire Song of Songs is analogous to the relationship between Klal Yisroel and the Almighty. The Ramban interprets the previous episode in the following manner: The prophets came to Klal Yisroel and pleaded with them to repent their evil ways. Despite all their exhortations, the people turned a deaf ear and showed no response. However, when Hashem causes Klal Yisroel to suffer, there is a definite reaction and a return to righteous ways.

It would seem at first glance that the analogy here is a bit strained. How can the appearance of the man's hand through a crack in the door be compared to an act of punishment meted out by G-d to His children?

If we analyze the following sentence of the Psalms of King David, the analogy becomes clear: "Your staff and your cane, they will comfort me." A stray lamb, separated from its flock, alone, bewildered and frightened, suddenly feels the stinging staff of its master upon its back. At that very

moment, despite the piercing pain, the lamb feels the greatest comfort. My master is here! I am not alone! Despite the pain and suffering inflicted upon us by Hashem, it is that very same pain that strengthens our knowledge of His presence. We recognize His need to reprimand us for our wrongdoings, and, therefore, we realize that the punishment is a revelation of His existence and manifestation of His concern. It is for this reason that we respond. Not out of fear, but rather, out of love.

This approach is what has sustained us through centuries of bloodshed and torture. However, it still remains to be explained how we, as a people, have been able to reach this astounding level of perception. How, as a nation, have we been able to see through the clouds of agonizing pain and focus on the reality of our suffering?

Man lives in an imaginary world. He believes that the pleasures in which he indulges himself will last forever. The pursuit of gratification is his overwhelming concern, leaving little or no room for an honest examination of the reality of his existence. The truth is, of course, that life is just a fleeting moment in eternity and even that short period of

existence is filled with difficulty and pain. The reality is that the soul is immortal, that a future does exist, and that this life is no more than a corridor to the World to Come. It is man's lack of control, his inability to curb and harness his passions, that distorts his grasp of reality and leads him to a life of false fulfillment and mistaken values.

The people of Israel are different. As the nation that embraced the Torah and as those who adhere to its precepts and ideals, we do not live under the haze of illusion. The Torah outlines for us a life that calls for the subjugation of desires. With the Torah we avoid being enslaved by our passions, and, therefore, we can free our minds to objectively pursue a life of significance and meaning. The Torah is the heartbeat and soul of our people. Its message as to the purpose of life is aflame within us. It is for this reason that when tragedy strikes we are not defeated. The pain and suffering help us focus on the reality of life and intensify the fires of faith with a reevaluation of our actions and a reassessment of our life's purpose, followed by a renewed commitment to the Torah and Mitzvos.

Our Rabbis tell us (Smachos, Chapter 8) that Rabbi Akiva lost his beloved son, Rabbi Shimon. When Rabbi Akiva rose to deliver the eulogy and beheld the great assembly of people, he was overwhelmed with emotion and proclaimed, “Do not think it is easy to bury a child. But now that I see so many people gathered to perform [the mitzvah of] “honoring the deceased” because of my son, I am assured that he is guaranteed a place in the World to Come, and I have been consoled.” The Talmud related that this same Rabbi Akiva was once traveling and stopped to spend a night at an inn. He was told that there was no room for him at the inn. At that moment, he proclaimed, “All that Hashem does is for the best,” and proceeded to sleep out in the field. While in the field he lit a candle, but a wind blew it out. Again he repeated, “All that Hashem does is for the best.” Rabbi Akiva again repeated the same phrase when his rooster was killed, and again, when the same happened to his donkey. The next day, Rabbi Akiva discovered that thieves attacked the inn and all the lodgers were killed. Had he spent the night at the inn, he certainly would have been killed. Had his candle been lit, had his rooster crowed, had his donkey brayed, he would have been discovered. But even had nothing

happened to the inhabitants of the inn, Rabbi Akiva still would not have registered any complaint. That Hashem does everything for the best was expressed with complete sincerity even before he knew how his misfortunes were really preserving and protecting him.

Yet this same Rabbi Akiva did not find comfort for the loss of his child with, “All that Hashem does is for the best.” To intellectually accept and adjust to such a loss is feasible. To find emotional comfort seems an impossible task. This is what Rabbi Akiva meant when he said, “Do not think it is easy to bury a child.”

Did Rabbi Akiva have to inform us of the difficulty of burying one’s own child? Rabbi Akiva knew that, logically, no one could comprehend his consolation other than with the assumption that his loss was not that profound. Rabbi Akiva explained that his loss was extremely profound, but the knowledge that his son was guaranteed a place in the World to Come, and the deep understanding that this was all that mattered, gave him solace and comfort.

Rabbi Akiva did not have a distorted picture of the meaning of life. His comprehension that our life in this world is temporary and transient was complete. When he was assured that his son was guaranteed a place in the World to Come, he knew that there had been no end. The momentary pain can only be soothed by the knowledge that eternal pleasure has been guaranteed.

IF ONLY WE COULD SEE

מאת ברוך חיים כהן
לזכר ושמחת חנה הינדא כהן

Parshas Re'ay gives us a very clear glimpse of the attitude the Torah enjoins us to have towards death: “בנים אתם לה' אלוקיכם לא תתגדדו...למות” (You are sons of Hashem, your G-d, do not gouge yourselves over a death) [14:1]. The custom of the gentiles was to scratch and cut themselves in order to show and vent their agony over the death of a dear one. We are prohibited from acting in such a fashion. Why? Because we are the sons of Hashem.

What is the connection between being the sons of Hashem and the prohibition of gouging ourselves over the death of someone we loved?

Of the different explanations of the many commentators, the Ohr HaChaim and the Chizkuni are the most poignant.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that the Torah is teaching us that death is a loss to those that remain alive – not to the one that died. It can be compared to a person who sent his son to a faraway land in order to start a business there. After many years, the father summoned the son to return home and the son acceded to his wishes.

The son is not lost. Those who had grown to love him are no longer able to see him and to build the relationship further, but the son is not lost. On the contrary, the son is returning home to his father. The thought of those friends going ahead and gouging themselves over the agony of the son's departure is preposterous. Sadness and a melancholy feeling of detachment are in order. Gouging is definitely out!

”אלוקיכם בנים אתם לה – You are the sons of Hashem your G-d.” At ‘death,’ the person is simply returning to the Father. The duration of that person's visit to this transient world has come to a close. The time has come for the return trip – to return home. Therefore, ”לא תתגדרו...למות” – do not gouge yourselves over a death.” Reacting in such a way really contradicts our beliefs.

The Chizkuni explains that the basis for the command not to gouge ourselves is that we are the sons of Hashem – we are mere children. Do we have an understanding of why we live and why we die? Can we fathom the Divine decisions that determine these occurrences? A child does not comprehend the decisions that a mature father makes – we too are children, "לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ" - do not gouge yourselves."

What follows is a very powerful story by R' Yom Tov Ehrlich which is based on the writing of Rav Chaim Vital, the primary student of the great Kabbalist, the Ari z"l. This was taken from the Sefer Yalkut Lekach Tov, Emunah U'Bitachon, vol. 1, p. 284.

Newly married Chaim walked his younger brother David home from shul one Shabbos evening to wish his mother a good Shabbos. The house glowed with warmth and peace. Candles burned brightly, announcing the arrival of the holy Shabbos. The only thing disturbing the restful atmosphere was the empty chair at the head of the table, the chair that had once been their father's. Since he had gone to his eternal rest two

years earlier, longing and anguish filled their hearts. The mother sat in her usual place, reading.

“Good Shabbos,” her sons greeted her joyfully.

“Good Shabbos,” she answered them, trying to hide her tears with a smile.

“Mother! You’re crying again,” Chaim exclaimed in distress. “Please. Today is Shabbos - crying is forbidden.”

“But you know as well as I do,” the widow sobbed, “that exactly two years ago today your father left this world! How can I not cry?”

“Yes, Mother,” Chaim said kindly, “it is true - today you have a reason. But what about yesterday and the day before? Two years have already passed, and still you are not comforted. You continue to cry and mourn, but do you think this makes Abba happy in Gan Eden? As for our Creator - it is certainly against His will. The Shulchan Aruch tells us when to mourn and when not to mourn. If you behave differently, you are

disobeying Hashem's will. Forgive me, Mother, for speaking to you this way," Chaim pleaded.

His mother stood up and wiped away her tears. "You are right, Chaim. But even though I wish with all my heart to forget, I am not able to." She began to sob.

Little Shoshana begged her, "Mommy, Mommy, we want you to be happy all the time."

"I also want to be happy," the mother whispered. "I promise I will try my best."

Chaim wished his mother "Good Shabbos" and left for his own home. His younger brother, David, made Kiddush over the wine, and the whole family sat down to a wonderful Shabbos meal. A feeling of well-being enveloped the table and everyone felt the true peace of Shabbos. Their mother even laughed. The children told stories from the weekly Parsha, and their mother felt so much Nachas.

By the time everyone was ready for sleep, it was much later than usual. The widow felt a sense of quiet such as she had not felt since the day her husband left her. She began to think about her fate. She realized, perhaps for the first time, that she was not the only person in her situation. But she also realized that many other young widows had found happiness again, because, unlike her, they had accepted their bitter lot. Her thoughts drifted to the shidduch that had recently been proposed to her. How could she betray her beloved husband's memory? Sleep overcame her, and she dreamt a beautiful dream.

In her dream, she saw people running, so she ran too. They all ran out of the city until they came to a thick forest. Even though it was dark, they continued to run. Suddenly, there was a burst of light and the forest ended.

The sun shone brightly and she saw before her a large garden filled with beautiful flowers which filled the air with a wonderful fragrance. The garden was filled with streams of sparkling blue water. Suddenly, a white bearded Jew dressed in a long white garment appeared before her eyes.

He asked her if she would like to see her husband. Heart pounding, she followed him. The sage stopped near a large tree laden with beautiful ripe fruit. From afar, she saw a spacious clearing, surrounded by a golden fence. She saw colorfully dressed Jews sitting in rows learning Torah. In their midst a young man stood teaching them.

“Please wait a moment,” said the elderly Jew. “Soon they will conclude the lesson, and you will have a clearer look.”

She could not believe the dazzling sights her eyes beheld. When the lesson ended, the teacher began walking towards her. She almost fainted when she saw it was her husband.

“Avraham!” she cried, and swooned against a nearby tree.

“Yes, it is I,” her husband replied. “Be calm.”

For a long time, she remained where she was with her eyes closed. When she recovered, she opened her eyes and asked, “Why did you leave me at such a young age?”

“Please understand,” he answered serenely, “that the world in which you live is like a land of exile. People are sent there to complete specified tasks or to suffer for earlier transgressions. The true world is here. Before you ever knew me, I once inhabited the world below. I was a Torah genius and perfectly righteous. My only fault was that I was unwilling to marry and bring children into the world because I wanted to remain undisturbed in my learning.

“When I departed from that world, I was made head of a yeshiva in Gan Eden, where I began to ascend to ever-higher levels. But when they found out that I had never married and had never had children, I was sent back to the lower world in order to marry and bring children into the world.

“So, I married you, and, Baruch Hashem, we were blessed with children. When our seventh child was born, I was called again to return to my yeshiva in Gan Eden where everyone awaited me. Great is your merit that I am your husband, for I have a good name here. When the right time will come, we will again live together in this world in delight.”

“But,” his widow protested, “I did not know you were such a great scholar. You never had much time to learn.”

Her husband replied, “I too did not know, since I came to the lower world only to correct what I lacked – that is, to marry and have children, and to provide for them. When I departed from that world, my mind was immediately filled with endless Torah knowledge.”

His wife continued her questions. “Why doesn’t our Chaim prosper in his affairs?”

Her husband responded, “You surely remember the Din Torah Chaim had with a certain Jew. Although Chaim won legally, he was judged guilty of causing great pain to the other Jew, and faced a harsh sentence. I prayed on his behalf and asked that he be given only four difficult years. In just one more year, the period of his penalty will be complete, and he will begin to prosper.”

“And what about our David? Not a single shidduch has been offered to him. I don’t even have the money to make a wedding.”

Her husband smiled and explained: “The reason for that situation is that David’s mate was late in coming into the world. She is now only thirteen years old and lives in a distant land. In another five years, she will come to your city. She will then become engaged to David and her parents will pay for the entire wedding.”

His widow began to tremble as a painful memory arose within her. In a soft voice she asked her husband, “Why was our three-year-old son killed by a drunk?”

Her husband smiled and said, “Follow me!”

She began to walk towards a light-filled garden. Small trees lined her path. Radiant beams of multicolored light shone from above, while beautiful songbirds flew from tree to tree. She found herself able to understand their songs. Some were singing, “Light is planted for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.” Others were singing, “To sing to your glory...” She heard: “Peace, peace to the distant and the near...” Small deer leaped back and forth singing, “I will sing of Your might; I will laud Your kindness daily.” Even the grass was singing: “May Hashem’s glory be

forever!” The trees too joined in with: “All the trees of the forest will sing...”

Suddenly, she saw leaping circles of fire in many colors. They positioned themselves near her in column-like formations, followed by small angels who also settled down near her. A wonderful melody played by musical instruments was heard from all sides, and she felt her soul slipping away. Her husband rushed to place a flower from the garden close to her. Her strength returned, and a Chuppa canopy made of sparkling precious stones appeared before her. Under the canopy, facing her, stood a small angelic form. She recognized her murdered son, who was now laughing with great joy. Again she felt faint, and again her husband gave her the flower to smell. She opened her eyes, and saw that she was not mistaken – it really was her son.

“Why did you leave me when you were so young?” she asked.

“Everything is in accordance with the plans of the Creator,” he answered. “I had already been in the world once before, as a member of a prominent family. There had been wild attacks on the Jews in our town, and the

gentiles murdered everyone. I was the only survivor. I was then about six months old, and a gentile woman took me into her house and raised me until I was redeemed by Jews. They taught me Torah and I studied until I became a great Torah scholar. I lived the rest of my life in comfort and peace. When I left that world, I was received in the True World with joy. I rose higher and higher until I reached a point where I could rise no higher, because I had nursed from a non-Jewish woman. It was decreed that I be born again to a Jewish mother, and live those early years in purity. That way, I would be able to continue to rise in the upper world.

“I was then born to you, Mother. It was a great merit for you. After three years, I was taken back to my place, for there was nothing left for me to do in that lowly world.”

“But why were taken in such a horrible way?” his mother asked.

“When I was about to depart form the world,” explained her son, “a terrible decree was issued against the Jews of our town – everyone would have died, including you and Abba. I was given the honor to be the sacrifice for the entire town. I was killed for their sake, and thus the town

was spared. For that reason I receive all this honor now. Nobody in Gan Eden is allowed to approach me except for Abba, who can see me whenever he wishes.” The child laughed softly, and wandered away until he disappeared from view.

“So you see now, there is an answer to all your questions,” the Torah scholar told his wife. “Our Creator does no evil.”

“I must return now to my students,” he concluded. He escorted her to the place where she had first opened her eyes, near the great tree, where he said to her: “It is very good here, but I cannot bear to see your suffering. You will do me a great favor if you now begin to live happily. You have been offered a shidduch – please accept it.”

He vanished, and once again the old man appeared and led her back to the forest.

She awoke from her dream a changed person. For a long time she lay in bed with a smile on her face as the images of her content husband and smiling son lingered in her mind. A great stone had been lifted from her

heart, and she was consoled. She remarried and lived a life of happiness and contentment.

The Ari *z"l* taught deep secrets of the Torah and, in particular, the subject of Gilgulim, transmigration of souls. He taught that all creatures are like cogs in the great machine called Creation. Hashem places each cog in the world and adjusts it to suit the operating needs of the mechanism. He brings into the world souls that have a function in this world, and removes the souls that are needed Above, for this world and the Next World are both part of the same machine.

Here below, the machine operates with souls plus bodies, while Above, it works with souls alone. If we would know how it all works, we would never become upset, for in the very near future, all the souls will return to this lower world. Here, they will serve Hashem with body and soul combined, until all the physical bodies will become purified and soul-like. This last stage will take place towards the end of the sixth millennium, which will be followed by the "Great Shabbos" (Rav Chaim Vital, heard from his great teacher, the Ari *z"l*).

PERSPECTIVE

By: Miriam Kramer

So many years ago, in so far away a place,
there was a little village of poorly constructed huts.
Travel was accomplished with a horse and cart
through unpaved streets traversed with ruts.

Winters were brutal and summers equally so,
and there was little available to deal with the weather extremes.
Just an extra lining of paper in hole-ridden shoes,
or an extra splash at laundry time in the nearby stream.

The Jews who lived in this simple village
lived a simple and straightforward existence.
Their job was to survive, bear children, have Nachas
and learn Torah with *Mesiras Nefesh* and persistence.

At the helm of this village was the Rebbe
to whom all looked for guidance and inspiration.
To him they turned for Halachic answers,
and to him they brought their heartaches and frustrations.

A spouse who was sick, a child who needed a Shidduch,
an income that provided for a tad more than starvation,
to the Rebbe they brought every problem they had
and begged him to alleviate their situation.

The Rebbe admired the אמונה פשוטה of these Yidden,
and looked upon each villager with compassion and love.
He did all he could to assuage their pain
by storming the gates of Heaven above.

Reb Yankel came one day to the Rebbe's house,
his face etched with lines of anxiety and stress.
"Rebbe," he sobbed, "my Ruchaleh is such a fine girl,
but in Shidduchim she just has no success."

The Rebbe nodded and sent Yankel home,
and then went to his Davening room alone
Where he wept and sweated and beseeched Hashem
that mercy to Reb Yankel should be shown.

Some few months later, music could be heard
as the villagers turned out en masse,
to watch with great happiness
as Ruchele's Chosson broke the traditional glass.

Srulik's mother came one day to the Rebbe's house,
bowed and broken with sorrow.
"My Srulik's been sick for so long,
the doctors don't think he'll live till tomorrow.

The Rebbe nodded and sent Srulik's mother home,
and then went to his Davening room alone
Where he wept and sweated and beseeched Hashem
that mercy to Srulik's family should be shown.

A few weeks later, boys were playing,
racing through the streets chasing each other.
Wondering how she would clean those mud-spattered pants,
was Sruklik's ecstatic and grateful mother.

Reb Itzik the tailor came one day to the Rebbe's house,
his devastation and despair complete.
"Rebbe," he wept, "my business just doesn't support us,
and we simply have nothing left to eat."

The Rebbe nodded and sent Itzik home,
and then went to his Davening room alone
Where he wept and sweated and beseeched Hashem
that mercy to Itzik's family should be shown.

A few weeks later the country's military required
a slew of uniforms for each soldier and sailor.
And who do you think they commissioned to sew them?
None other than Itzik the tailor!

Many years passed in this fashion,
and the villagers became used to the Rebbe's heavenly ways.
But then one sad day the news was released-
The Rebbe was ill and had only a few more earthly days.

“Woe to us!” the Yidden cried in fear.
“Who will intercede to Hashem on our behalf?”
But even as they all wept in despair,
one wise villager began to laugh.

“Why do you wail in so heartrending a fashion?
Don't you see that our lives will be better than ever before?
If the Rebbe's Tefillos are so effective on this earth,
near the **כסא הכבוד** he'll be able to accomplish even more!”

“Surely our lives will be good and sweet
when the Rebbe will have direct access to Hashem.
He'll advocate to reverse our harsh judgments,
and you'll see, we'll have no more Tzaros then.”

Even as the Yidden mourned the passing of their Rebbe,
they breathed a quiet sigh of relief.
In their trouble-free future they took solace,
so simple and pure was their belief.

But as the months passed, reality was bitter,
for troubles and anguish besieged these poor village folk.
And try as they might to plead with their Rebbe,
his compassion they could not seem to invoke.

They Davened at his Kever, begging for help,
asking for the same compassion he'd always shown.
But as time progressed with no change in their circumstances,
they felt so abandoned – so alone.

Finally one night, the Rebbe appeared in a dream
to one of the respected village men.
And he said, "I haven't forgotten you, my beloved friends,
but my perspective now is so different from then."

“When I lived amongst you, I ached when you did,
and my heart broke as each of you grappled with pain,
and I used that empathy to storm the heavens
to reverse the harsh verdict that was ordained.”

“But now, my children, I see differently,
and I know now what I’ve never before understood –
that what seems harsh and unjust on this earth
is really and truly eternally good!”

“Hashem has a plan that we cannot perceive,
and in our limited understanding it seems cruel and unfair,
but in the long view of your lives,
it’s really a Chessed beyond compare!”

“Divine חשבונות are for your benefit,
and the good they produce is eternal,
but you can only see the truth of that
from the advantage of a perspective supernatural.”

“So how can I Daven for you,
and why should I beg to have the verdict changed,
when I know now with utmost certainty
that it’s for your benefit that all is arranged?”

“Yes, I know that problems with children or Parnassah
feel like raw and brutal grief,
but I beg you, my sweet villagers,
to hold on to your faith and belief.”

“Believe that Hashem wants the best for you,
and believe that He yearns for your well-being and success,
but he’s willing to sacrifice a few superficial joys
to grant you the ultimate happiness.”

“I can’t intercede for you, my friends,
when I have this newfound view.
All I can tell you is that it’s never been clearer,
just how much Hashem loves each one of you.”

THE ROAD TO HUMAN PERFECTION

It is well known that the most effective way to teach someone an idea or concept is by setting a living example for that person to learn from and emulate. We are aware that children learn more from their parents' actions than from their admonitions and even their beatings.

This is because things that are conveyed to us through sight and communicated through specific illustration make the most lasting impression on us. Sight is the most vivid and realistic sensory perception. It follows then, that if we are constantly exposed to certain actions, they leave an indelible imprint upon our minds and cause us to act in a similar, if not identical, manner. If we are constantly surrounded by deception and lies,

we imbibe these attributes into our very being, and truth becomes meaningless to us. On the other hand, if we see integrity, honesty, sensitivity and concern for our fellow man, these characteristics become the elements that we absorb into our beings. As the Rambam writes in Hilchos Dayos, the natural course of human nature is to be most influenced by those with whom we come in contact, not so much by what they tell us, not by how they reprimand us, but more than anything else, by how they act.

All of us realize that our goals in life are to strive for the highest levels of human dignity and perfection, and to shun those influences that would rob us of the values and ideals we hope to attain. However, we not only need to avoid negative influences to achieve these goals, we also need positive influences to define and illustrate what our accomplishments can and must be. We face, however, a difficult dilemma. Where do we find this perfect model? Who can we use to guide and direct us?

The Torah provides the solution to this problem with the unique mitzvah of “*Veholachto Bidrochov*” (to emulate Hashem’s ways). Only Hashem, the ultimate in perfection, can be used to furnish the supreme definition of any characteristic or trait. To emulate man, with all his frailties and imperfections, will lead one to stray from the path of proper development. (We are, however, commanded to follow in the ways of Tzadikim, for they perform the mitzvah of “*Veholachto*” and their actions are a reflection of Hashem’s.)

Although sight is the most effective form of communication, it is obviously not possible in our relationship to G-d. However, one can spend his life analyzing and studying the ways of Hashem and becoming intimately familiar with His attributes, so that in a sense, he actually sees Him! When our Avos (forefathers) walked in the ways of Hashem, although there was no actual visual contact, they could feel the warmth of His being and they could perceive with complete clarity, the beauty of His kindness. We now have the perfect example, the ultimate representation of

what truth is, what justice is, and what love is. By following in His ways, there is no longer any fear that we are compromising our goal.

The initial response most frequently displayed by those learning this mitzvah for the first time is one of complete and total futility. Who is man to try to emulate the Almighty Himself?

How can the human, with his weaknesses and inadequacies, even hope to grasp something that is so far beyond his reach? Hasn't the Torah charged us with a task beyond our scope and capabilities, thereby rendering this mitzvah completely obsolete?

In truth, this mitzvah can be the greatest morale booster and the most powerful source of encouragement to us. If Hashem has commanded us to reach for the stars, then obviously we possess the ability to do so! We have been informed that we can potentially reach levels of perfection and purity that can almost be equated with those of G-d Himself. In fact, Chazal teach us that were it not for two seemingly extraneous words in the

Torah, we would actually equate the holiness man is capable of reaching, with that of the Almighty Himself. The Torah states, “*Kedoshim tihyu... ani Hashem...*” (You shall be holy ... I am G-d). Chazal interpret the words “Ani Hashem,” I am G-d, but you cannot be G-d. Hashem Himself has to show us that there is a boundary, that our ability is not limitless. The apex of kedusha is beyond our grasp. It is reserved only for G-d, but we can come very, very close. The Divine spirit (*Tzelem Elokim*) implanted in our souls is an awesome source of energy. If we harness this power properly, if we utilize our strength to the utmost, we can become beings of even greater kedusha than the Malachim (angels) themselves. True, there are other driving forces within us that can swing the pendulum to the other extreme, but let us not underestimate our potential for greatness and thereby minimize our chances of actually reaching that goal.

There is a very significant side-effect and benefit from the mitzvah of emulating G-d.

The Rambam, in Hilchos Purim, tells us that on Purim, if one wishes to add to the observance of Mishloach Manos or Matanos L'evyonim he should sooner engage in the gifts to the poor, for they will bring him greater Simcha. The reason the Rambam offers is that there is no joy like the one who feels he is following in the ways of His Creator. Much like a young child whose greatest joy is being like his parent, so it is with man and his relationship with his G-d.

Following in the Divine ways can then be not only the ultimate cure for the moral decadence of our society, but a solution to the depressions and empty feelings so familiar in our world today. It is only through the study of Torah, the Creator's gift to man, revealing to him the essence of His pure and holy ways, that man can achieve significant insights into the attributes of G-d, thus enabling him to emulate His ways and benefit from the serenity and joy that it can bring to his existence.

WERE YOU AWARE?

- The New York Times reported in 1990, a radical revolution in scientific thinking, that the gender of an embryo is not finally determined at the moment of conception, as previously believed, but rather 40-some days after conception, as stated in the Talmud Brachos, 60a, known to our Rabbis over 1,500 years ago.
- In 1925, science revised its concept of how many stars exist in the universe, based on Einstein's theories to 1.06×10^{21} . If you compute the figure given in the Talmud Brachos 32b, you find this figure, known to our Rabbis over 1,500 years ago.
- Louis Pasteur, in the late 19th century, spent 30 years fighting the entire scientific establishment to convince them that insects carry disease. This was to known to the Rabbis of the Talmud Kesuvos over 1,500 years ago.
- The concept of immunization, developed in the 19th century, was known to our Rabbis in Yoma over 1,500 years ago.

- As late as 1963, scientists still believed that nothing the mother saw or heard affected the child she was carrying. Today, accepted scientific wisdom agrees with the Rabbis of the Kabbalah and Talmud that the embryo hears and learns and has a certain level of understanding, but forgets everything when it comes out.
- Over 25,000 species of fish are known today, and not one of them has scales and no fins. This scientific fact was told to us by the Rabbis of the Talmud over 1,500 years ago.
- The Torah promises that if we allow the land of Israel to lie fallow every seventh year, then it will be blessed in the sixth year with enough produce for the sixth, seventh and eighth years. This illogical prediction has been true throughout history.
- The Medrash, which is over 1,500 years old, tells us that towards the end of days, everyone will be afraid that the world will be devoured in fire in a brief moment. Until the dawn of the nuclear age, no one could imagine what the Rabbis were talking about.

- The Talmud, over 1,500 years ago, warned us of the threat of the unleashed power of Germany and its union with Italy to destroy the world.
- The Torah tells us that no nation will ever claim that the Creator revealed Himself to them in front of millions of people. The Jews are, in fact, the only nation to make such a claim, and our process of transmission of that testimony, over the ages, has provided us with the living testimony to the truth of the events that took place at Sinai over 3,300 years ago.
- The Medrash tells us that the Almighty promises that the Kosel Hamaaravi, the Western wall of the Bais Hamikdash, will never be destroyed. Jerusalem was destroyed at least nine times with devastating consequences, but this wall could never be destroyed.
- The Torah tells us that when the Jewish people will be expelled from Israel, it will remain desolate. Until this century, when Jews started returning, no occupier could make the land flourish.

- The Hebrew word for ear is “*ozen*.” This root means balance, equilibrium. *Moznei Tzedek* refers to a scale. The classical problem of morality cannot be solved by any human being. We cannot establish our own moral values judging only by logical reasoning. The Torah is the absolute guide. We need to adhere to, to listen to and to obey the Divine word. So too, it is the ear which is the organ that spiritually takes care of our moral equilibrium. Hence the Hebrew name – “*ozen*.” Moreover, the location of the physical equilibrium is in the middle ear, known to science only about 200 years ago.
- The Torah puts itself at risk of devastation by predicting the likes of: the *Kosel* will never be destroyed, no species of fish will ever be found to have scales and no fins, only the Jews can make Israel flourish, the precise details of the destruction of the second *Bais Hamikdash*, written much before it happened, only one species of animal, the pig, has split hooves and does not chew its cud, etc...

- In no other religious tradition do we find such extensive information borne out over time that no human could have known at the time it was written.

ABOUT JEWS

By Mark Twain, Harper Magazine, September 1897

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of stardust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the

planet with sound and splendor; then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greeks and the Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

