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Drasha L'Shabbos Terumah: The Purpose of Creation

The Midrash describes the significance of the Mishkan with the following parable:

"I gave you a good acquisition, My Torah, do not abandon it" (Mishlei 4:2). There are some acquisitions in which the seller sells himself along with his merchandise. HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Klal Yisrael, "I 'sold' you the Torah, and it is as if I sold Myself to you together with it." As is written, *"You shall take for Me a donation"* (which can also be read as, "You shall take Me as a donation") (Shemos 25:2).

This can be explained by means of a parable. Once there was a king who had an only daughter. Then, another king came to marry her. When it came time for the second king to return to his land with his new wife, the father said to him, "My daughter whom I gave to you is my only child. I cannot bear to be separated from her. On the other hand, I cannot tell you not to take her, since she is your wife. Therefore, please do for me this favor. Wherever you go, prepare for me a small room so that I can stay with you, since I cannot bear to part from my daughter."

So too, HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Bnei Yisrael, "I gave you the Torah, but I cannot part from it. On the other hand, I cannot tell you not to take it. Therefore, wherever you go, make for Me a house in which I can stay with you," as is written, *"Make for Me a Mikdash and I will dwell among them"* (ibid 8).

This Midrash parallels Chazal's teachings (Berachos 8a): *"Hashem loves the Gates of Tzion more than all the dwelling places of Yaakov"* - Hashem loves the Gates of the yeshivos in which halachos are studied, more than all the places of prayer," and "HaKadosh Baruch Hu has nothing (i.e. no place for His Shechinah to rest) in His world except for the four *amos* of halachah" (ibid).

In several places I explained this concept, that the creation of the world and its continued existence are only for the sake of the Torah studied by Bnei Yisrael, as the Gemara (Shabbos 88a) states, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu stipulated with creation that if Bnei Yisrael would not accept the Torah, the world would revert to nothingness." We can explain this by means of the following Gemara.

The Debate with the Elders of Athens

The Gemara (Bechoros 8b) tells the story of a debate between Rebbe Yehoshua ben Chanania and the Elders of Athens, in which they conversed with one another using a series of cryptic metaphors which can hardly be understood at face value. One of the questions that the Elders posed to Rebbe Yehoshua was, "Where is the center of the earth?"

He answered by holding up his finger, and saying, "Right here."

"How can you prove that this is so?" they asked.

"Bring a rope and measure it," he answered.

In these terse and mysterious words, they referred to an age-old debate between the philosophers of the world and the Sages of the Torah. Which of the creations are most important in Hashem's eyes? For whom was the world created?

The philosophers asserted that the ministering angels and ethereal beings have a greater purpose than mankind, since they are more spiritual, they are immortal, they have no physical form to draw them after lowly, animalistic desires, they have greater capacity for understanding, and they are not subject to demise but are made to live and endure.

Mankind, on the other hand, finds his place in the physical world, which is the lowest of all planes. He is fated to return to the earth from which he was taken. He is materialistic, with lusts and desires for everything. His capacity for understanding cannot reach even a fraction of that of the ethereal beings.

Nonetheless, the Sages of the Torah insist that man is greater than angels. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 78:1) comments on the verse (*Tehillim* 91:11), "**He will instruct His angels to guard you on all your paths.**" - Who is greater, the guard or the one he was sent to guard?" Obviously then, man is greater than the angels.

Hashem is infinite. From Hashem's perspective, we cannot say that the angels and ethereal beings are any closer to Him than mankind, even though we are formed from the earth. Saying so would be to imply that there is some limit to Hashem's greatness, such that one creation is more similar to Him in some way than another, *chas v'shalom*. Only of a human king can such a thing be said. His advisors and ministers are closest to him, since the par between him and them is smaller than the par between him and his common subjects.

Such is not the case with Hashem's relationship to His creations. Hashem cannot be approached or understood by any thoughts or reasoning in the world. There is no limit or boundary to His greatness. Before His infinite greatness, man and angel alike are as nothing. Therefore, the relative greatness of the angels as compared to man is really inconsequential.

However, man has an advantage over the angels in terms of the ultimate purpose of creation. The purpose for which Hashem created the world was not to have His honor exalted, *chas v'shalom*. The purpose was to grant goodness and reward to those who would fulfill His will from their own free choice. This purpose is only relevant to man, who was formed from the earth and is under the sway of the *yetzer hara*, with material passions that tempt him to throw off the yoke of Hashem's service. Only man is capable of earning reward, by grappling with the *yetzer hara* against which he was created to contend.

As such, Hashem's purpose in creation is only for the sake of man, who dwells here below in this physical world. All the other creations, including the angels, were created only to serve him, as Chazal say, "**For this is the entirety of man**" (*Koheles* 12:13) the entire world was created only as an accompaniment for man" (*Berachos* 6b).

The Purpose is at the Center

In philosophical terminology, the aim and purpose of anything is called its center. It is like the center of a circle, from which a radius of equal length can be drawn to any point on the circle, and back again to its center.

Throughout the six days of creation, before man was created, the world had not yet reached completion. Hashem's purpose in creating the world had not yet been fulfilled. Only at the end of the sixth day, after the creation of man, was Hashem's handiwork completed. The pinnacle and purpose of creation now came into being, and Hashem ceased from His labors.

For this reason, we do not find the Name יהו"ה appear anywhere in the story of creation before this point. Until the creation of man, only the Name Elokim is used. Then, after the creation of man marked the completion of Hashem's purpose in creation, we find the Name יהו"ה used for the first time: *"These are the generations of Heaven and Earth ... on the day that יהו"ה Elokim made the Earth and the Heaven"* (Bereishis 2:4). These two Names join together to form the complete Name of Hashem, and its use here denotes that His Name and His Throne were now completed (see Bereishis Rabbah 13:3; Rashi, Shemos 17:16).

Also for this reason, we find in this verse a sudden switch in order. Until now, Heaven was always written before earth: *"In the beginning, Hashem created the Heavens and the Earth."* Now, for the first time, Earth is placed before Heaven: *"... on the day that יהו"ה Elokim made the Earth and the Heaven."* Before man was created, the Hosts of Heaven had precedence and superiority over the inanimate objects, plants and animals of the lower world. Therefore, the Heavens came first. However, once man was created in this lower world, the purpose of creation was completed through him, and the Earth took precedence over Heaven.

Another hint for this can be found in the verse, *"These are the generations of Heaven and Earth when they were created."* The Hebrew word for "when they were created" is בְּהִבְרָאָם. Chazal comment that this word should be rearranged to read בְּאֶבְרָהָם – for the sake of Avraham Avinu (Bereishis Rabbah 12:9). The main purpose that Hashem planned to achieve from the creation of mankind was realized when the light of Avraham Avinu first shone upon the earth. His arrival marked the true completion of creation. At that point the first epoch of history, the two thousand years of chaos ("tohu"), came to a close.

The second epoch, the two thousand years of Torah, began when Avraham was forty-eight years old and first recognized his Creator (see Bereishis Rabbah 95:3). At that point, he started drawing followers to Hashem's service. These were *"the souls that they made in Charan"* (Bereishis 12:5). Before then, Hashem's plan for creation was not yet fulfilled. The world was in a state of chaos, like raw material ready to be formed into its proper shape by a Godly spirit.

All this was alluded to in the debate between Rebbe Yehoshua ben Chanania and the philosophers of Athens.

"Where is the center of the world?" they asked, meaning to say, "Who sits at the center of Hashem's intention for creating the world? The ethereal beings above in Heaven, or humankind down here below on earth?"

Rebbe Yehoshua answered by holding up his finger and saying, "Here is the center of the world." He had an awesome depth of meaning in this response.

The verse states, *"Who measured the waters with His fist, prepared the Heavens with His measuring stick, measured the dust of the earth in His cup, arranged the mountains with His level, and the hills with His scales?"* (Yeshayah 40:12).

This verse was meant as an assurance to Bnei Yisrael, as we await the ultimate Redemption, that our future reward will be complete, as the previous verse states, *"Behold, Hashem Elokim will come in strength, with His reward with him and the wages (for those who served Him) before Him."* This refers to the reward destined for those who justify the work of creation by fulfilling its purpose through their Torah and mitzvos.

Hashem created all the worlds, comparing Himself to a builder who works with his five fingers. The five fingers parallel the five building tasks listed above: measuring the waters, and so on. The third task *"He measured the dust of the earth"* parallels the third finger, the longest of them all, which is in the middle of the hand. Dust is the lowest element of creation, yet it is represented by the middle and longest finger, since it is the central purpose of creation and the focus upon which Hashem invested His powers. Therefore, Rebbe Yehoshua lifted up his middle finger to show them that here, in the lowest world, is the center point of creation.

"How can you prove that this is so?" the Elders of Athens asked.

"Bring a rope and measure it," Rebbe Yehoshua answered. He explained to them that from the highest planes of Heaven all the way down to earth, all the worlds are connected to one another as if by a rope. *"For there are guards one upon another, and even higher guards above them"* (Koheles 5:7). Each level is drawn by the level beneath it, in a series of causes and effects, with the bottom of the "rope" (so to speak) reaching down into this world. Here the rope ends, and here creation reaches its completion.

We see this in the verses of creation, as we explained above, that the name יהו"ה is expressed through the first letters of וַיִּבְרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, only after the world reached its completion through the creation of man. The worlds of Heaven had not yet achieved their purpose and could not be considered complete, until man was created on this lowest of all worlds, since the worlds of Heaven were created for the sake of man. This was the condition upon which the rest of the world was founded – that there must be a human being with free will to be rewarded for his good deeds. Otherwise, there would be no purpose in creation.

The Completion of Hashem's Name

This helps us to understand the union of Hashem's Names, יהו"ה אלהי"ם, which join together to form the complete Name of Hashem. Elokim in gematria equals "The Throne" (הכסא). This Name represents Hashem's ultimate power. He created

everything out of nothing. He alone rules over all creation, and everything is a Throne to His Majesty. However, the support to this Throne is the revelation of His Kingship in this lower world, as the verse states, **"So says Hashem, the Heavens are My Throne and the Earth is My footstool"** (Yeshayah 66:1). By way of analogy, a footstool supports the legs of a king, as he sits upon his throne. So too, as far as it may be said, Hashem's Kingship is supported by the mitzvos of Bnei Yisrael in this lower world, through which we "strengthen the Court of Heaven" (Eichah Rabbah 1:33).

As the verse states, **"Give strength to Elokim"** (Tehillim 68:35), by fulfilling His will. The verse then continues, **"Upon Yisrael is His pride, and His might is in the Heavens."** Hashem's might is more evident in the Heavens, which were created with greater power, as is written, **"My hand founded the Earth and My right hand measured the Heavens"** (Yeshayah 48:13). Since the right hand is stronger than the left, this verse shows us that the Heavens are a place of greater power.

Nonetheless, His greatest pride is among Bnei Yisrael in this lowest world. When a person in this lower world recognizes the Creator and fulfills His will, he reveals the Name יהוה, which is Hashem's essential Name, thus letting it be known throughout the world that Hashem fills all worlds and surround all worlds.

The letters of the Name יהוה represent how Hashem created everything that exists with Ten Utterances (Rosh Hashanah 32a), which – so to speak – represent the ten fingers of the two hands, five on each hand. These Ten Utterances originally existed in primal thought as the letter *yud* (10) of Hashem's Name, but in actuality they were expressed in the world as the two letters of *heh* (5) from His Name, one for the Heavens and one for the Earth, with the right hand exerting its influence upon the left. All this took place during the six days of creation, represented by the letter *vav* (6) from His name. For this reason, the combined Name יהוה אלהים was used only after the world was completed with the creation of man, at which point Hashem's Throne was completed and He sat upon it in His glory.

All this is alluded to in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 12:11):

Rav Huna said in the name of Rav Yosef: Everything that exists in Heaven and Earth was created only from the Earth, as is written, **"Just as the rain and snow fall from the Heaven"** (Yeshayah 55:10). The rain descends from Heaven, but it is formed on earth. So too, everything that exists in Heaven and Earth was created only from the Earth.

Rain is formed from moisture that evaporates and ascends from the Earth. Then, once the cloud of moisture from the Earth is formed, a drop of water from above the Heavens is added to it. This is the spiritual power, the soul of the water, which is hidden within the lower waters. When the letters for the Hebrew word for water, מים, are spelled out, they read מ"ם יו"ד מ"ם, such that the inner letters מ, יו+ד=י, מ also spell out מים. This shows us that in addition to the water visible to our eyes, which is formed from the moisture that ascends from the earth, there is also an inner, spiritual force in the water that gives it the power to make plants grow, just as the human soul animates the body.

Of this the verse says, *"I placed the clouds as its garment and the fog as its shawl"* (Iyov 38:9) and *"they pour rain into its cloud"* (ibid 36:27). This means to say that the moisture from the earth ascends like a physical body, which serves as a garment to the soul. In this case, the "soul" is the spiritual water from Heaven, from the *"stream of Elokim that is full of water"* (Tehillim 36:27). "Full of water" is also a reference to the inner letters that fill out the word מים, which, as we explained above, refers to the spiritual waters from above.

In this respect, mankind's role in creation is to elicit the blessings of Heaven through our good deeds. All the blessings that descend to the world, and the ultimate perfection of creation, depend on the degree to which we perfect ourselves through Torah and mitzvos. Everything else that exists in this world was created only in order to help us reach this goal.

Our good deeds are like the cloud of moisture that ascends from Earth to Heaven, in order to receive the blessings of the Heavenly waters and bring them back down to Earth. Without our intervention, all the Hosts of Heaven would be meaningless and cease to exist, since there would be no channel through which the blessings of Heaven could descend to Earth. For this reason, only after the creation of man does the verse state, *"The vegetation of the field did not yet appear upon the land ... for there was not yet man to work the land ... and then a cloud ascended from the earth"* (Bereishis 2:5-6).

This is also the meaning of the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 13:13), which states that for every drop of water that falls from Heaven, two drops of water ascend from the depths of the Earth to accept it. The "two drops of water from the Earth" are the good deeds of mankind that ascend to unlock the Gates of Heaven.

The Midrash states that the lower waters tell the higher waters, "You are Hashem's creations, but we are His messengers." We are Hashem's messengers in the sense that we act on His behalf to elicit spiritual blessing from the higher worlds, and draw it down into this world through our Torah and mitzvos. We were created to guide the course of creation through our deeds, and to act as if we were members of Hashem's household.

In this regard, the Midrash cites the verse, *"The Heavens will rain from above, and the firmament will pour forth righteousness. The earth will open to produce fruit of salvation, and charity will sprout together with it. I am Hashem who created him"* (Yeshayah 45:8). Our good deeds and charity cause the fruit of salvation to sprout. The verse concludes, "I am Hashem who created him," referring to man, who was created in order to perfect the world and instill strength and might in the Court of Heaven.

Bringing Peace to Creation

Man was created expressly for this purpose, so that his deeds would bring unity and might to Hashem's Name, and Hashem would unite with His creations to bestow His blessing and illuminate all things. If not for man's good deeds, there would be no way for creation to unite with the Creator. Of this it is written, "... *or strengthen with My might, make peace for Me, peace he will make for Me*" (Yeshayah 27:5). The definition of peace is unity between the parts.

There is a deep meaning behind the double usage of the word peace. A clock is made out of many fine parts that work together. When all the parts are present and working properly in unison, the clock can serve its function. If the smallest part is missing, the entire clock is worthless.

So too, man's body is composed of 613 parts, including 248 organs and 365 sinews. On a spiritual level, he also has 613 components which correspond to the 613 mitzvos. He must complete himself and perfect his soul by observing the 613 mitzvos, through which all the parts of his being reach their fulfillment and their purpose in having been created. Then, like the clock in our analogy, all the parts of man function properly and he is fit to perform his function – which is to correct the Heavenly worlds and draw their blessing down into this world. This is the meaning of the first half of the verse, "*make peace for Me*" – יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם לִי, which can also be interpreted to mean, "*he will be made perfect for Me*" – יַעֲשֶׂה נְשִׁימָה לִי. By perfecting himself in all his parts, he is enabled to serve the function for which Hashem intended him.

This is one aspect of the word *shalom*, in the sense of *shleimus* – perfection. The second aspect of *shalom* is unity. Through our mitzvos, we unite creation with its Creator, such that the world is drawn after Hashem's will, and Hashem interacts with the world according to the original benevolent design that He had for His creation. This is the meaning of the second half of the verse, "*Peace he will make for Me*" – שְׁלוֹם יַעֲשֶׂה לִי, meaning that he brings creation to a state of unity with the Creator.

This is also an aspect of what we described above, that the two Names of Hashem, יהו"ה and Elokim, actually combine to form Hashem's complete Name. Chazal tell us that Shalom is also a Name of Hashem (*Shabbos* 10b). Shalom, in the sense of *shleimus* – completion, represents the perfect state of interaction between Hashem and His world.

Shalom also depicts a state of love and attachment, in which there is nothing to divide between two loving friends. When we defy Hashem's will, we empower the forces of evil that oppose holiness. These forces separate us from Hashem, weaken our connection with Him, and block the flow of blessing that He wants to bestow upon us. Of this the verse states, "*Your sins separate you from your God*" (Yeshayah 59:2).

This can be compared to how the moon reflects the light from the sun. The moon produces no light of its own. When the shadow of the earth blocks the sun's light from shining on it, the moon turns dark. When the shadow passes, the moon shines again. In a similar way, the entire Creation can reflect Hashem's light, provided that there are no *aveiros* to separate between Creator and creation. This is one aspect of Chazal's teaching that the sun and the moon originally shined with equal light, but circumstances then caused the moon's light to be restricted (see Rashi, *Bereishis* 1:16; *Zohar*, *Bereishis* 20a).

The Light of Torah

The only way that the world can reach a state of fulfillment and alignment with Hashem's original intention, is through the Torah study of the Jewish people. Torah is the covenant that Hashem made with His creation when He first made the world, as the verse states, *"If not for My covenant studied day and night, I would not have placed into effect the statutes of Heaven and earth"* (*Yermiyahu* 33:25).

For this reason, the Name Elokim appears 32 times in the story of Creation, representing the Torah that was given in 22 letters and 10 vowel sounds. Without the vowel sounds, the letters cannot be pronounced. The verbal expression of *divrei Torah* is the basis for the world's continued existence, as the verse states, *"I will place My words in your mouth ... to plant the Heavens and establish the earth"* (*Yeshayah* 51:16).

Just as the world was brought into existence through Hashem's speech, so too the world's continued existence depends upon the speech of Bnei Yisrael in Torah study, day and night without fail. Rav Chaim of Volozhin *zt"l* warned that if there would be any single moment in which no Jew anywhere in the world would be learning Torah, the world would immediately revert to nothingness (*Nefesh Hachaim* 4:26).

We can easily imagine that the world could not possibly function without light. No one could get anything done while stumbling around in the dark. So too, the world could not exist without Torah. Light makes things real.

The Torah describes the state of the world before light first shone upon it as, *"chaos, emptiness and darkness on the face of the depths"* (*Bereishis* 1:2). Chazal teach us that this refers to the deeds of the wicked (*Bereishis Rabbah* 3:8). Like a dark cloud, their evil deeds block Hashem's light from shining upon the world. Without the light of Torah, the world has no meaning and cannot really be said to exist.

For this reason, the very first thing to be created was light. The word "light" is mentioned five times in the first day of creation, corresponding to the five books of the Torah. This also corresponds to the letter *heh* added to *yom hashishi*, from which we learn that the world cannot exist without Torah (*Shabbos* 88a).¹ It also corresponds to the letter *heh* in the verse, *"These are the generations of Heaven and Earth when they*

¹ The Gemara there explains that whereas the other days of Creation are counted by number: day one, second day, third day, etc., the sixth day is referred to as *יְהִי עֶשְׂרִים וְשֵׁשׁ יוֹם* – implying not just *a* sixth day, but *the* sixth day – a specific and momentous sixth day, the 6th of Sivan, on which Bnei Yisrael received the Torah.

were created" (*Bereishis* 2:4). The Hebrew word for "when they were created" is בְּהִבְרָאָם. Chazal interpret this to mean "they were created with the letter *heh*" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 12:10).

The Mishkan Parallels the World

Chazal tell us that just as light was the first thing to be created in the world, so too the first thing that we were commanded to build for the Mishkan was the Aron, which housed the light of the Torah (*Shemos Rabbah*, 34:2).

The Mishkan and its vessels paralleled in perfect detail all the works of Heaven and earth (*Zohar, Pikudei* 331b). Every detail of creation was somehow incorporated into the Mishkan. The laws of Shabbos are learned by association from how the Mishkan was built (*Shabbos* 102b, *Bava Kama* 2a), since the same creative actions employed in the construction of the Mishkan were employed on a Divine scale in the creation of the world. We are commanded to rest on Shabbos, just as Hashem rested from the creation of the world, by refraining from these same creative actions.

The first thing we were commanded to make was the Aron, since the Luchos HaBris (Tablets of the Testimony) that it held inside were the purpose of the Mishkan, and the very purpose of creation. Through the Torah, Hashem "sits on His Throne", so to speak, revealing His kingship over all creation. For this reason, the Shechinah rested in the Mishkan between the Cherubim that stood on the Aron, since the resting place for Hashem's majesty in the world is upon the holy Torah.

For this reason, the berachos for Shema in the morning place Yotzeir Or alongside Ahavah Rabbah. In the first, we praise Hashem for the sunlight that shines upon the earth. In the second, we thank Hashem for the light of the Torah that shines upon creation.

Creating Our Own Reward

With this in mind, we can understand why Chazal interpret the word "*Bereishis*" to mean "for the sake of the '*reishis*,' for the first and most important thing, which is the Torah" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1). Hashem's purpose in creating the world was so that Klal Yisrael could learn Torah and thereby cause His light to shine throughout all the planes of creation.

This leads us to an important disclaimer regarding the concept of Divine reward. A person should not think that Hashem gave us the Torah and mitzvos in the same way that a kindly benefactor might try to protect the recipients of his charity from disgrace, by finding some sort of odd job for them to do, which he does not really need, but at least lets them feel that they earned their bread. There, the reward is totally disproportionate to the service done. Furthermore, in that case the reward is one thing and the service is something else entirely.

Such is not the case in the reward given for Torah and mitzvos. Torah and mitzvos are the opportunities that Hashem gave us to create our own reward. The Ramchal (*Kinas Hashem Tzvako*) writes: " Hashem's awesome wisdom decreed that His

creations would have the power to do a mitzvah and create its reward, such that the reward and the mitzvah are inseparable, one and the same, revolving around itself, with the result planted in the deed, and the deed planted in the result."

(The Ramchal then proceeds to explain in great depth how the 613 aspects of man's character correspond to the 613 spiritual faces of his being, as expressed through the mitzvos, all of which are represented by higher and higher planes of man's existence and intertwined throughout all of creation. These are the 613 general categories, but they are subdivided into limitless and unfathomable details, all of which are intertwined with one another. Through the Torah that a person studies and the mitzvos he performs, he connects creation to the Creator and draws the Creator's blessing into all of creation.)

The Torah and mitzvos are the means through which Hashem connects with His creation, to enliven, enlighten and bestow His bounty upon us. Chazal tell us, "The reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah" (*Avos* 4:2), meaning to say that each mitzvah is an aspect of Hashem's benevolence that shines upon His creation. By performing the mitzvah, we connect ourselves to Hashem and are thereby enabled to receive His light. This itself is the reward of the mitzvah.

Chazal refer to this when they interpret the word אָנָפְשִׁי from the Ten Commandments as an acronym for *Ana nafshi kesiva yehavis*, which means, "I give Myself with this writing" (*Shabbos* 105a).

How can we understand this concept that Hashem "gives Himself over to us" together with the Torah? Whereas a person's self is one thing, his desires are another, his thoughts are another, and his memories are another, with Hashem it is not so. Hashem is perfect in His Oneness, such that He, His knowledge and His desire are all one and the same, in a way that we cannot possibly understand (see Rambam, *Yesodei HaTorah* 2:5; Ramchal, *Derech Hashem* 1:5).

In His great kindness, Hashem bequeathed His will to His creations, such that by taking hold of His will and fulfilling it, we connect ourselves to Hashem Himself, each person to the best of his ability.

In Hebrew, the word *nefesh* usually means soul or self, but it can also mean desire, as we find in the verse in which Avraham asked Bnei Cheis to help him buy the Maaras Hamachpeilah, "If you have within your *nefesh* to bury my dead" (*Bereishis* 23:8).

In this sense, the word *nafshi* from the acronym *Ana nafshi kesiva yehavis* refers to Hashem's will. When Hashem wrote His will into the Torah, He wrote Himself into the Torah and granted it to Bnei Yisrael. The Hebrew word רְצוֹן - "will", equals the gematria of שְׁמוֹ - "His Name." Hashem's will and His Name were written within the letters of the Torah. The letters of the Torah are sketches of all the powers of creation. All of them were brought into existence from the essence of Hashem's will. This is what was meant by "the entire Torah is made up of Hashem's Names" (Ramban, introduction to Commentary on the Torah). These were the details of the expression of His will as revealed to His creations. This is Hashem Himself, as He gave Himself over to Bnei Yisrael.

By accepting the Torah, Bnei Yisrael become eternally bonded to Hashem and His will, as is written, "*You, who are attached to Hashem your God are all alive today*" (*Devarim* 4:4). As the souls of Bnei Yisrael fulfill the Torah and mitzvos they fulfill Hashem's will. By attaching themselves to Hashem's will, they attach themselves to Hashem Himself. Therefore, they will live eternal life.

The Crowns of the Torah's Letters

This attachment to Hashem is itself the reward of which Chazal say, "The righteous will sit with their crowns upon their heads and bask in the glow of the Shechinah" (*Berachos* 17a). These are the crowns of the *tagim* that Hashem placed on the letters of the Torah (see *Shabbos* 89a).

The distinction between the letters themselves and their *tagim* is as follows. As we explained above, the letters of the Torah are the sketches for every detail of creation, outlining their shape, position, structure and function. They were all created by the word of Hashem and divided into their various details, just as a spoken word is divided into letters.

A spoken word is used to reveal the speaker's intent. The speaker might have more in mind, but if he does not express it in words, the audience will remain unaware of it. The same is true of the words through which Hashem brought creation into existence. Only the words that were formed by letters and spoken aloud came into being as the tangible plane of existence that we see before us. This is the physical reality that is sketched by the letters of the Torah.

The *tagim* of the letters are the crowns of creation. These were not inherent in the original creation of the world. They represent the additional illumination and spiritual perfection that is endowed upon creation through the Torah and mitzvos of Klal Yisrael.

Chazal interpret the verse, "*Give strength to Elokim*" (*Tehillim* 68:35), to mean that when Klal Yisrael fulfill Hashem's will we "strengthen the Court of Heaven" (*Eichah Rabbah* 1:33). This does not mean that we give strength to Hashem Himself. Hashem does not need us to strengthen Him, as the verse explicitly states, "*If you are righteous, what do you give Him?*" (*Iyov* 35:7). Rather, the "Court of Heaven" in this sense refers to the Higher Beings that exist in the spiritual worlds above.

The Torah and mitzvos of Klal Yisrael bring holiness and perfection not only to this material world below, but also to the spiritual worlds above, the "Court of Heaven," which is the abode of Hashem's ministering angels. They are proverbially referred to as "Elokim," since they are the emissaries through which He conducts the world according to His Divine Providence, thus exhibiting His Kindship over creation. For this reason, the Name of Elokim is a plural word.

All the beings of Heaven and Earth exist as an expression of Hashem's will. However, the additional flow of illumination that descends upon them is the proverbial crown, the increased revelation of Hashem's Kingship, which the righteous bring about through their good deeds. Through these good deeds, Hashem pours additional light upon creation, which becomes attached to the depths of their

souls. These lights are the crowns that the righteous wear as they bask in the glow of the Shechinah, and these are the *tagim* on the letters of the Torah.

The *tagim* are not heard when the letters are read aloud. They are there only to be contemplated, to add additional depth of meaning to the words. In a similar way, they represent the forces of holiness that were not revealed with the original creation of the world, but are subsequently revealed through the good deeds of Klal Yisrael. These are the meanings behind Hashem's words, which were not immediately obvious. Over time, through our good deeds, we reveal that this was Hashem's original intent in creation.

Chazal (*Shabbos* 89a) referred to this in the following enigmatic conversation between Hashem and Moshe Rabbeinu:

When Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah, he found HaKadosh Baruch Hu attaching crowns to the letters of the Torah.

"What need do you have for those crowns?" Moshe asked,

"Do they not know how to say Shalom in your city?" Hashem answered him.

"Is it fitting for a slave to say Shalom to his Master?" Moshe asked.

"You should have helped me," Hashem answered.

The crowns that Hashem placed on the letters of the Torah were in fact the *shalom*, the unity that comes about in creation when Klal Yisrael fulfills the Torah, thus uniting creation with the will of Hashem, uplifting all worlds and drawing Divine light upon them. This is the "help" that Bnei Yisrael give to the Court of Heaven, although Hashem Himself obviously needs no help from us.

The Hebrew word for crown, *keser*, equals 620 in gematria, representing the 613 Biblical mitzvos and the 7 Rabbinic mitzvos.² These are also represented by the 620 letters in the Ten Commandments. In fact, there are two crowns for each mitzvah: one for fulfilling the mitzvah in practice, and another for learning about it. For this reason, when Bnei Yisrael said "*na'aseh vinishmah* – we will do and we will listen," 600,000 angels descended to crown every Jew with two crowns, one for *na'aseh* and one for *nishmah* (*Shabbos* 88a). One crown was for learning about the mitzvah, and the other crown is for fulfilling it in practice.

When Bnei Yisrael received the Torah on Har Sinai, they were able to experience the pleasure of the World to Come even as they lived in this world, basking in the glory of the Shechinah like the righteous in Gan Eden. They shared in the radiance that emanated from Moshe when he descended from Har Sinai. Every Jew merited this light at Har Sinai, but we lost it through the sin of the Golden Calf and will not

² Most Rabbinic mitzvos are extensions of existing mitzvos from the Torah. However, there are seven mitzvos of purely Rabbinic origin. The commentaries debate what these seven mitzvos are. According to the Megaleh Amukos (73), these are *netilas yadayim*, *eiruvain*, *berachos*, Shabbos candles, Megillah, Chanukah and Hallel. The Rama of Pano (*Maayan Ganin* I, *Kavanas Haberachos*) removes from this list Shabbos candles and Hallel, and adds in their place mourning and fasting.

be able to experience it again until the World to Come. Only Moshe Rabbeinu kept this light even in this world.

A hint for this can be found in the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 47:6), which states that when Moshe finished writing the Torah, a drop of ink remained in his quill which he rubbed across his head. From that drop of ink, his rays of glory were formed (see *Shemos* 34:29).

These rays were like the crowns of the letters of the Sefer Torah, which were not revealed in how the letters are read aloud. They represent the additional levels of perfection and illumination, which are the reward for the mitzvos in the World to Come.

The War Against the Yetzer Hara

We have seen that the Torah and mitzvos are the expressions of Hashem's will which gives life to all creation. However, there is a flip side to this, in that *aveiros*, which are contrary to Hashem's will, spread darkness and destruction across creation.

Just as we described the deep bond of unity that is formed between man and Hashem when he observes the Torah, and how this bond enlivens everything that exists, there is also an opposite bond that is formed when a person defies Hashem's will, *chas v'shalom*. He then becomes attached to the forces of evil that oppose holiness, of which it is written, "**Elokim made one thing to oppose another**" (*Koheles* 7:14). Man must be left with the choice which side to follow, so that he can be rewarded for his efforts.

If a person chooses to oppose Hashem's will, he attaches himself to the forces of impurity and distances himself from Hashem's light. He prevents Hashem's benevolence from descending into the world, and drives the world towards destruction. For this reason, Chazal teach that the verse, "The earth was chaos, emptiness and darkness," refers to the deeds of the wicked (*Bereishis Rabbah* 3:8).

In this sense, an evil deed is its own punishment (*Avos* 2:4). Since real life is drawn by aligning oneself with Hashem's will, distancing oneself from Hashem's will is itself the opposite of life. Of this the verses state, "**Behold, I place before you life and good, death and evil**" (*Devarim* 30:15), and "**The sins of the wicked will trap him, and in the rope of his sin he will be hanged**" (*Mishlei* 5:22). The symbolism of this verse is that sin creates a powerful bond that attaches the sinner to the essence of evil, and cuts him off from the spiritual source of life, as is written, "**He will uproot you from the land of the living**" (*Tehillim* 52:7).

The Gemara (*Sotah* 3b) states:

Rav Shmuel bar Nachmeini said in the name of Rebbe Yochanan: Every mitzvah that a person fulfills in this world leads the way before him in the World to Come, as is written, "**Your righteousness shall walk before you, and the glory of Hashem shall gather you in**" (*Yeshayah* 58:5). Every aveirah that a person does attaches itself to him and leads him towards the Day of

Judgment, as is written, "*They will cling on to their paths*" (Iyov 6:18). R' Elazar said that the sin becomes tied to him like a dog.

The relationship between a person and his sins is compared to that of a man and his dog. If a person raises a dog in his home and feeds it, it will follow him wherever he goes and never abandon him. If he wishes to be rid of it, his only recourse is to kill it. The same is true of a sin, which damages and draws impurity upon the aspect of his soul to which it corresponds. His sin follows him wherever he goes. Even if he then performs a mitzvah, the merit of the mitzvah cannot protect him from his sin. His only recourse is to "kill" the sin through Torah study.

In this respect, the Torah is compared to water. Just as ritual impurity can only be relieved by immersing in water, so too the impurity of sin can only be relieved by immersing in the proverbial waters of Torah wisdom (Berachos 16a).

The "dog" of sin cannot survive in the vicinity of Torah. Chazal (Sukkah 52b) tell us, "If the repulsive one (the *yetzer hara*) accosts you, drag it to the *beis midrash* (where Torah is studied). Even if it as hard as stone, it will melt, as is written, '*Stones have been eroded by water*' (Iyov 14:19)," referring to the waters of Torah (Bava Kama 82a).

For this reason the Ten Commandments, which are the general principles of the Torah, were engraved on stone. Stone represents the heart of man, since the desires of our heart draw us after temptation, causing us to trip over the stumbling blocks of sin. The only way to overcome this is through the "writing of Elokim inscribed upon the stone." By constantly toiling in Torah study, the Torah becomes engraved upon our stone hearts, just as it was engraved upon the stone tablets, as is written, "*Engrave them upon the tablet of your heart*" (Mishlei 7:3).

The heart also has two tablets, the left and right chambers, which correspond to the positive commandment and the prohibitions. These mitzvos, which were engraved upon the Twin Tablets, are sketches of Hashem's will through which He fashioned the world, as we discussed above at length. The mitzvos are also called *chukim*, from the same root as the word *chokeik* – engrave, since they were the instruments through which Hashem carved the Heavens and Earth.

The opposite is also true of the wicked, of whom it is written, "*They engrave carvings of sin*" (Yeshayah 10:1). They bring ruin and destruction upon creation. The *sitra achra* is compared to a ruined wasteland, the abode of dangerous bandits. These "bandits" are the destructive forces that a person creates through his sins and then return to punish him, as is written, "*Your evil shall afflict you*" (Yermiyahu 2:19).

These forces become attached to him like a dog, with a powerful bond that is hard as stone. The only way to escape them is through Torah, which is the antidote to the *yetzer hara*, and a potion of life for anyone whose soul ails from the illness of sin, no matter how desperate his situation.

The Power of Torah

The kabbalists explain that there is a masculine and a feminine aspect to the *yetzer hara*. Corresponding to these two evil forces, there are also masculine and

feminine aspects to the Torah: the Written Torah of Tanach (*Torah She'biksav*) and the Oral Torah (*Torah She'baal Peh*) which was codified in the Talmud. "**Hear, my son, your father's mussar...**" refers to the Written Torah, "**...and do not abandon your mother's Torah**" (*Mishlei* 1:8) refers to the Oral Torah.

Chazal tell us that HaKadosh Baruch Hu sealed His covenant with Klal Yisrael only because of the Oral Torah. Just as a mother develops and raises her small children into grown adults, so too the feminine aspect of the Torah develops the terse and cryptic hints from the Written Torah into clear halachos. All the wisdom of those ideas already exists, hidden in the letters of the Torah, just as all the potential of the grown adult exists in the small baby. However, it takes the feminine aspect to bring these potentials to fruition.

As we explained above, the letters of the Written Torah are sketches of everything that exists in all the worlds of creation, above and below. This aspect of the Torah is Written across the Heavens, and Moshe Rabbeinu "transcribed it from one book to another," as it were, when he wrote the Torah in this world. The Written Torah exists on every plane of existence in a fashion appropriate to creations that exist on that plane, according to their composition and their powers. In this world, the Written Torah took its shape in Ashuris letters, standing in direct parallel to the way it is written above.

Thus, the Written Torah exists in all the worlds, and can be comprehended by the angels, each according to its level. However, the Oral Torah stems from a plane high above the angels and is incomprehensible to them. It was transmitted to Bnei Yisrael, whose souls are carved from beneath the Throne of Glory, from a place above the level of the angels. This was the complaint of the angels, "**Let Your glory be upon the Heavens,**" (*Tehillim* 8:2) when they demanded that the Torah remain in Heaven and not be given to the Jewish people (*Shabbos* 88b). Hashem overruled their complaint and granted it to the Jewish people, thus forming with us an eternal covenant.

Corresponding to the masculine and feminine aspects of the Torah, there is a masculine and feminine aspect of the *yetzer hara*. The feminine aspect is what lures us into sin with the power of her voice. Of this, Shlomo HaMelech warned, "**To guard you from the foreign woman, whose words are slippery**" (*Mishlei* 7:5). The masculine aspect is what records our sins, wages accusations against us, and wrecks destruction throughout creation. Of this it is written, "**The sin of Yehuda is written with an iron stylus**" (*Yermiyahu* 17:1).

Chazal hint to these two aspects in Pirkei Avos (3:16): "Everything is given on security, and a net is cast over all living things. The store is open, the storekeeper sells, the ledger is open and the hand records. Anyone who wants to borrow can come and borrow, but the officers make their rounds each day to collect payment from man whether he admits his debt or not. They have sufficient evidence and the judgment is true. Everything is prepared for the meal."

"The store is open" refers to the display of alluring sins that are available, and the storekeeper who entices customers to come and purchase them. "The hand records" refers to the record that is kept of our deeds.

The two hands represent the powers through which Hashem created the world, as is written, *"My (left) hand established the earth and My right hand measured the Heavens,"* (Yeshayah 48:13) and, *"When I see Your Heavens, the work of Your fingers"* (Tehillim 8:4).

There are twenty-eight joints on the two hands, representing the Hebrew word for power, *koach* (כח), which equals twenty-eight in gematria. These parallel the Hebrew letters, which are the forces of creation: twenty-two basic letters, the five end letters (א,ב,ג,ד,ה), and the letter aleph which is repeated at the end.

When a person sins, "the hand records," meaning that a record of his sin is left across all the forces of creation. The same is also true of our good deeds. They too are inscribed upon the handiwork of creation, and upon our physical hands as well.

This is the depth of the Priestly Blessing, in which Hashem commanded the Kohanim to raise their hands and spread their fingers as they bless Klal Yisrael. The Kohanim devote their time to serving in the Beis Hamikdash and disseminating Torah, as is written, *"For the lips of the Kohen preserve knowledge, and you shall seek Torah from his mouth"* (Malachi 2:7), and, *"They shall teach Your judgments to Yaakov and Your Torah to Yisrael"* (Devarim 33:10). In the merit of the Torah that they learn and teach, the Shechinah rests on the joints of their fingers. As we explained above, the Torah is made up of the Names of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Of this it is written, *"They shall place My Name on Bnei Yisrael and I will bless them"* (Bamidbar 6:27). Through the Torah study of the Kohanim, the Name of Hashem rests upon their hands as they bless Bnei Yisrael.

Right and Left

From all that we have written, we can understand that it is impossible for a person to purify his soul and draw close to Hashem to merit all the good for which we are destined, except through the merit of Torah study day and night. Torah purifies our souls and causes us to despise all the lowly temptations of this world. Compared to the awesome joy of Torah, all the trivial pleasures of this world are meaningless. *"If a person would offer all the riches of his house in exchange for love (of Torah), he would be scorned with contempt"* (Shir Hashirim 8:7).

Torah enables a person to recognize the greatness of his soul and realize that he is connected in his spiritual roots to the Living God, by means of the Torah. In truth, a person who experiences the passion for Torah takes little heed of the pleasures of this world. He is not drawn after the desires of this world when they are present, and he is not upset by the wants of this world when they are absent. Nothing can distract him from his attachment to Hashem and his determination to fulfill the will of his creator.

Of this Shlomo Hamelech said, *"A multitude of waters cannot extinguish the love"* (ibid). Water serves as a metaphor for both ends of the spectrum. It can represent affluence, prosperity and all the succulent fruits of this world, which grow when watered. Chazal tell us that when rain falls a blessing descends even upon the

money in our pockets (*Taanis* 8b). On the other hand, water can also represent the waves of suffering or poverty that pass over a person in this world.

In both senses of the word, Shlomo Hamelech said that the waters of this world cannot extinguish the love for Torah and for serving Hashem. A person who is attached to the Torah looks with scorn at all offers to trade his Torah for even the greatest wealth in the world. The pleasures of this world are empty and insubstantial. They last for a fleeting moment, like a passing shadow, and then they are gone. A person who has experienced the sweetness of Torah has the sense of perspective to recognize all this.

The Merit of Supporting Torah

For those who are unable to apply themselves to Torah day and night, *chas v'shalom*, there is no recourse other than to support those who study Torah, as is written, "It is a tree of life for all who grasp hold of it, and its supporters are fortunate" (*Mishlei* 3:18). The Gemara suggests at first that only Torah scholars will merit to rise for the resurrection, since "the dew of Torah enlivens them," but the Gemara then concludes that this merit also extends to those who support Torah scholars (*Kesubos* 111b).

In *Mishlei*, Shlomo HaMelech writes in the name of the Torah, as it addresses in first person both those who study the Torah and those who support it. Regarding the Torah scholars themselves, the Torah says:

Wisdom is better than pearls and nothing can compare to it. I am wisdom. I dwell in cleverness. I will find understanding and wit. Fear of Hashem is to despise evil and arrogance. The path of evil and the dishonest mouth I hate. Counsel and resourcefulness are mine. I am wisdom. Mine is might. With me kings rule and rulers engrave just laws. With me officers rule, and all who judge righteously (*Mishlei* 8:11-16).

Shlomo Hamelech describes how the Torah teaches its scholars to despise the sordid pleasures of this world. It breaks the power of the *yetzer hara*, and instills *yiras Shamayim* and love for Hashem instead. "I am wisdom. I dwell in cleverness. I will find understanding and wit." The Torah teaches one to see through the deceptions of the *yetzer hara* and outwit all its machinations to harm us. It imparts the "fear of Hashem to despise evil and arrogance."

Regarding those who support Torah, the Torah says:

I love those who love me, and those who search for me will discover me. Wealth and honor are with me. Riches, strength and *tzedakah*. My fruit is better than gold, and my produce is better than choice silver. I walk on the paths of *tzedakah* and on the roads of judgment. To bequeath something substantial to those I love, and fill their treasure-houses (*Mishlei* 8:17-21).

The promises of wealth and honor are for those who love the Torah, but do not actually study it. They admire Torah and spread their wealth to support Torah

scholars and provide for poor children so that they can study Torah. The Torah loves those who love its scholars. They too will discover the reward that the Torah has to offer. They too will find the path that leads to the Shechinah.

The Purpose of Prosperity

Wealth and honor are not given to a person so that he can surrender himself to the foolish distractions of this world. They were given to him so that he could use them in a way that is good and proper in Hashem's eyes. *"Hashem created everything for His sake"* (Mishlei 16:4).

The verse, "Wealth and honor are with me. Riches, strength and *tzedakah*," comes to teach us that wealth, honor, riches and strength can all be good things, but only when they are used for the sake of *tzedakah*, to serve Hashem by supporting Torah and those who study it.

"All the treasures of the nations shall come and I shall fill this House with honor, says Hashem, Lord of Hosts. Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold, says Hashem, Lord of Hosts" (Chaggai 2:7-8). Mine is the silver and gold can be interrupted to mean, "For My sake." All the precious gems, treasures and riches in the world were created only in order to glorify the Beis Hamikdash.

Now that the Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim lies in ruins, the Shechinah rests instead on the places where the Torah is studied. upon us. Of these places it is written, *"Make for Me a Mikdash and I will dwell among you."*

The concept of honor that exists in the world is also meant only for the Torah and those who support it. This is an extension of the honor of Hashem, which He shares with those who fear Him. "All those who honor the Torah are honored among mankind" (Avos 4:6).

The Left Supports the Right

Of this it is also written, *"Length of days are in its right hand, and in its left hand wealth and honor"* (Mishlei 3:16). As we explained above, the Heavens were created with the proverbial right hand, and the Earth was created with the left. *"My (left) hand founded the earth, and My right hand measured the Heaven"* (Yeshayah 48:13).

The right hand is the stronger of the two, representing the greater power of holiness that is found in Heaven. That is the place of eternal life and the reward of the World to Come for the souls of the righteous. The Torah scholars and tzaddikim who devote themselves to Hashem's service are compared to the ministering angels who perform Hashem's will, as is written, *"The lips of the Kohen preserve knowledge, and you shall seek Torah from his mouth, for he is an angel of Hashem,"* (Malachi 2:7) and as Chazal say, "Who are the ministering angels? These are the Sages" (Nedarim 20b). Although they walk on this earth, they are like angels who belong to the spiritual world of Heaven.

On the left hand, the weaker of the two, we have this temporal, natural world, with all its "wealth and honor." Together, the two hands comprise the twenty-eight

letters of the Torah, fourteen (the gematria of hand – *yad*) on the right hand and fourteen on the left.

Sometimes, the stronger right hand is unable to accomplish a task on its own. It then needs the left hand to assist and support it. This is the role of those who involve themselves in worldly matters to amass wealth. If they do so in order to support those who study Torah, which was given with Hashem's right hand,³ then the left hand becomes subservient to the right. Both of them together receive their reward in the World to Come, "length of days" in the world of eternal life. For this reason, the Kohanim bless Klal Yisrael with both hands, in order to extend their blessing to the right and to the left, both to those who study Torah and to those who support them.

Shlomo Hamelech said "***My fruit is better than gold,***" (*Mishlei* 8:19) referring to the reward for those who support Torah. However, this verse ("טוֹב פְּרִי מִהָרוּץ וּמִפֶּזֶז") can also be interpreted to mean, "My fruit, which grow from gold, are good." In this sense, it means to say that just as mitzvos produce spiritual fruit in Heaven, so too does wealth, when it is used to support Torah.

Through their Torah study and devotion to Hashem, Torah scholars and *tzaddikim* produce proverbial "fruit" above, bringing light and perfection to the upper worlds and strengthening the Court of Heaven. In a sense, we can consider creation as an investment that Hashem made, the "profits" or "fruits" of which are realized through the Torah and good deeds of the righteous.

Silver, gold and all the seemingly worthless desires of this world are also capable of producing spiritual fruit in Heaven, through the monetary contributions of those who support Torah. Tremendous spiritual profits can be reaped from these physical things, when they are used in fulfillment of Hashem's will.

The verse then continues, "***...and my produce is better than choice silver.***" The Hebrew word for silver, *keseif*, means shame, *kisufa*, in Aramaic. The expression *nahama d'kisufa* is used for the "bread of shame" that the Heavenly creations are forced to eat, since they cannot earn their reward through their own hard work, as we do here in this world by struggling against the *yetzer hara*. This is the very reason why we were created in this lower world, subject to material temptations. The reward for overcoming our greed and contributing our wealth towards lofty goals is greater than the highest spiritual pleasures experienced by those who dwell above, since theirs is a bread of shame, while our reward is hard earned.

The opportunity to earn our own reward is an expression of Hashem's kindness and His desire to benefit His creations in the greatest possible way. Of this, the verse continues, "***I walk on the paths of tzedakah.***" For this *tzedakah* to be complete, it must be justly earned, as the verse concludes "***... and on the roads of judgment.***"

"***To bequeath something substantial to those I love ...***" refers to the eternal reward that they will inherit through their own free choice, as a result of their own decision to use their wealth for Hashem's sake. *Yiras Shamayim* is the one thing that is not in Hashem's hands (*Berachos* 33b). He leaves it for each person to choose his own path and earn his own reward.

³ "From His right hand, a fiery Torah to His nation" (*Devarim* 33:2).

"...and fill their treasure-houses." Chazal tell us that "Hashem has nothing in His world except a treasure-house of *yiras Shamayim*" (ibid). Treasures are things that are rare and hard to come by. Often, they are brought with much difficulty from distant lands. Therefore, they are the most valuable things of all. The "treasure-house" that Hashem has in store for the righteous in the World to Come is filled with the reward that they earned for the *yiras Shamayim* that they gathered through their hard work in this distant world.

Supporting the Torah Study of Children

Therefore, let us strengthen the hands that have grown lax in their support of Torah study. Most importantly, let us take care of the children of the poor, from whom Torah is destined to spread throughout Klal Yisrael (*Nedarim* 81a). The entire world depends upon the Torah study of children (*Shabbos* 119b).

I found it necessary to explain all of this, in order to challenge the foolish notion that we need not invest our money to teach the Talmud to poor children to such great proficiency that they can delve into its depths. "Suffice it to teach them *aleph-beis*, so that they can daven from a siddur and learn Chumash. Leave the Talmud for big rabbis who are responsible for making halachic rulings for the generation. No one else needs it," they say.

As I explained above, the entire world stands on the pillar of the *Torah She'baal Peh*, as it is has been passed down through the Mishna and Talmud, codified into halachah, and studied day and night.

All this can be seen from the account of how the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai. In fact, the Torah was given on two different levels. The first was a spectacular public display. Hashem descend to Har Sinai amidst thunder and lightning, with an open revelation of the Shechinah. The second was a quiet, intimate meeting, in which Moshe alone ascended for forty days and then returned to teach what he had learned to Bnei Yisrael. Why was Kabbalas HaTorah divided into these two different stages, so radically different from one another?

In truth, the Torah is also divided into two categories: *Torah She'biksav* (the Written Torah) and *Torah She'baal Peh* (the Oral Torah). The Written Torah was given in a public display, directly from Hashem to the entire Jewish people. When Bnei Yisrael heard Hashem proclaim the Ten Commandments, they simultaneously heard the entire Written Torah, with all the 620 mitzvos⁴ corresponding to the 620 letters of the Ten Commandments, as we explained above.

The second category is the Oral Torah, given in a soft whisper, representing a level of intimacy that is not meant to be exposed. The essence of the Torah is the Oral Torah. This is the "hidden treasure with which Hashem rejoiced before the world was created" (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, 5:10). Hashem desired that this wisdom remain hidden to the world at large, and revealed only to His holy, chosen nation.

⁴ This refers to the 613 Torah commandments and 7 Rabbinic mitzvos, see above ____.

Hashem did not allow the Oral Torah to be written, since He knew that the gentile nations would eventually copy the Written Torah for themselves. If the Oral Torah were to be written, they would take that too (*Gittin* 60b, Tosefos s.v. *Atmuhei*). Hashem told Moshe, "I know that the nations of the world will subjugate them and take the Torah from them. Therefore, I am giving them only Mikra in writing, but I leave the Mishna, Talmud and Aggadah to be transmitted by word of mouth alone. Thus, even if the nations subjugate them, they will still remain distinguished from the nations (through their knowledge of the Oral Torah)" (*Shemos Rabbah* 47:1).

The verses from Mishlei, which we cited above, publicize the greatness of the Torah. This publicity is a facet of the Written Torah, which was given with great fanfare, as Hashem in His Glory descended upon Har Sinai together with the Divine Chariot and the Hosts of Heaven. By doing so, He showed that all the angels of Heaven would be subjugated under the Torah that was now being delivered to those who dwell upon the Earth.

Of this the verse states, "*The Chariot of Elokim with twenty thousand leading angels, with Hashem among them, on Sinai in holiness*" (*Tehillim* 68:18). All this refers to the spectacular display that accompanied the bestowal the Written Torah upon Bnei Yisrael.

However, the following verse adds, referring to Moshe Rabbeinu, "*You ascended to Heaven. You caught captives and brought gifts to man, so that even the wayward will dwell with God Elokim.*" Quietly and alone, Moshe ascended Har Sinai in order to "catch captives" in secrecy. This refers to the levels of the Torah that were kept hidden in the highest secret recesses of Heaven. This was the greatest gift that Hashem had in store for Klal Yisrael. It had to be given in secrecy, so that if *chas v'shalom* Bnei Yisrael would go on wayward paths and be exiled for their sins, Hashem would still dwell with them in their exile. The Oral Torah would preserve their distinction from the nations and ensure Hashem's continued attachment to Klal Yisrael.

The Dwelling Place of the Shechinah

From all this we can see the great importance of those who toil to understand and explain the depths of the Oral Torah, through Mishna, Talmud and Aggadah. Because of the Oral Torah, Hashem sealed a covenant with Klal Yisrael that could never be broken throughout all the travels and travails of our exile.

Since the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the Shechinah has been exiled from its home and forced to wander from place to place. It finds rest only in the *batei midrashos* where the halachos of the Oral Torah are studied. "*Hashem loves the Gates of Tzion,*" the gates in which halachos are studied, "*more than all the dwelling places of Yaakov*" (*Tehillim* 87:2).

Even while the Beis Hamikdash stood, the Shechinah dwelled there in the merit of the Torah. That was where the Sanhedrin was seated, in the Chamber of Hewn Stone. There, halachic rulings were decided and disseminated throughout Klal Yisrael, as is written, "*If you will have a question on a matter of judgment ... you*

shall get up and ascend to the place that Hashem your God will choose. You shall come to the Kohanim and Leviim, to the judge that will be in that time, and seek their counsel. They will tell you the ruling on the matter of judgment" (Devarim 17:8-9).

The Sanhedrin was seated near the Mizbei'ach to show that the sacrifices were accepted only in the merit of the Torah. *"Does Hashem desire sacrifices? He wants us to heed His voice"* (Shmuel I 15:22). Hashem has no desire for our sacrifices if we do not heed His word.

The main dwelling place of the Shechinah in the Beis Hamikdash was the Aron which held the Luchos HaBris. In the second Beis Hamikdash, the Shechinah was not revealed, since the Aron and the Luchos were absent. But now, even after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, His holy Name rests on every place where Torah is studied. These are His holy dwelling places in our times, as the Gemara says, *"In all places, fiery offerings are brought to My Name"* (Malachi 1:11) - this refers to the Torah scholars who study halachah" (Menachos 110a). Through the Torah, Hashem's Name rests upon Klal Yisrael even in our exile. *"Even as they are in the lands of their enemies, I have not despised them or rejected them to destroy them or annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem your God"* (Vayikra 26:44).

Bilam hoped to curse Bnei Yisrael that we would have no *batei midrashos*. He foresaw that one day we would be exiled among the nations and the Beis Hamikdash would be destroyed. Without *batei midrashos*, where scholars would toil in Torah, we would be lost in our exile, *chas v'shalom*. Hashem in His mercy transformed Bilam's curses into blessings. Rather than cursing us that we would not have places of Torah, Bilam was forced to bless us, *"How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov"* (Bamidbar 24:5). In every area that he thought to curse us, he was forced to bless us instead. However, when we later sinned, all these blessings reverted to curses except for this one (Sanhedrin 105b). Despite our sins, even when we were cast into exile, we were left with *batei midrashos* in all the places of our wanderings. These are what ensure our survival and cause Hashem's Name to remain upon us.

"How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov... Like flowing streams, like gardens planted by the river ... like cedars beside the water. The waters will flow from his wells, and his seed will be upon many waters"(ibid).

Here too we find a hint for the two different levels of Klal Yisrael. The first are the scholars who toil in Torah. They are compared to flowing streams, just as the Torah itself is compared to water.⁵ The second are those who support them. They are compared to cedar trees, since they are as strong as cedar wood to support the edifice of Torah. They take responsibility to support the Torah schools so that children can have a Torah education, as Chazal warn us, "Be careful of the children of the poor, since Torah will spread from them throughout Klal Yisrael" (Nedarim 81a). Water spreads from the wells of the Torah supporters, to nurture the seeds of Torah greatness. "Fortunate are those who cast their seeds upon the water," (Yeshayah 32:20) refers to those who invest in Torah and kind deeds (Bava Kama 17a).

⁵ See page ____

Supporting Torah Schools

In times of financial difficulty, when poverty abounds and many families lack their basic needs, one might think that it is the wrong time to invest in building Torah institutions, since the community cannot bear the financial burden. Such were the thoughts of Bnei Yisrael when they returned from the Babylonian Exile. Due to the terrible poverty of the times, they were lax in rebuilding the Beis Hamikdash. Chaggai the Navi then chastised them, saying:

So says Hashem, Lord of Hosts, to tell this nation who say, "This is not the right time for the House of Hashem to be built." The word of Hashem was upon Chaggai the Navi saying: Is this the right time for you to sit in your roofed homes while this House lies in ruins? And now, so says Hashem Lord of Hosts, set your hearts upon your paths. You have planted much but harvested little. You have eaten but are not satisfied ... your profits are gathered into a torn purse ... You turn towards plenty and it becomes sparse ... "Why is this?" says Hashem Lord of Hosts. "It is because My House is in ruins while each person runs to his own house" (*Chaggai* 1:2-9).

Upon their return to Eretz Yisrael, they claimed that the times were too hard for them to take on the expense of building the Beis Hamikdash. The Navi chastised them for this claim, by showing them how they found the means to engage in their own worldly pursuits and build fancy homes for themselves, while the House of Hashem which is the source of our lives lay in ruins.

He called upon them to take note of their difficulties in making a livelihood, and to realize that this was because Hashem's blessing was absent from their lives. They planted much and harvested little since the Gates of Prosperity in Heaven were shut. Their efforts were compared to a person whose money spills out through a hole in a torn purse. All his efforts are lost.

This was all because the House of Hashem was in ruins. Had the Shechinah rested upon them, they would have found abundant blessing in their homes and fields. The same is true of our own situation in exile. Our prosperity and livelihood depend on the merit of toiling in and supporting Torah.

One Last Treasure

Exiled from our land, with our Beis Hamikdash lying in ruins, with no Navi or Kohen to guide us, and without all the spiritual treasures that we once enjoyed, we still have one last treasure that is equal to them all. This is the Torah, which Hashem promised would never be lost to us. *"For it shall never be forgotten from among their descendants"* (*Devarim* 31:21). *"This is My covenant with them, says Hashem: My spirit that is upon you and My words that I placed in your mouth, shall not falter from your mouth, or from them mouth of your offspring, or from the mouth of your offspring's offspring, so says Hashem, from now and forever"* (*Yeshayah* 59:21).

Hashem promised that His holy spirit, which rested upon us when we received the Torah on Har Sinai, will remain with us forever to protect us from our enemies.

This is the Presence of His Glory, the proverbial "sukkah of peace." As a mother bird spreads her wings over her offspring, so to does the Shechinah spread its wings over us to shield us from all harm.

Together with this protection is the promise that the words of the holy Torah that Hashem placed in our mouths will remain with us forever. These are none other than the words of Hashem Himself, which He spoke to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael. They could actually see the words that were spoken, as the verse states, "*The entire nation saw the sounds*" (*Shemos 20:15*, Rashi). These words are the projection of Hashem's will in sustaining the existence of creation, which depends on the letters of Torah that were placed in the mouths of Bnei Yisrael as we toil in Torah study at all times.

Through these words of Torah, we draw close to Hashem. Chazal tell us that when the Torah scholars toil in Torah, HaKadosh Baruch Hu quotes their teachings in their names, "My son Evyasar says like this, and My son Yonasan says like that" (*Gittin 6b*). In this way, we attach ourselves to Hashem's words as we study His Torah.

Bound to the Torah in All Three Worlds

The Torah became one with the Jewish people, to our souls and housed within our physical bodies even as we live upon this world. When the time comes for us to leave this world and our bodies rest in the grave, a spark of this holy fire will remain within our bodies. The Zohar calls this the "warmth of the bones." This is what will enable the body to rise for the Resurrection and live for length of days in the seventh millennium.

"When you walk, it will guide you. When you rest, it will guard you. When you rise, it will be your speech" (*Mishlei 6:22*). This refers to the three periods of each person's existence. The first is the years of life he is given in this world. The second is after death, when the soul separates from the body and the body returns to the dust. The third is after the Resurrection.

"When you walk, it will guide you." Our life in this world is called "walking" since this is our only opportunity to advance. We were not born to remain in one place, but to move forward and change our positions, from place to place and from time to time. This world was created with the letter *heh*, the fifth letter of the *aleph-beis*, which represents how our lives in this world are segmented into five kinds of divisions: years, months, days, hours and minutes.

Furthermore, the letter *heh* is written with three lines, symbolizing past, present and future. It also symbolizes the three dimensions of space. These divisions of time and space exist only in this world. The World to Come is not subject to time or space. It was created with the letter *yud*, a single dot, which has no length or width. Without any notion of time or space, it is impossible to advance.

Therefore, while a person lives in this world, he must seize the opportunity to ascend from one spiritual level to the next. In the World to Come, he will have no opportunity to do more good deeds. He will remain stable in whatever position he earned while he was in this world.

Therefore, the verse states, *"When you walk, it will guide you."* When we walk in this world, the Torah guides us to follow its ways. Then, *"When you rest, it will guard you."* After our souls leave our bodies, the Torah will guard us with the warmth that remains in the body, left over from the soul's attachment to Hashem's word while it lived.

Then, in the third period of our lives, when we return from our slumbers for the Resurrection, *"When you rise, it will be your speech."* The capacity for speech shows the complete union of spirit and body, since the spirit is what enables the body to speak, as we find regarding the original creation of man, *"He blew into his nostrils a living soul, and man became a living nefesh"* (*Bereishis* 2:7). The Targum translates "living nefesh" as "a speaking spirit."

Before the Throne of Glory

Seven things were created before the world (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4). Among them are the Throne of Glory, as is written, *"From then, Your Throne was established"* (*Tehillim* 93:2), and the Torah, as is written, *"Hashem acquired me (the Torah) at the beginning of His path, before His deeds from then"* (*Mishlei* 8:22). The Midrash then adds, "I would not have known which came first, the Torah or the Throne of Glory, if the verse had not stated that the Torah came *'before His deeds from then.'*"

This is an important insight which disproves the misconception of twisted philosophy, into whose net many of our Jewish brethren have been caught. They propose that the Torah has no Heavenly power to illuminate and empower the higher worlds of holiness, but that it is simply a convention of human interaction, designed to improve our behavior and distance us from theft, dishonesty and the like. They suggest that even the mitzvos whose reasons are beyond us are just to help us remember the Exodus, or to distance us from heathen rituals.

Those who try to base the entire Torah only on the worldly, social benefit that it has to offer, fail to recognize the awesome power that Torah has to draw a flow of blessing and perfection upon all the higher worlds of creation. Many have fallen into this misconception, and have even claimed that this is the meaning of the verse, *"This mitzvah ... is not in Heaven"* (*Devarim* 30:11-12). Yet this is a false interpretation, which must be refuted.

In truth the Torah and mitzvos are celestial lights from the highest worlds, which have descended to this world in material garb. When a person performs a mitzvah with intention to fulfill Hashem's will with all his heart and soul, he connects himself to the celestial light of the Torah. This light is itself the reward of the World to Come, as we explained above.

When the Midrash says that the Torah was created before the Throne of Glory, it means that the will of Hashem as revealed to His holy nation came before any other creation. Before there was any kind of foundation for the Kingdom of Hashem to be created and the Throne of Glory to be established, there existed only Hashem, His Torah and the souls of the Jewish people, which are all bound one to the other in perfect unity (*Zohar* III 73a). For this reason, just as the Torah is made up entirely of

Names of Hashem (Ramban, introduction to commentary on the Torah) so too Klal Yisrael is called by Hashem's Name.

Each mitzvah is a facet of Hashem's will, which we comprehend through 613 roots that divide into many branches. Much of the depth and meaning of these mitzvos are hidden from us, just as the depth and meaning of Hashem's Name is hidden, such that in essence the Written Torah is really something far beyond our comprehension. It descended from Heaven. Only there can its true depths be known. However, the Oral Torah was given to this world, and revealed to the scholars of each generation.

On a conceptual level, the true depths of the mitzvos are far beyond our understanding. They involve worlds of purity, love and awe that are beyond our ken. They are revealed to us only on the physical plane, where we can connect to them through our deeds, as we fulfill the mitzvos in all their halachic details. For each mitzvah, there is a deep correspondence to a certain combination of the letters of Hashem's Name, since each mitzvah is a different path through which Hashem's will and benevolence shines through all the worlds. As we attach ourselves to the mitzvos, we attach ourselves to Hashem Himself, as is written, *"You who are attached to Hashem your God are all alive today"* (Devarim 4:4).

Were we to entertain the foolish notion that the Torah was given for nothing other than to improve our character and guide our social interactions, then the Throne of Glory should have preceded the Torah. There is no reason that resolving the childish disputes of mankind should be any more important than glory of Hashem among the angels in Heaven. However, the truth is that the Torah transcends even the highest planes of Creation. It preceded even the Throne of Glory, both in terms of order and in terms of importance.

Regarding this debate, the Midrash states, "I would not have known which came first, the Torah or the Throne of Glory, if the verse had not stated that the Torah came *'before His deeds from then.'*" In other words, I would not have known if the Throne of Glory came first, as the philosophers believe, or if the Torah came first, as Chazal teach us. To resolve this question, Shlomo Hamelech said, *"Hashem acquired me (the Torah) at the beginning of His path, before His deeds from then."* The Torah is the first, foremost and highest revelation of Hashem's will and of the attributes through which He bestows His blessings upon creation. It comes before any of the other deeds of creation, all of which fall beneath the Throne of Glory.

The Torah was not given only for the sake of this lowest world, to preserve order and justice in human interactions. It was given to purify the roots of the souls of Klal Yisrael, which emanate from the highest spiritual heights.

The Souls of Klal Yisrael

Chazal tell us that when Hashem gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, the nations of the world complained about the special favoritism that we were shown. "Why were they found worthier than us to be drawn close to You?" the nations asked.

Hashem silenced their complaints with the answer, "Show me a book of lineage for yourselves that compares to the lineage of Bnei Yisrael," as the verse states, **"To their families, to the houses of their fathers"** (Bamidbar 1:2; Yalkut Shimoni, Torah 684),

What is the meaning of Hashem's response? What relevance does a person's lineage have to his worthiness to receive the Torah? Hashem cares only for the sincerity of a person's heart. He makes no distinction between families of illustrious or simple descent.

Rather, this Midrash comes to teach us something deep about the source of our souls in Heaven, the spiritual lineage of Bnei Yisrael. Our souls stem a source entirely different from that of the gentiles. It is a source intrinsically attached to the Torah.

The Vilna Gaon (Gra on Shir Hashirim 1:6) explained that there are two different aspects to each person's soul, as expressed by two different verses in the Torah. The first is the *nefesh* that is born of the earth, like that of all living creatures, of which the verse states, **"The earth gave forth a living nefesh"** (Bereishis 1:24). The Midrash explains this refers to the *nefesh* of Adam (Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria 1).

The second is the *neshama*, of which the verse states, **"Hashem blew into his nostrils a living soul"** (Bereishis 2:7). This is the *neshama*, carved from the **"spirit of Elokim that hovered over the face of the water"** (Bereishis 1:2). Chazal tell us that this verse refers to the Throne of Glory (Rashi), from which the souls of Klal Yisrael are carved.

In a spiritual sense, the *nefesh* and *neshama* can be compared to a father and mother. The *nefesh* that comes from the earth is like the mother, providing nourishment and the ability to grow. The *neshama* from above is like the father, providing the flow of life. These two parts of a person's composition are represented by the letters *yud* and *heh*. Chazal tell us that the woman (השא) provides the letter *heh*, while the man provides the letter *yud* (שיא), such that together they spell Hashem's Name and cause the Shechinah to rest upon them and their children (Sotah 17a).

This Name of Hashem was attached to the Tribes of Bnei Yisrael when they were counted by the names of their father's houses. For example, **"For Chanoch, the family of Ha-Chanoch-y"** (Bamidbar 26:5). The letter *heh* was placed at the beginning of their name, and the letter *yud* at the end, on which Rashi comments, **"The Tribes of Hashem (ה-י) are a testimony to Yisrael"** (Bamidbar 26:5). Hashem's Name testifies to the purity of their lineage.

As such, the lineage of the **"To their families, to the houses of their fathers,"** which made us worthy of the Torah was not just a biological ancestry, but a spiritual source of our souls, which are rooted in the Name of Hashem and inseparable from the Torah, which is One with Hashem. For this reason, it is also impossible to separate Klal Yisrael from the Torah. The Torah must come to Klal Yisrael and Klal Yisrael must come to the Torah, since our souls are deeply rooted in Torah.

This was why Hashem hung Har Sinai over the heads of Bnei Yisrael and threatened to bury them beneath if they would not accept the Torah (Shabbos 88a). What need was there for such a threat? They had already agreed to accept the Torah, willingly and joyously proclaiming *"na'aseh vinishmah."*

The answer is that even after they agreed to accept the Torah, Hashem imposed it upon them by force, in order to show that this was not a matter dependent on their choice and free will. They should not think that had they not agreed to accept the Torah, they would not have been under any obligation. Rather, the Torah is intrinsically obligatory due to the essence of their being and the source of their souls, as the Maharal explains (*Tiferes Yisrael*, Chapter 16). Even if the Torah would be forced upon them at first, Hashem knew that they would ultimately observe the Torah with eager hearts, love and awe, since they are attached to the Torah from the source of their souls.

This point is demonstrated by the Gemara, which states that when Hashem grants the reward for those who toiled in Torah, the gentile nations will complain that had they been forced to accept the Torah, as Bnei Yisrael were, they too would have accepted it and received its reward. Hashem will answer their claim by giving them one last chance to do a mitzvah. The mitzvah chosen to test them will be sukkah. Then, Hashem will make the sun pierce down as in the hottest parts of the summer. When they find it too hot to sit in the sukkah, they will kick down their sukkos and leave (*Avodah Zarah* 2b).

This is because they do not have a real connection with the Torah from the depths of their souls. In truth, the Torah can only belong to Klal Yisrael.

The Feast of the Leviathan

This is also represented by the Feast of the Leviathan, which will be held in a "sukkah" made from its skin, as the Gemara states:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Everything that Hashem made in the world, He made with male and female counterparts. He also made a male and female Leviathan. Were they to reproduce, they would destroy the entire world. Therefore, Hashem neutered the male and killed the female, salting her meat for the *tzaddikim* in the future

Rabbah said in the name of Rav Yochanan: Hashem is destined to make a feast for the *tzaddikim* from the meat of the Leviathan ...

Rabbah also said in the name of Rav Yochanan: Hashem is destined to make a sukkah for the *tzaddikim* from the skin of the Leviathan. Hashem will then take the skin that remains and drape it on the walls of Yerushalayim, from where its glow will shine from one end of the world to the other (*Bava Basra* 74b-75a. See also *Zohar* I, 136a).

The Hebrew word Leviathan is based on the word *leviyah*, which means accompaniment.⁶ In this sense, the Feast of the Leviathan represents our attachment to the Shechinah.

As we explained above, our attachment to the Shechinah is through the Torah. The male and female Leviathan represent the masculine and feminine aspects of the

⁶ As we find in the verses *כי לְיָיִת הוּן הֵם לְרֵאשִׁיָּהּ* (*Mishlei* 1:9), and *בְּמַעַר אִישׁ וְלִיּוֹת* (*Melachim* I, 7:36).

Torah, which are the Written and Oral Torah.⁷ Chazal tell us that Hashem neutered the male Leviathan and killed the female Leviathan, salting it to preserve it for the *tzaddikim* in the future. This represents the depths of the Torah that are hidden from us for now, but will be revealed in the future. The verse, "*You created the Leviathan with which to play*" (*Tehillim* 104:26), also refers to His rejoicing with the Torah, of which it is written, "*I (the Torah) will be His pleasure each day*" (*Mishlei* 8:30).

From the skin of the Leviathan, Hashem will make a glowing sukkah for the *tzaddikim*, which will shine across the world (*Bava Basra* 75a). This represents the secret of Hashem's Name, which both surrounds us to protect us, like a sukkah, and also shines upon us. This is the glory of the Shechinah that the *tzaddikim* are destined to enjoy.

In this sense, the mitzvah of sukkah shows the greatness of Klal Yisrael, and how the Torah, Klal Yisrael and HaKadosh Baruch Hu are all One (*Zohar* III, 73a). Chazal tell us that Hashem hid the primordial light of creation for the *tzaddikim* to enjoy in the future (*Chagigah* 12a). This light is in fact the hidden wisdom of the Torah that is destined to be revealed to us. Since the entire world was created from the letters of the Torah, the light of this wisdom will "shine from one end of the world to the other."

This light is currently hidden within the two "great luminaries," which are the Written and Oral Torah. Chazal tell us that in the future, Hashem will draw the sun out of its sheath (referring to the revelation of the hidden light of the Torah). The righteous will be healed by its light, while the wicked will be judged by it (*Nedarim* 8b).

Chazal tell us that Hashem will hold the Torah in His lap and invite all those who toiled in it to come and receive their reward (*Avodah Zarah* 2a). The imagery of "holding the Torah in His lap" was used, in order to show how closely attached the Torah is to Hashem. All those who toiled in Torah share in this attachment. This itself is the reward for the Torah. For Bnei Yisrael, this closeness to Hashem will be the greatest possible reward. For the other nations, it will be unbearable.

Spiritual and Physical Torah

The Torah is written on parchment, with the letters representing the deep meaning of the Torah and the parchment representing the external form on which that meaning is imprinted. So too, the light of the Torah from Above is a wondrous, spiritual phenomenon. There are deep secrets to it, which impart a spiritual pleasure that only the soul can enjoy. On that level, it has no relevance to physical form or action.

Nonetheless, this spiritual light descended into this world, cloaked in an external, physical form. These are the simple interpretations of the Torah and the physical mitzvos that were given to us to study with our mouths and perform with the physical limbs of our bodies. Hashem's intention in this was to give the physical body an opportunity to fulfill mitzvos and thus be purified, uplifted and enabled to

⁷ See page ___

receive the spiritual reward of the World to Come, when it will be reunited with the soul and continue to live forever, body and soul together.

In this sense, the physical body is like the physical parchment on which the spiritual Torah is written. On a spiritual level, man also has 613 spiritual faculties, which are "dressed in" and attached to the 613 parts of the body.

Eating the meat of the Leviathan represents the light of the Torah that shines upon spiritual side of man's being. We find this metaphor used in the Torah, "*They saw Elokim and they ate and drank*" (Shemos 24:11). The Targum Yonasan explains this to mean, "They gazed upon the glory of Hashem, and rejoiced as if through eating and drinking."

The skin of the Leviathan represents the external, simple aspect of the Torah, which we fulfill through the physical mitzvos performed in this world. Just as a sukkah provides shelter to protect those within, so too these physical mitzvos protects the bodies of the righteous, allowing them to rise for the Resurrection and live on forever.

For this reason, the mitzvah of sukkah represents the reward for the tzaddikim and the punishment for the wicked, as we saw above, that Hashem will "make the sun pierce down" on the sukkos built by the other nations. Hashem will "remove the sun from its sheath," referring to the revelation of the hidden light of the Torah. The righteous will be healed by this light. Since they are attached to it at the source of their souls above, the light will also shine upon their physical bodies, granting them new life in the future.

However, the wicked will be judged by this same light. They are not attached to this light at the source of their souls. Their *nefesh*, which is drawn only from the maternal aspect of the earth,⁸ will melt before such an awesome revelation of spirituality. "*As wax melts before a fire, so too shall the wicked be destroyed*" (Tehillim 68:3).

With this we can understand the Midrash cited above, that Bnei Yisrael were worthy to receive the Torah since they could provide a book of lineage "to the houses of their fathers." This refers to the paternal aspect of the soul, which stems from Heaven, as we explained above.⁹

The Festival of Our Rejoicing

With this we can understand why Sukkos, more than any other holiday, is called the "Festival of Our Rejoicing." As we have seen, the sukkah is the symbol of the greatness of Klal Yisrael, our attachment to the Torah, and the reward that awaits us in the future, which is the time of true rejoicing of which it is written, "*Hashem will rejoice with His creations*" (Tehillim 104:31). Then, Hashem's glory will be revealed throughout the world, after all the wrongs have been corrected and the spirit of impurity has been swept from the earth. All the souls of Klal Yisrael will be attached

⁸ See page ____.

⁹ See page ____.

to the light of their source, and all creation will be uplifted by this same light. This is essentially the revelation of the light of Torah in the world, which is our greatest joy.

We now return to reinvestigate the Midrash with which we began our discussion: "HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Klal Yisrael, 'I sold you the Torah, and it is as if I sold Myself to you together with it.'"

As we have seen, the Torah is Hashem's will, which is indivisible from Hashem Himself. Through the Torah, we study and observe Hashem's will, thus attaching ourselves to Hashem Himself, as is written, *"As a belt is attached to the waste of man, so too I have attached to Myself the entire House of Yisrael and the entire House of Yehuda, says Hashem, to be My nation in renown, praise and splendor"* (Yermiyahu 13:11).

May Hashem plant in our hearts love for Torah, and may we merit the fulfillment of the verse, *"You who are attached to Hashem your G-d are all alive today,"* (Devarim 4:4). Amen.

Bereishis: Connecting Heaven and Earth¹⁰

Questions

The Midrash comments on the verse, *"Hashem is my light and my salvation': My light – on Rosh Hashanah, and my salvation – on Yom Kippur"* (Tehillim 27:1; Vayikra Rabbah 21:4). What is the significance of this parallel? What does it mean to teach us? Elsewhere, the Mishna (Yoma 85b) states:

Fortunate are you Yisrael. Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven, as is written, *"I shall sprinkle upon you pure waters"* and *"Hashem is the mikveh of Yisrael."* Just as a mikveh purifies those who are impure, so too does HaKadosh Baruch Hu purify Bnei Yisrael.

The double wording of "before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you," seems redundant. Furthermore, what point is meant to be drawn by comparing Hashem to a mikveh?

The Division of Creation

To explain all this, we will begin with an introduction from the Sages regarding the purpose for which Hashem created the world. So that man would have the free will to choose between good and evil, and thereby be fully rewarded for his efforts, it was necessary for Hashem to hide Himself from man. In this way, the planes of creation were brought into being, descending from one level to the next. With each level of descent, Hashem's light was progressively hidden more and more, until He created this bottommost level, in which Hashem's glory is almost entirely hidden.

¹⁰ (Sovalak, Shabbos Shuvah 5609)

The concealment of Hashem's presence creates a vacuum in which the forces of evil and the *yetzer hara* can exist. The holiness and light must be hidden, so that the *yetzer hara* will have an opportunity to tempt man into sin with the claim that there is no Judge and there is no judgment, *chas v'shalom*. Man is thus challenged to overcome the *yetzer hara*, and thereby claim his due reward.

Towards this end, creation was divided into two categories: those above and those below. Above in Heaven, the light of Hashem's holiness is more revealed. There, they all recognize His glory. Therefore, the hosts of Heaven and the supernal angels are all far from sin. The forces of evil have no power there at all. The second division is here on Earth below, where Hashem's light is hidden, which allows for evil to exist and hold sway.

These two divisions are also known as light and darkness. The light is found in Heaven, where all can see Hashem's blessed glory and splendor. The darkness is found here below on this Earth.

Therefore, the verse states, "***Bereishis bara Elokim***" (*Bereishis* 1:1) – in the beginning, God created. The word for beginning starts with the letter *beis* which signifies the number two, thus teaching us that there were two parallel worlds of creation, two different beginnings, and two roots from which sprouted everything that exists. One is the root of good and the other is the root of evil.

The verse thus continues, "***the Heavens and the Earth***." These are the two worlds of light and darkness that we described above. The *yetzer tov* is from the Heavens, from the side of holiness. The *yetzer hara* is from the Earth, of which it is written, "***The Earth was chaos, nothingness and darkness***."

Chazal tell us that the "darkness" in this verse refers to the deeds of the wicked, of which it is written, "***Their deeds are done in darkness***" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:6). These deeds are made possible by the removal of Hashem's holiness and the concealment of His glory in this lower world. The world remained dark until Hashem sent His holy spirit from the heights. This is the holy soul of man, which descends below to illuminate his path through the darkness, allowing him to follow the side of holiness. Of this the verse continues, "***God said, 'Let there be light,'***" referring to the deeds of the righteous.

All of this was set in place from the very first day of creation. The stage was set for a conflict in which creation must inevitably reach its perfection, as the forces of evil will ultimately be subdued before the forces of good. Evil is like a chained dog, which can only go so far as its chain allows. The limit of the chain allowed for evil is the six thousand worlds for which this stage of existence will exist, after which everything will return to perfect holiness, the world will reach its perfection, and Hashem's oneness will again be evident throughout all of creation. Then, the world will no longer be divided between good and evil. Everything will revert to perfect goodness, as the verse concludes, "***God saw that the light was good, and it was evening and it was morning, one day***."

Preserving the Balance

After explaining that light refers to the deeds of the righteous and darkness refers to the deeds of the wicked, the Midrash asks, "It is still unclear which Hashem desired, the deeds of the righteous or the deeds of the wicked, until the verse came to clarify, '*God saw that the light was good*' – referring to the deeds of the righteous."

How could the Midrash have possibly wondered what Hashem preferred? Is it not obvious that Hashem desires the good? Are there not many verses throughout the Torah to this effect: "*Behold I have placed before you life and good, death and evil... Choose life*" (*Devarim* 30:15,19), and "*Do I desire the death of the wicked? I want him to return from his path and live*" (*Yechezkel* 33:11). What then was the uncertainty of the Midrash over which path Hashem desires?

Rather, it is clear that the Midrash had a very deep intent. Hashem removed His control from man's free will and placed before him two equal paths, with an even balance between the *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hara*. Had one side exerted more power than the other, man would lose his free will. Although good is really infinitely more powerful than evil, this can be compared to a wrestling match between a strong man and a weak man. The strong man restrains his power, and fights with the same strength of the weak, so that the contest will be evenly matched.

If Hashem wishes that both sides will be equal, the contest between good and evil could go on forever, and there is no assurance that the world will eventually reach its perfection at the end of its allotted time. If Hashem wishes that good must ultimately conquer evil, then the power of good must be stronger, and this infringes on the free will of man.

Unlike human beings, who want something and then must do something to bring their desires into reality, Hashem's will is itself the creative force that brings things into existence, as is written, "*My thoughts are not like your thoughts ... as the rain and snow descend from Heaven ... so are the words that leave My mouth*" (*Yeshayah* 55:8-11).

If Hashem wants good to conquer evil, this is what will happen. What room is left for the free choice of man?

The World of Thought

The answer to this is that Hashem created His world on two levels: a level of thought and a level of speech. Through the initial thought and will of "*Bereishis*," the potential for all things was created. However, Hashem's thoughts are high above this world, and their influence cannot be seen down here. They remain above, waiting to be revealed at the completion of the time allotted for this temporary world, which is six thousand years. After this will come the seventh millennium, "the day when all will be Shabbos" (*Sanhedrin* 97a).

Throughout the six days of creation (and the six millennia of this world's existence), everything was created with words, "*And Hashem said*" Speech is sound constricted by the vocal organs. It is a metaphor for the power of Hashem that is active during these six days, constricted in accordance to the descending levels of

existence, as He conceals from the world the perfection of His goodness. This is how time comes into existence. Time is also a constriction, in which existence is divided into moments and hours joined together, just as speech is sound constricted into combinations of letters.

In the six days of creation, everything that was destined to exist throughout the six millennia of this world was brought into existence through Hashem's word. These were included in the final six words of the verse, "*Bereishis bara Elokim es hashamayim ve'es ha'aretz.*" The first word, *Bereishis*, refers to the creation of the world of thought, which is above time and speech. This is the seventh millennium. It is the first word in the verse, since "that which is last in deed came first in thought" (as we say in Lecha Dodi regarding Shabbos).

In that final stage of existence, Hashem's original thought to bring the world to perfection will come about. The *yetzer hara* and the forces of evil will be undone, as the power of holiness overcomes them. Then, "*Death will be swallowed forever*" (*Yeshayah* 25:8). However, this thought will not be revealed during the six millennia of the current stage of existence, when man still has free will to choose good or evil.

The world of thought is above time and does not influence it. This resolves the question (posed by the Rambam) of how Hashem's knowledge of everything that will occur does not contradict man's free will to choose whatever path he wishes. Thought is a point that can only exist at the present, and cannot be divided into future and past. Therefore, such knowledge does not force man's actions.

We can now understand Chazal's question of which Hashem prefers, the deeds of the righteous or the deeds of the wicked. They meant to ask that it would seem that Hashem views both paths equally, since if He preferred good over evil, there would be no room for free choice. Good would immediately conquer evil and the *yetzer hara* would be powerless.

The answer to this is found in the verse, "*God saw that the light was good*" – from which we learn that Hashem prefers the deeds of the righteous. Hashem wants good to triumph over evil. This was Hashem's intent, and this will be the final result in the seventh millennium when the world reaches its perfection. The victory of holiness is symbolized by the light, which is the radiance of Hashem's holy Name in the world. This light was hidden for the righteous to enjoy in the World to Come, when Hashem's glory will be revealed in this lowest world just as it is revealed in Heaven. "*On that day Hashem will be One*" (*Zechariah* 14:9) and the power of evil will disappear forever.

The current world, however, is a world of free choice. Now, in this lower world, Hashem's Name is "not one," so to speak, in the sense that His holiness is hidden, which allows the powers of evil to have sway. Now, creation is divided between Heaven and Earth. His glory is revealed only in Heaven but not on Earth. In the seventh millennium, both worlds will be united and Hashem's Name will be One, with His glory equally revealed in both. Then, all will recognize His Kingship and glory.

Hashem Helps Us to Return

With this we can understand the verses:

Seek Hashem when He is to be found, call Him when He is near. Let the wicked abandon his path and let the sinful abandon his thoughts. Let him return to Hashem and be shown mercy, and to our God Who is abundant to forgive. For My thoughts are not like your thoughts, and your ways are not like Mine, says Hashem. As the Heavens are high above the Earth, so are My ways high above your ways, and My thoughts high above your thoughts. As the rain and snow descend from Heaven and do not return to there ... so will be the words that leave My mouth. They will not return to Me emptyhanded, but shall do as I desire and succeed in the mission for which I have sent them (*Yeshayah* 55:6-11).

Here, the Navi means to encourage those who have become so steeped in sin that they despair of ever being able to return. The *yetzer hara* has so much power over them that they need Hashem's special assistance to break free, as Chazal teach, "Those who come to purify themselves are assisted" (*Yoma* 38b). They may worry that since each person must have his own free will to do good or evil, Hashem will not override their free will to help them overcome the *yetzer hara*. If Hashem in His omniscient thought saw that the good in them would conquer the evil, there could be no room for free choice.

Therefore, the verse assures them that Hashem's thoughts are unlike those of mortal men. Hashem's thoughts are above the flow of time in this temporary world. They remain in Heaven for now, and will be revealed in this world only when the final perfection is reached in the seventh millennium.

"As the Heavens are above the Earth, so are My paths above your paths, and My thoughts above your thoughts." Hashem thoughts do not act upon this lower world. Only His word descends from Heaven to shape the course of events in this world. **"As the rain and snow descend from Heaven but do not return to there, so will be the words that leave My mouth."** His words descend to direct the world, but for now His thoughts do not. Therefore, although Hashem's thought was for man to be righteous, man is not forced by Heaven to be so.

Nonetheless, there is still a spark of the hidden light that shines down into this world at all times to help those who aspire to improve. The light is kept concealed such that just enough is revealed as is necessary to help people do *teshuvah*, but not enough to take away their free will.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Taanis* 2:6) describes this Heavenly assistance as follows:

HaKadosh Baruch Hu attached His Name to Bnei Yisrael. This is like a king who had a tiny key to his palace. He worried that if he would leave the key by itself, it might get lost. Instead, he attached to it a chain. That way, if it ever got lost, he could find it through the chain.

So too, HaKadosh Baruch Hu was concerned that if He would leave Bnei Yisrael as they are, they might get lost and assimilated among the nations. To prevent this, He attached His Name to them.

Although this was said in the context of the nation as a whole, it also applies to every individual in his own fight against the *yetzer hara* and his struggle to escape the quagmire of evil, as Rav Chaim of Volozhin explained (*Nefesh Hachaim* 1:19).

Hashem foresaw the great power that the *yetzer hara* would have in this world. He was concerned that if man was left to nothing but his own free will, he might stray so far onto the path of evil that he would never be able to return. Therefore, he tied a chain, so to speak, to every Jewish soul, through which every Jew can pull himself out of quagmire and purify himself.

The Lifeline of Torah

This proverbial "chain" is the holy Torah, which connects Heaven to Earth. Of this Hashem said, "I created the *yetzer hara* and I created the Torah as its antidote" (*Kiddushin* 30b). The main power of the *yetzer hara* lies in the division between light and darkness, such that the domain of light is in Heaven while the domain of darkness is on Earth.

To rectify this issue, Hashem sent to this world the holy Torah, which includes all the good traits and paths of Hashem that we must follow. The Torah, although purely spiritual in essence, was dressed in the physical form of this world, through the practical mitzvos that we perform. As a person studies the Torah, it sanctifies and purifies him. In this sense, it is compared to water which cleanses a person from his filth. The Torah is also compared to light, in the sense that it shines down from Heaven (the dwelling place of light) to illuminate the dark Earth.

As a person engages in Torah and mitzvos, all four letters of Hashem's Name rest upon him. The first two letters of His Name, *yud* and *heh*, were used to create this world and the next (*Menachos* 29b). They rest upon man whose soul came from Heaven and whose body was made from the Earth. Man's body and soul are joined together by means of the Torah – the five books of the Written Torah (represented the second letter *heh* of Hashem's Name), and the six orders of the Mishna (represented by the letter *vav*). Thus, Hashem's awesome Name rests upon every Jew as he studies Torah.

This is the chain that is attached to the Jewish soul, through which a Jew can always return to Hashem. No matter how low he might have fallen, the light of the Torah can help him return to good (*Eichah Rabbah*, Introduction 2). Our Sages tell us, "Let a person arouse his *yetzer tov* against his *yetzer hara*. If he defeats it, good. If not, let him toil in Torah" (*Berachos* 5a).

This is also the meaning of the verse, "**Sanctify yourselves and be holy. Observe My statutes and perform them. I am Hashem who sanctifies you**" (*Vayikra* 20:7-8). Since man starts his existence in the physical world, at the lowest level of creation, entirely bereft of holiness, he must draw holiness upon himself through his Torah study and mitzvos. He should not despair and say, "How can I ever become holy? The *yetzer hara* rules my life and I am sunk up to my head in sin." There is no place for despair

among Klal Yisrael. Through the Torah, we remain attached to the highest source of holiness. This is the proverbial chain, which we can always grasp hold of to pull ourselves up. *"Sanctify yourselves and by holy,"* since, *"I am Hashem your God"* - you are attached to Hashem by means of His holy Name that rests upon us.

However, this depends on our observing His statutes and performing them. *"Observe My statutes"* refers to Torah study (*Sifra, Emor 9*). Thereby, we will come to *"perform them,"* since study leads to action. Through this, we connect Heaven to Earth and merit the assistance of *"I am Hashem who sanctifies you."*

Like a Tree Planted by the Water

As we explained, Torah is the only means by which a person can overcome his *yetzer hara* and cleanse himself from the impurity into which he has descended. Torah is the antidote for all spiritual maladies, as is written, *"For they are life to all who find them, and healing to all his flesh,"* (*Mishlei 4:22*).

With this we can understand the opening words of David Hamelech in his Psalms: *"Fortunate is the man who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked, did not stand in the path of the sinners, and did not sit in the gathering of the scoffers. Rather the Torah of Hashem is his desire, and he toils in his Torah day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by many waters, which produces fruit in its time and its leaves do not wither. Everything he does will succeed. Not so are the wicked, who are like chaff blown before the wind. Therefore, the wicked will not be able to stand in judgment, or the sinners in the congregation of the righteous"* (*Tehillim 1:1-5*).

This refers to three different aspects of evil. The first is evil deeds, of which the verse states, *"He did not walk in the counsel of the wicked."* The second is evil thought, of which the verse states, *"He did not stand in the path of the sinners."* The imagery here is of a person who stands at a crossroads and stops to think whether or not to continue forward on a dangerous path. The third is a person who sits and does nothing. He does not learn Torah, nor does he actively engage in sin. Nonetheless, he will certainly end up sinning, since he does not have the Torah to protect him, of which Hashem said, *"I created the yetzer hara and I created the Torah as its antidote"* (*Kiddushin 30b*).

The verse therefore continues, *"The Torah of Hashem is his desire."* Through the Torah he will be rescued from sin and will not have to work so hard to defeat his *yetzer hara*. *"He shall be like a tree planted by many waters"* - irrigated by the waters of Torah, *"which produces fruit in its time"* - the fruit of good deeds, each one in its proper time, such as matzos on Peach, and so on.

In truth, it is easy to escape sin through the power of Torah study, which helps a person see how insubstantial are the fleeting pleasures of this world, and how the *yetzer hara* really has no power at all. *"Not so are the wicked"* - wickedness has no substance. It is *"like chaff blown before the wind."*

Therefore, *"the wicked will not be able to stand in judgment."* They will have no excuse on the day of judgment to claim that they were unable to withstand the *yetzer hara*. Had they studied Torah, they could have overcome it.

Spiritual Sense of Smell

Chazal tell us in Pirkei Avos:

Each day a Heavenly voice goes forth from Har Sinai and proclaims, "Woe to the creations for their disgrace of the Torah." All those who do not toil in Torah are rebuked to Hashem, as is written, "***Like a golden ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman*** who strays from good counsel" (*Avos* 6:2).

The spiritual soul that was placed in the physical body is compared to a golden ring in a pig's snout. The ring itself is precious, but if the pig digs through the refuse with it, it becomes filthy and disgusting.

The spiritual pleasure of the soul, which is the reward for mitzvos, is compared to a fragrant aroma. Chazal use the metaphor of "thirteen rivers of balsam oil" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 10:2) to describe the reward of the souls in the World to Come. Chazal call fragrant smells "something enjoyed by the soul but not by the body" (*Berachos* 43b). This is because smell is something so ephemeral that it can hardly be called a physical pleasure. It is enjoyed only by "***the spirit of life that Hashem blew into man's nostrils***" (*Bereishis* 2:7). So too, Chazal teach us that with each word that Hashem spoke on Har Sinai, the entire world was filled with fragrant smell (*Shabbos* 88b).

The opposite is also true. The punishment of the soul in Gehinnom is compared to an awful stench. Chazal tell us that some sinners are punished by being boiled in feces (*Eruvin* 21b).

The metaphor of the ring in the pig's snout comes to teach us that without Torah, we have no guarantee that the soul will have a fragrant aroma when its time comes to ascend above to stand in judgment. The *yetzer hara*, which is compared to a pig that wallows in filth, makes the soul filthy as well, until it becomes so repulsive that it cannot ascend to produce a fragrant aroma before Hashem.

In this sense, the soul is compared to a beautiful woman, of which the verse states, "***A woman of valor, who can find?***" (*Mishlei* 31:10). It is pure when it first descends into the body. However, when it "strays from good counsel," and turns away from the sweet taste of Torah study, it stands in dire peril of drowning in the depths of impurity.

A Call for Torah Study During the Days of Judgment

In previous generations, the Jewish people had a deep sense of appreciation for Torah study. When the days of judgment approached, the shuls and yeshivos would be packed day and night, as people came to toil in Torah study, each according to his ability – some in Talmud, some in Shulchan Aruch, some in Midrash and some in Mussar. People were scared of the impending judgment and they would return in sincere *teshuvah* before Yom Kippur. Therefore, there were not so many harsh decrees in the world as there are in our times, when the hardships of each day are worse than the day before (*Sotah* 49a).

In the past three or four years, we have seen the four harsh judgments that Yechezkel the Navi foresaw, "*I shall send upon you famine, wild animals will kill you, pestilence and blood will pass over you, and I will bring sword upon you*" (Yechezkel 5:17). We have seen all these things in our times, may Hashem have mercy. The wild animals are the nations of the world who subject us to cruel decrees that threaten our very lives.

All this has come about because of our failure to apply ourselves properly to Torah study. Had we studied Torah as we should, we would understand the severity of sin and refrain from it. If we would occasionally stumble in sin, we would return in *teshuvah*. Torah is a precious light that shines upon our path and guides us through the darkness.

Due to our *bitul Torah*, we are like blind people who stumble through the darkness. We do not consider the path on which we walk, "*and the way of each person seems straight in his eyes*" (Mishlei 21:2). It seems as if the *yetzer hara* will never be satisfied with the sins he draws us into, and with the terrible bloodshed that results from it. What will be with us in the end? The wicked rise in power. The masses of our people have come to disdain Torah and those who study it. Our only consolation is that our Sages foresaw the depths to which the final generations would fall (*Sotah* 49b, *Sanhedrin* 97a). This is how they described the generation before Moshiach's arrival, but Moshiach has still not arrived.

The Tents of Torah Study

I stopped to think about the cause for all of this. How did it happen? We have been in exile for close to two thousand years, during which we have endured countless hardships. Death, destruction, exile and wandering have been our lot, yet throughout it all we have remained faithful to Hashem. All the winds of the world have never succeeded in blowing us off of the course of His service. To the contrary, we have established yeshivos and Torah teachers in all the places of our wanderings, as is clear to anyone who studies the history of our nation.

Chazal tell us that the curse with which the prophet Achiya cursed Bnei Yisrael was better than the blessing with which the wicked Bilam blessed us. Achiya cursed us by comparing us to a reed, while Bilam blessed us by comparing us to a cedar. The wind blows on the reeds and bends them over, but when the wind stops, they stand back up (*Taanis* 20a). So too, after the winds of hardship pass, Klal Yisrael stands strong again, renewing our efforts in Torah and mitzvos.

A cedar, on the other hand, does not even sway in the wind. However, when the powerful southern wind comes, it knocks the cedar over entirely and it does not rise again.

After considering what has changed in our own times, it seems that this too is part of Bilam's curse. Chazal tell us that he wanted to curse us that there would be no *batei midrashos* (places of Torah study) in Klal Yisrael, and Hashem transformed his curse into a blessing: "*How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov*" (*Bamidbar* 24:5, *Sanhedrin* 105b).

Although the curse was transformed into a blessing, some vestige of the curse still remains. This is what has brought such devastation upon our times. Since the Beis Hamikdash has been destroyed, Hashem dwells with us in exile in our shuls and *batei midrashos* (*Megillah* 29a). These are the places that inspire a person towards *teshuvah*.

Unfortunately, in recent years people have stopped coming to daven in the shuls and *batei midrashos* where Torah is studied. Instead, they make small minyanim in their homes, and do not bother to come to the shuls where they would find inspiration in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. Their small minyanim are places for chatting during davening, *lashon hara*, *rechilus* and disdaining Torah scholars. They have no opportunity to hear words of Torah and mussar. All this is part of the plot of the *yetzer hara*, which has grown powerful in our times.

A River of Purity

"*Like flowing rivers ... like tents stretched by Hashem*" (*Bamidbar* 24:6). Chazal explain that rivers are mentioned alongside tents, to teach us that just as immersing in a river brings a person from impurity to purity, so too studying in the tents of Torah brings a person from guilt to merit. This verse was also among the blessings of Bilam, from which we see how he intended to curse us, before his curse was transformed to blessing. He wanted to curse us that there would be no places of Torah study in Klal Yisrael. Without Torah, we would have nothing to purify our souls and we would remain submerged in the impurity of our sins.

Torah is compared specifically to a river, and not to a regular mikveh. The difference between a river that flows from a spring and a mikveh formed from gathered rain water, is that a mikveh is valid only if it contains forty *se'ah* of water, enough for a person to immerse his entire body in it at once. A river, on the other hand, has no minimum amount (*Mikva'os* 1:7).

This distinction teaches us an important lesson about *teshuvah*. After a person sins, he must purify his entire body and soul. The 365 prohibitions correspond to the 365 sinews and the 248 mitzvos correspond to the 248 organs. All are infected by his sins, and they all must be purified. One way of cleansing sin is by subjecting oneself to suffering equal to the enjoyment he received from his sins. However, a person who toils in Torah does not need to subject himself to suffering to atone. The light of the Torah guides him back towards the good path.

A person should not think that the light of Torah is available only to the great Torah scholars who can learn for many hours, and that those who must work for their living and cannot learn so much have no hope. To refute this notion, the Torah is compared to a river, for which there is no minimum amount of water. One need not submerge oneself in Torah throughout the entire day and night, as one submerges his entire body in a mikveh. Torah is like a river, with no minimum amount.

The purification of Torah is available to each person, however much he is able to study, provided that he does not let his time go to waste, and that he uses his free moments to make set times for Torah to the best of his ability. The light of the Torah

will then purify his soul, without his having to endure suffering or fasting in atonement. The Torah is a potion of life for the soul. It heals the soul like medicine heals the body.

Honest Business Dealings

A person might think that he does not sin and is not in need of *teshuvah*. Unfortunately, people are inclined to believe so. Each person's path seems straight in his eyes. He thinks that only idolatry, illicit relations or bloodshed are really serious sins, or perhaps even theft or eating non-kosher food too. The religious Jews of whom we speak are not suspected of any of these things, *chas v'shalom*.

However, there are other serious sins that the *yetzer hara* makes light of as if they are not so bad. Many of them are in fact unbearably severe. The Gemara (*Chagigah* 5a) comments on the verse, "***I will draw close to you in judgment and be a swift witness against the wizards, adulterers, those who swear falsely and those who fail to pay their workers.***" When R' Yochanan read the following verse he would cry, "Woe to us, that the verse equates mild sins to severe sins." These are the sins that people take lightly but are in fact as severe as idolatry, adultery and murder. Among them are theft, dishonesty in business and false weights and measures, of which the Torah says, "***An abomination to Hashem are all who do these things.***" It is just like idolatry, which the Torah also calls an abomination.

There is great depth in the comparison between idolatry and dishonest business. Idolatry began when people thought that Hashem was so high that He does not descend to interact with the Earth. Instead, they worshipped the stars and constellations. So too, a person who is dishonest in business denies Hashem's providence in providing sustenance for all His creations. Hashem decrees each year on Rosh Hashanah how much a person will earn that year (*Beitzah* 16a). Nothing can add to or detract from that decree.

A person who is dishonest in business obviously believes that his prosperity depends, not on Hashem's providence, but on his own efforts. By stealing and lying to make money, he serves the false god of "***my power and the might of my own hand***" (*Devarim* 8:17).

I am amazed that such people are not ashamed to ask Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, "Inscribe us in the book of livelihood." Do they really imagine that Hashem will inscribe them for a livelihood made from theft, cheating and usury? Do they think He will help them violate the prohibitions that He wrote in His Torah? Obviously, they think that their livelihood comes from their own efforts, and not from Hashem. Why then do they go through the insincere motions of davening to Hashem for livelihood?

Chazal tell us that, "From a box filled with sins, theft rises to the top and is the first to cry for punishment" (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yechezkel* 345). For any other sin, a person might find an excuse that his desire overcame him. Theft, however, is not just an issue of desire. It is a denial of Hashem's providence.

Chazal also compare hurting another person's feelings to cheating in business. Hurting someone's feelings is in fact worse than cheating, since stolen money can be returned but hurt feelings cannot always be repaired. Whereas other sins are punished through an intermediary, those who hurt other's feelings are punished by Hashem Himself (*Bava Metzia* 58b-59a).

Those Who Will Not Merit to Greet the Shechinah

Other sins that must be addressed are those of which Chazal say, "Four groups will not merit to see the Shechinah" (*Sanhedrin* 103a). The first group is those who flatter the wicked. Chazal tell us that a congregation that allows the wicked to be flattered is disgusting like a niddah (*Sotah* 42a). The impurity of a niddah is so great that she makes those who come in contact with her impure just like her (*Pesachim* 68a). The same is true of those who flatter the wicked. Since they fail to rebuke the wicked for their sins, they are punished as if they committed those same sins themselves. Therefore, it is written, "**Rebuke your kinsman and do not bear on his account a sin**" (*Vayikra* 19:17). In other words, if you fail to rebuke him, you will bear his sin too.

The second group that will not merit to see the Shechinah is the liars, as is written, "**Those who speak falsely will not stand before My eyes**" (*Tehillim* 101:7). Falsehood is from the side of evil. It is the opposite of reality. It is emptiness. Chazal tell us that falsehood has no legs on which to stand (see *Shabbos* 104a). It has no standing in reality. It is like the forces of evil, which also have no real substance. They exist only from the small grain of truth within every lie, which is like the narrow points at the bottom of the letters *shin*, *kuf*, *reish* on which these letters stand, spelling the word *sheker* - lie.

The third group is those who speak *lashon hara*. What can we say about this terrible sin, after our great teacher, the Vilna Gaon, wrote so much against it in his letter. It is the worst sin of all. The entire Gehinnom was created only for this sin, as is written, "**All of man's troubles are for his mouth**" (*Koheles* 6:7). It causes a person to be cut off from Hashem, as is written, "**Hashem will cut off all slippery lips**" (*Tehillim* 12:3).

Chazal warn us that this sin towers up to Heaven (*Erchin* 15b). Man's whole distinction from animal-kind is in his power of speech. His speech stems from the spirit invested in him from Heaven, as is written, "**Hashem blew into his nostrils a soul of life and he became a living spirit**" (*Bereishis* 2:7). The Targum translates this as "a speaking spirit." Therefore, when a person blemishes his tongue by speaking *lashon hara*, his sin ascends to Heaven to the root of his soul. Other sins stem from the tendencies of the physical body which was formed from the Earth. To some degree, they also ascend to Heaven, but not to the same extent as *lashon hara*, which is essentially a sin of the spirit.

Chazal also tell us that speaking *lashon hara* is like denying Hashem (*Erchin* 15b), as is written, "**With our tongues we will conquer... who shall rule us?**" (*Tehillim* 12:5).

The fourth group that will not merit to see the Shechinah is the scoffers, of whom it is written, "**Draw Your hand away from the scoffers**" (*Hoshea* 7:5). Chazal warn us to

keep a safe distance from them and not live in their neighborhood (*Pesachim* 112b). Unfortunately, this sin is very prevalent among those who congregate around the street corners and make fun of people, eventually coming to *lashon hara* and *rechilus*.

Hatred, Anger and Arrogance

There are other sins that are just as bad, including senseless hatred, which is equivalent to idolatry, illicit relations and murder. The Gemara tells us that the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed as a result of idolatry, illicit relations and murder. In the time of the second Beis Hamikdash, they learned Torah and observed mitzvos, but the Beis Hamikdash was still destroyed as a result of the senseless hatred among them (*Yoma* 9b).

The sin of senseless hatred still dances among us. It is the main reason we still languish in exile. If this sin destroyed the Beis Hamikdash and caused us to be banished from our land, then certainly it can prevent us from being redeemed and the Beis Hamikdash from being rebuilt as long as we do not correct it.

Anger is also a terrible sin, which Chazal compare to idolatry. The Arizal taught that when a person gets angry, his holy soul departs him (*Shaarei Kedushah* II, Ch. 4). For this reason, anger makes the wise lose their wisdom and the prophets lose their prophecy (*Pesachim* 66b). When a person gets angry "all forms of Gehinnom rule over him" (*Nedarim* 22a), since anger is a foreign fire, drawn from the flames of Gehinnom.

Arrogance is also compared to idolatry (*Sotah* 4b). An arrogant person does not care about the Shechinah (*Nedarim* 22b). He is disgusting to Hashem (*Mishlei* 16:5), and Hashem cannot stand to be in his presence (*Sotah* 5a). He will not rise for the resurrection, and he is fit to be cut down like an idolatrous *asheirah* tree (*ibid*).

This comparison can be understood based on the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 45a), which states that it is forbidden to derive any benefit from something that was worshipped as an idol. However, when idolaters worship mountains, the mountains do not become forbidden, since the prohibition does not apply to something attached to the Earth. If so, why does an *asheirah* tree become forbidden? The Gemara explains that this is because the tree was once a sapling, which people then planted in the Earth. Since it had a moment that it was in the hands of man, it can become forbidden as an idol.

The meaning of this is that anything worshipped as an idol becomes a resting place for the forces of evil. However, this is possible only for something that was made by man. Something that was made by Hashem as part of nature cannot become a resting place for evil.

An arrogant person worships himself, in a sense. He clearly does not reckon with the Shechinah. Had he done so, he would have realized that he is under Hashem's control at all moments and there is no reason at all for him to be arrogant over others. How could he think that he was so great and important, if he realized that in one second Hashem could take his soul and leave his body for the grave. Avraham Avinu had this realization, and therefore said, "***I am just dust and ashes***" (*Bereishis* 18:27). So too did Moshe, who said, "***What are we?***" (*Shemos* 16:7).

When a person does not realize this, and haughtily believes that his life and success are in his hands, and that he alone is responsible for his strength, health, prestige and wealth, he is like the sapling tree of idolatry that was "in the hands of man." Therefore, the forces of evil can rest on him, as they rest on an *asheirah* tree, and he is fit to be cut down.

Chilul Hashem

The sin of *chilul Hashem* is equivalent to all of these sins combined. Chazal tell us that some sins can be atoned through *teshuvah* and Yom Kippur. More severe sins, which are punishable by *kareis* or execution, require suffering as well to complete the atonement. However, *chilul Hashem* is unique in that it cannot be atoned through *teshuvah*, Yom Kippur or suffering. Only through death can it be atoned (*Yoma* 86a).

From here we see that *chilul Hashem* is even worse than sins punishable by *kareis* and execution, such as idolatry, illicit relations and murder. *Chilul Hashem* is defined for each person differently, according to his level. For some people, walking four steps without learning Torah is considered a *chilul Hashem* (*ibid*).

If a Jew sues another Jew in a secular court, this is also a *chilul Hashem*, since he places the honor of their system of justice above that of the Torah (Rashi, *Shemos* 21:1). There could be no greater disgrace to Hashem and His Torah, as Eliyahu the Navi said to Achazyah son of Achav, "***Is there no God in Yisrael, that you seek from Baal Zuvv the idol of Akron?***" (*Melachim* II, 1:3).

This is true even when the secular courts rule exactly the same as Beis Din. How much more so when he sues in a secular court to extract money from another Jew that he does not deserve according to Torah law. He is a lowly thief, and is considered as if he took the soul of his victim. May Hashem protect us from such sins and their punishments.

Here we have seen many terrible sins that a person might transgress without even noticing it. Therefore, it is so important for us to contemplate our ways and investigate our deeds as the days of judgment approach. When a person pays close attention to what he does, he will catch himself transgressing sins that would otherwise have slipped by unnoticed, as the Navi said, "***Let us search our ways, examine them, and return to Hashem***" (*Eichah* 3:40).

The Paths of Teshuvah: Torah and Forgiveness

Many methods of atonement are discussed in the books of *mussar*, including the fasts and self-afflictions appropriate for each individual sin. The Kabbalists had a tradition through which they understood the root of each sin, the damage it causes, and how to repair it. They are like expert doctors who understand the maladies of the body, and know which medicines or surgeries are most beneficial for any particular illness.

However, in our weak generation, it is hard for people to endure the suffering that would counter-balance the enjoyment we derive from our sins. How then can we regain Hashem's good favor? How can we atone for our sins?

For this Chazal revealed to us the special medicines that heal all wounds. The first is Torah study, which cleanses all kinds of impurity. The holiness of the Torah is very powerful, and the forces of evil cannot overcome it. For this reason, when the Torah was given on Har Sinai, the Satan could not be present (Tosefos, *Shabbos* 89a).

Another remedy for all spiritual wounds, which is accessible to everyone, is being forgiving towards others. Chazal tell us that when a person forgives offense, all his sins are forgiven (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a). The expression Chazal use for forgiving offense is *maavir al midosav*, which literally means, "sets aside his measures," as if to say that he does not seek to measure out an equal punishment to those who harmed him (Rashi).

There is great depth to this expression. Hashem placed all of creation under our care, to maintain and improve it through our good deeds, or darken and destroy it through our sins. Rav Chaim of Volozhin (*Nefesh Hachaim*, 1:4) writes:

When a wise person contemplates this, he will shudder to think about the damage he causes through even the slightest sin. It is even worse than the damage caused by Nevuchadnetzar and Titus who destroyed the first and second Beis Hamikdash. When they did so, they caused no damage to the spiritual worlds above, since they had no connection to those worlds and no ability to influence them either for good or for evil.

When we sin, however, we weaken the powers of holiness above and desecrate the Heavenly counterpart of the Beis Hamikdash. Only after we destroyed the Beis Hamikdash in Heaven, were our enemies able to destroy the Beis Hamikdash here on Earth, as Chazal say, "They ground flour that had already been ground."

The only way that a person can repair the damage that his sins caused to the upper worlds, is to sweep away the darkness he caused, by drawing down new light from an even higher world untouched by sin. This is the world of *teshuvah*, which preceded and transcends the work of creation in which man operates (see *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*, Chapter 3). Drawing down new light from the pristine world of *teshuvah* is no less than a renewal of creation, similar to that which will occur in the seventh millennium, when the world will be illuminated by the hidden, supernal light that is above the reach of man.

When a person forgives offense, he "sets aside his measurements," so to speak. He sets aside the measures of his own ability to interact with the world, for good or for evil, and draws down new measures of holiness from a higher world untouched by his sins. A new light then descends to repair the damaged he caused, cleanse his soul from impurity, and atone for all his sins.

The Atonement of Shame

Another kind of atonement that does not involve suffering is found in the Gemara, which states, "If a person sins and is then ashamed of it, he is forgiven for his sin" (*Berachos* 12b).

The capacity to feel shame marks a greatness of spirit. Chazal explain that the verse, "***In order that His fear may be upon you so that you do not sin***" (*Shemos* 20:17), refers to the ability to feel shame (*Nedarim* 20a). If a person contemplates the greatness of Hashem and the many kindnesses that He grants us despite our sins, he will be ashamed to ever sin again.

The Tomer Devorah comments on the verse, "***Who is like You, Hashem? You carry iniquity.***" He explains that with every sin a person commits, a force of destruction is created, which then demands that Hashem provide it with the sustenance it needs to exist. It would be just and fair for Hashem to say, "Go to the person who made you and take his soul to feed off of." However, He does not do so. He "carries the iniquity," providing sustenance for it until the sinner does *teshuvah* and corrects the force of evil he created. Thereby, the life of the sinner is spared.

There can be no greater shame than this. If a person harms or steals from his friend and his friend discovers his crime, he is ashamed to look his friend in the face. How much more so when a mortal man sins against Hashem and creates a force of evil that destroys Hashem's handiwork. How could he not be ashamed of himself?

The Shame of Yosef's Brothers

When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and reminded them of their sin against him, they were so ashamed that they could not speak. Chazal comment on this, "Woe to us on the day of judgment! Woe to us on the day of rebuke! Yosef was the youngest of the brothers, but they were unable to answer him. How much more so when Hashem confronts each person with his judgment" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 93:11).

The double wording of, "Woe to us on the day of judgment! Woe to us on the day of rebuke!" is used to signify two kinds of distress. When Yosef confronted his brothers, they were ashamed of him, but they were not scared that he might kill them in revenge. Their father was still alive and he would not want to cause his father this grief. Only after Yaakov died, does the verse state, "***His brothers saw that their father had died and said, 'Perhaps he will take revenge'***" (*Bereishis* 50:15). As long as Yaakov lived, they had no reason to fear.

The distress that rendered them speechless was only due to their shame in having harmed him, and even that was mitigated by the fact that they had thought they were right in doing so at the time. They feared that he planned on killing them in order to take control of the family line. They saw that he spoke badly of them to their father. Then he announced his dreams in which the entire family would bow to him. Therefore, they thought that the only way to be safe from his ambitions would be to kill him.

In the end, when they saw that he indeed ruled Egypt, they realized that his dreams were true, and that they had sinned against him. Therefore, they were ashamed.

We can see that they did not realize their sin at first, since when Shimon was seized, they said, "*We are guilty for our brother, since we saw the plight of his soul when he begged us for mercy*" (Bereishis 42:21). They recognized their guilt in forgetting their bonds of brotherhood and cruelly ignoring his pleas for mercy, but they did not recognize their guilt in plotting murder and selling him into slavery that might have led to his death. They thought they were right in doing so, but were still held accountable for ignoring his pleas for mercy.

Such was the case with Rebbe Yehuda HaNassi, who once had a calf run to him for protection when it was led to slaughter. "Go. You were created for this," he told it. There is no sin in slaughtering a calf, but Rebbe Yehuda HaNassi was held accountable for failing to show it mercy, and was punished with many years of illness (Bava Metzia 85a).

With this we can understand why Reuven told them, "*Did I not tell you not to sin against the child? Now his blood is also being demanded from us*" (Bereishis 42:22). He saw that they had not confessed their guilt in the deed itself, but just in having failed to show the high level of mercy expected of them at their great spiritual level. Therefore, Reuven told them that they were not being held accountable for having failed to show special mercy. They were held accountable for murder.

In light of all this, we can explain the double wording, "Woe to us on the day of judgment! Woe to us on the day of rebuke!" When a person contemplates his sins, he must take into account two things. First, even if he would not be punished for them, he should still be ashamed for having rebelled against Hashem and causing damage to all the worlds.

We learn this from Yosef's brothers. He was the youngest of them all, and they thought they were right in preventing him from claiming control of the family line – which might have led to strife and bloodshed. Still they were ashamed when the truth came to light, and they saw that Yosef really was destined for kingship.

This is the point of, "Woe to us on the day of rebuke." Rebuke in Hebrew is *tocheichah*, which comes from the same root as *hochachah* – which means to prove or clarify. After a person's death, he will be shown everything he did in his life. He will then understand how much damage he caused above through all of his sins. How he could help but be ashamed before the King of kings, HaKadosh Baruch Hu? The second point is, "Woe to us on the day of judgment," which refers to the punishment through which his sins will be corrected.

Chazal refer to these two points when they say, "Against your will you are destined to give judgment and accounting before the King of kings, HaKadosh Baruch Hu" (Avos 3:1). Judgment refers to the punishment he will have to endure for his sins. Accounting refers to the shame he will feel when he sees an accounting of how many sins he committed and how much harm they caused.

Shame and Fear of Sin

For this reason, Chazal interpret the verse, "*In order that His fear may be upon you so that you do not sin,*" as a reference to shame, as we cited above. The main *yiras Shamayim* comes from being ashamed before Hashem.

A person does not do things that other people find disgusting, even if he will not be punished for it, simply because he is ashamed to do it. How much more so when a person realizes that he is constantly in the presence of Hashem, whose glory fills the world. He will be ashamed to do things that are disgusting to Hashem.

The highest kind of fear, which is awe of Hashem's greatness, is nothing other than a recognition that Hashem rules all worlds, His Presence fills all worlds, and nowhere is empty of His Presence (*Zohar I, 11b*). Such a recognition prevents a person from sinning, as David Hamelech said, "*I place Hashem before me at all times, and I will not slip from the right*" (*Tehillim 16:8*). He was confident that he would not slip from the right path, since he was always aware of Hashem's Presence.

This can help us understand the Gemara (*Chagigah 5a*) which states:

When Rebbe Yochanan reached this verse, he would cry, "*Hashem will bring all deeds under judgment, and everything that is hidden*" (*Koheles 12:14*). What recourse is there for a slave whose master equates accidental ("hidden") infractions to deliberate ones! What does "*everything that is hidden*" come to add? Rav said that this includes killing a louse in front of someone else and causing him disgust.

This verse is the conclusion of Koheles. The verse before it states, "*In the end, after everything is heard, fear God ... since this is the entirety of man.*" This means that the basic premise of our devotion to Hashem is *yiras Shamayim*, as the Gemara states, "Hashem has nothing in his treasure-house but a store of *yiras Shamayim*" (*Berachos 33b*).

Yiras Shamayim is distinct from fear of punishment, which is a lower level. The real fear of Hashem is an awe of His exalted greatness. This sense of *yiras Shamayim* is also a kind of shame. When a person contemplates Hashem's greatness and splendor, and that His Shechinah is everywhere, he can imagine how he would act were he to be standing before mortal king. He would be ashamed to do anything that would detract from the king's honor.

This kind of *yiras Shamayim* is experienced by the angels in Heaven, who are free from sin and therefore have no fear of punishment. Still, they have tremendous fear of Hashem in terms of their awe of His greatness, as Yechezkel described in His vision of the Divine Chariot, "*They have height and fear, and their height is covered with eyes on all four sides*" (*Yechezkel 1:18*). Since they are so high, they have a clear, unhindered perception of Hashem's glory and greatness. This is expressed as their having eyes on all sides, as if to say that they see Hashem's glory all around them.

This is in contrast to man, who can only see in one direction at a time. There are obstacles to his sight, such that if a king were to stand behind him, he would not be able to see the king and act as befits the king's honor. Man is dressed in a physical

body, surrounded by the *yetzer hara* which distracts him and blinds him to Hashem's glory. In this sense, his awareness of Hashem and his *yiras Shamayim* are limited. Not so are the angels, who have no physical body and no *yetzer hara*. It is as if they have eyes on all sides to see Hashem's glory and fear Him.

The Entirety of Man

When a person perfects himself in the service of Hashem, such that he is constantly aware of Hashem's glory surrounding him at all times, he has merited to achieve true *yiras Shamayim*. This is the same *yiras Shamayim* experienced by the angels in Heaven.

This is the goal that Hashem wants us to achieve. "*In the end, after everything is heard, fear God ... since this is the entirety of man.*" The entire world was created so that man could reach this awareness of Hashem, even from this lowly physical plane in which Hashem's holiness is hidden. This is the purpose of the constriction of Hashem's revelation that we discussed above. Hashem rescinds His holiness from this lowest world, so that man – through his good deeds and pure thoughts – can draw that holiness back down from Heaven until the holiness visible in this world equals that which is visible in Heaven. Such is the state of the perfect servant of Hashem, whose heart and mind recognize Hashem's Presence surrounding him at all times, as do the angels.

Of this, Shlomo Hamelech said in Koheles, "*In the end, after everything is heard, fear God ... since this is the entirety of man.*" Chazal explain this to mean that the entire world was created for this (*Berachos* 6b). This is hinted to in the words, "*Bereishis bara Elokim.*" Hashem created the world for the sake of the "*reishis,*" the foremost thing, of which it is written, "*The foremost wisdom is fear of Hashem*" (*Tehillim* 111:10; *Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1). The letters of Bereishis can also be rearranged to spell *ירא בשת*, which means "fear and shame," referring to the awe of Hashem's greatness, as we discussed above.

The Awareness Achieved at Har Sinai

With this we can understand the Torah's description of Kabbalas HaTorah at Har Sinai (*Shemos* 20:15-17):

The entire nation saw the sounds, the fires, the blast of the shofar and the smoking mountain, and the nation was afraid. They shuttered and stepped back to stand from afar. They said to Moshe, "You speak to Hashem on our behalf and we will hear from you. Let Hashem not speak with us (directly), lest we die from it." Moshe said to them, "Do not fear, since Hashem has come to test you, so that His fear may be upon you so that you do not sin."

When Bnei Yisrael saw the awesome revelation of the Shechinah, all the layers of Heaven parted before them. "*You have been shown so that you will know that Hashem is God, and there is nothing else besides Him*" (*Devarim* 4:35). They saw that Hashem is the First Cause of all the worlds; His Presence fills all the worlds; and all

the worlds are like nothing compared to Him, as Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes (*Nefesh Hachaim* 3).

They feared that this revelation of light would cause this lowest physical world to cease to exist. In fact, their bodies were unable to endure this revelation. Chazal teach us that with each word that Hashem spoke, their souls fled their bodies and they had to be resurrected (*Shabbos* 98b). Therefore, they asked Moshe to act as an intermediary, so that Hashem's word would be revealed indirectly, through a chain of descent that would allow them to experience it in a way they could endure and understand in this low physical world.

Moshe answered them that they should not fear. This level of revelation was not meant to continue. It was necessary only for the moment, in order to instill in them a recognition of Hashem. They had to see, even if just for a moment, that although Hashem's glory fills all the worlds, He wondrously conceals His Presence to allow rise for the *yetzer hara* and give man an opportunity for free choice.

This revelation imprinted on our nation a recognition that would last until the end of time, such that every Jew would be able to capture in his mind's eye, to some extent, the revelation that was witnessed by our 600,000 ancestors when they received together the Torah at Har Sinai. We would be able to see, on some level, that Hashem is really everywhere.

This recognition is what leads to true *yiras Shamayim*, which is not just fear of punishment, but a sense of shame. It is a fear of the sin itself, as opposed to the punishment for sin. This is what is meant by the verse, "***So that His fear may be upon you so that you do not sin.***" They should be afraid of sin itself, and not of the punishment for sin.

This is truly the highest level of all. When a person has this recognition in his mind, he will never come to sin. The capacity for feeling shame is an inheritance of the entire Jewish nation, which we received when we stood at Har Sinai. Therefore, Chazal say that anyone who has no shame can be assured that his forefathers did not stand at Har Sinai (*Kallah*, 1).

When a person has a sense of shame, he will be ashamed to sin before the glory of Hashem which is everywhere. If he sins, he shows that he is not ashamed before Hashem.

For this reason, Shlomo Hamelech wrote in the final verses of Koheles, "***In the end, after everything is heard, fear God ... since this is the entirety of man. Hashem will bring all deeds under judgment, and everything that is hidden.***" From here Chazal learn that accidental ("hidden") sins are equated to deliberate sins. A person cannot claim as an excuse that his *yetzer hara* overpowered him and made him forget about Hashem, until he got into the habit of sinning even without intent.

He should have been ashamed to sin. He should have made use of the trait of shame, which he inherited from his forefathers who stood at Har Sinai with his own soul among them, as is written, "***Not with our forefathers alone did Hashem seal a covenant, but with us who are here today***" (*Devarim* 5:3).

The example cited by the Gemara of disgusting another person by killing a louse is a perfect analogy. Hashem's glory fills the world. A person who sins rebels against the King in His presence, by doing something that offends the King's honor.

The Revival of Teshuvah

There are three stages of *teshuvah*. First, one must regret one's sins and abandon them. Then, one must confess before Hashem. Finally, one must commit to improving in the future by making the necessary safeguards that will prevent relapsing into sin.

It is impossible for a person to abandon his sinful ways entirely, unless he has first internalized how bad were the things that he did, and is ashamed of himself to the point that he is disgusted by the thought of repeating them. As the Navi said, "**Be ashamed, House of Yisrael**" (*Yermiyahu* 14:3).

It is a high level when a person does *teshuvah*, not out of fear of punishment, but out of sincere disgust of the sin itself. Such a recognition brings a person to loathe his previous sinful ways and humble his heart.

Of this it is written, "**He bears sin and passes over iniquity for the remnants of His nation**" (*Micha* 7:18). Chazal explain that Hashem bears the sins of those who are as humble as unwanted remnants (*Rosh Hashanah* 17b). Their humility shows that they are truly regretful, which uproots their sins as if they had never been committed.

This also includes an aspect of *teshuvah m'ahavah* – *teshuvah* inspired by love for Hashem. When *teshuvah* is inspired by fear of Hashem, one's deliberate sins are considered as accidental sins. When *teshuvah* is inspired by love of Hashem, one's deliberate sins are transformed into merits (*Yoma* 86b).

The difference between *teshuvah* inspired by fear and *teshuvah* inspired by love can be understood when we consider the effects of sin and how they are repaired. When a person sins, he drives Hashem's holiness away from the place where the sin was committed. This leaves a vacuum in which a destructive spirit of impurity is formed. Impurity is nothing other than a lack of Hashem's light, as is written, "**All the nations are as nothing**" (*Yeshayah* 40:17).

The 365 prohibitions of the Torah correspond to the 365 physical sinews of the body, and the 365 spiritual sinews of the soul. The 248 positive commandments correspond to the 248 organs of the body and the corresponding spiritual organs of the soul. When a person commits a sin with his body, or fails to uphold a mitzvah, he drives away the holiness of his soul from that sinew or organ. A vacuum is left, into which a spirit of impurity arises. If a person sins to the extent that he banishes the holiness of his soul from his body entirely, he is left with no spiritual lifeforce in his body, and he is considered as dead, as Chazal say, "The wicked even as they live are considered as dead" (*Berachos* 18b).

The spirit of impurity that a person creates through his sins remains attached to his soul. Since the soul is attached to the body, it would make sense that the spirit of impurity would drain the lifeforce from his body until he actually died. It is nothing other than an act of great kindness on Hashem's part, that the spirit of impurity is

nourished by Heaven instead, until a person does teshuvah and rids himself of the impurity (as we explained above on page 49).

When a person does *teshuvah* out of fear of punishment, he does not free himself from the impurity entirely, since he does not really regret his sin. He just regrets that he will have to be punished for it. Had he been able to do the sin again without getting punished, he would do so. Therefore, although his *teshuvah* weakens the spirit of impurity, it does not destroy it. Of this kind of *teshuvah* it is written, **"Even if you wash it with cleansers, your sins are a stain before Me"** (Yermiyahu 2:22).

However, when a person does *teshuvah* out of love for Hashem, his sin is uprooted entirely and the spirit of impurity is destroyed. The light of his soul then returns to the place that it left. A person who does this kind of *teshuvah* experiences a resurrection. The aspects of his soul and body that were considered as dead due to the impurity that rested upon them, are revived by the light of the soul that returns to shine upon them. Of this it is written, **"I do not desire the death of the wicked, but that he shall return from his ways and live"** (Yechezkel 18:23).

With this we can understand the verses, **"When the wicked returns from the wickedness that he did, and does justice and righteousness, he revives his soul. When he fears and returns from all his sins, he shall live and not die"** (Yechezkel 18:27-28). At first glance, the second verse seems to be a needless repetition of the first. However, upon closer inspection we see that they refer to the two kinds of *teshuvah* that we discussed above.

The first verse refers to a person who does *teshuvah* out of love for Hashem. He is not just afraid of the punishment for his sin. He is disgusted by the sin itself. Since he is so remorseful and pained over his sin, he makes for himself boundaries and fences that will prevent him from ever repeating it. He becomes even more pious than ever before, just to make sure that he will never slip back into sin. As such, his sins drive him towards greater heights of merit.

"He does justice and righteousness." "Justice" refers to the law. He follows the law from now on and no longer sins. "Righteousness" refers to the extra boundaries and fences that he accepts upon himself, which are not required by law. **"He revives his soul,"** in a manner akin to the ultimate resurrection of the dead.

When the resurrection comes, the bodies will be revived with a strength greater than they had when they first lived. So too, when a person returns in *teshuvah* from love of Hashem, he draws down upon his physical spirit a new light from his supernal soul above.

The second verse refers to a person who does *teshuvah* out of fear of punishment. He does not seek to add boundaries and fences that will make his life unnecessarily difficult. Suffice it for him to stop sinning and spare himself from punishment. **"When he fears and returns from all his sins,"** – when his *teshuvah* is inspired by fear of punishment, **"He shall live and not die"** – he spares himself from the death caused by sin, but he does not gain a higher level of life, since his sin has not been entirely erased.

Sackcloth and Ashes

Sincere regret is an essential part of *teshuvah*. This involves mourning over one's bad deeds and over the damage he has done to his soul, as is written, "***This is the fast day that I choose, the day in which a person afflicts his soul. When he hangs down his head like an agmon, and places sackcloth and ashes. This is called a fast and a day that is favorable to Hashem***" (*Yeshayah* 58:5).

He hangs down his head in shame, like a person who cannot bear to look in the face of the one from whom he is ashamed. Since Hashem's glory fills the world, he is ashamed to lift his head anywhere in the world.

Chazal tell us, "When a person haughtily walks with an upright posture, it is as if he pushes away the legs of the Shechinah, of which it is written, '***The whole world is filled with His glory***'" (*Berachos* 43b).

By walking proud and upright, he shows that he is not ashamed before Hashem, even after all he has done to drive Hashem's supernal light away from the world. He walks around unashamed, as if Hashem's glory did not fill the entire world, of which it is written, "***The Earth is My footstool***" (*Yeshayah* 61:1). It is as if he thinks that Hashem is not here, and therefore he has no one from whom to be ashamed.

The verse above continues, "***He places sackcloth and ashes,***" referring to another important aspect of *teshuvah*. The soul descends to the world dressed in a garment of light, which a person loses when he sins. Such was the case with Adam and Chava. After they sinned, "They realized that they were unclothed." They had lost their garment of holiness. When a person sins, his soul is dressed instead in proverbial garments of sackcloth, of which it is written, "***One may not enter the king's presence dressed in sackcloth***" (*Esther* 4:2). In recognition of the spiritual sackcloth that his sins brought upon his soul, the *baal teshuvah* dresses his body in sackcloth too.

He places ashes upon himself, in recognition of the sins that drew his soul down into dust and ashes. The purpose of man's descent into this physical world is to uplift the body, which is formed from dust, and attach it to its spiritual source in Heaven through his Torah and mitzvos. If he fails to do so, then his soul separates from his body and returns to Heaven, while "***the dust (of his body) returns to the Earth***" (*Koheles* 12:7). To atone for the sins that cause this, he humbles his body down into dust and ashes.

Sins of Speech

As we discussed above, the worst sins are those of speech, including empty chatter, *lashon hara*, *rechilus*, and informing to the authorities. The reason that sins of speech are so severe is that just as holy speech in words of Torah creates "***new Heavens and a new Earth***" (*Yeshayah* 65:17, *Zohar* I 5a), and just as the entire world was first created by the speech of Hashem, the opposite is also true.

When a person sullies his lips with forbidden speech, or even just with senseless chatter, his words give power to the *yetzer hara*, whose first deed was to induce Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge by telling her *lashon hara* about Hashem

(*Taanis* 8a). The *yetzer hara* was jealous of man's power to guide and sustain creation through his speech. Therefore, it used the power of speech against him, to destroy what he had made. With every forbidden word that a person speaks, he gives power to the *yetzer hara*, and creates worlds of emptiness and chaos.

With this we can understand the teaching of Chazal, that man's fingers were made to be smooth and pointed like a tent peg ("*yeted*"), so that he could stick his fingers in his ears to prevent himself from hearing *lashon hara* (*Kesubos* 5a).

The depth of this is as follows. The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 26:2) states that snake was asked why it slithers between the fences. "Since I was the first to break down the fence of the world, I became an executioner for all future fence-breakers." As we explained above, Hashem created this physical world by constricting the revelation of His glory, which allowed room for the existence of evil and darkness. This was necessary so that man would have free choice to choose between good and evil. Through his good deeds, he would shine light into the darkness.

The supernal light of which we speak is divided into two categories. There is the light that is seen in Heaven, where there is the greatest revelation of Hashem's glory. Then there is the light that descends to this world through man's good deeds, revealing Hashem's glory in this world. When Hashem's glory is revealed below, the *yetzer hara* has no power. Such was the case with the Plague of the Firstborn and the Splitting of the Red Sea. The entire world saw His splendor and greatness, and even the nations proclaimed Hashem's Kingship over the world.

Such was also the case before Adam's sin. The whole world was filled with holiness, and the *yetzer hara* had no opportunity to tempt man into sin with its lies. The only way it could find was to tempt Chava into eating from the Tree of Knowledge between Good and Evil. This represents the use of human reason to challenge Hashem's word and deny the truth of anything that is not evident to our understanding. This line of philosophy became a stumbling block that eventually led many of Adam's descendants to deny Hashem's Torah, His involvement with the world, or even His very existence.

In our own times, this trap is all too prevalent. Many of our nation have fallen into the heresy of mocking the words of our Sages, denying prophecy and miracles, and disbelieving in Hashem's interaction with the world – all because they are unable to understanding these things with their limited reason.

Such was the ruse of the snake who spoke falsely of Hashem and thereby brought Adam and Chava to sin. "*Didn't Hashem tell you not to eat from any of the trees of the garden?*" it said (*Bereishis* 3:1). This same trick exists until today, as the *yetzer hara* leads people with its lies down the slippery path of philosophy, to question, doubt and deny Hashem. When Chazal tell us that Adam was an *apikores* (*Sanhedrin* 38b), they mean that his sin allowed for the rise of *apikorsim* among his descendants.

The snake was the first to break the fence of the world, in the sense that there had been no entrance point for evil until then. The light of Hashem's holiness that shone into the world was too powerful for evil to exist. Through man's sin, this intensity of light became hidden from the world and continued to shine only in Heaven. The

world was then divided in two. The Heavens remained the abode of light, while the Earth became the abode of darkness.

As we explained, the term "light" is used to represent the revelation of Hashem's glory and honor. In Heaven, His glory remains perfectly evident. There is no *yetzer hara* in Heaven, no power of evil, and no room to doubt Hashem's presence or His control of the world. In this sense, Chazal say that light was created from Hashem's garments (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* Ch. 3). His "garments" are a metaphor for the revelation of His power. The metaphor implies that we do not see Hashem Himself, but only the "clothes" through which He presents Himself.

This is the "light" – the revelation of Hashem's presence – which is evident in Heaven forever. In this world below, it is hidden, and can be seen only through our *emunah* in the words that were given to our prophets and at Har Sinai, and then passed down as an inheritance from one generation to the next, as is written, "**Your *emunah* is from generation to generation...**" (*Tehillim* 119:90). This *emunah* allows for the continued existence of this mundane world, as the verse then states, "... **You prepared the world and it stands.**"

The Hebrew word fence is גדר which is equal in *gematria* to the Hebrew word for light, אור. The "fence of the world" was the light that revealed Hashem's Presence and made it impossible to deny Him. As long as Adam was attached to the Tree of Life, which is the Torah, this light was evident to him, and he was protected from sin.

The Light of Torah

For this reason, the Torah is often referred to as light, as in the verse, "**A *mitzvah* is a candle and the Torah is light**" (*Mishlei* 6:23). When Moshe was born, the entire house was filled with light (*Megillah* 14a), since Moshe was destined to bring the Torah of light to Klal Yisrael. The "house" refers to the home in which he was born, but it also refers to the entire world, Heaven and Earth, which were reunited at last when Moshe ascended Har Sinai to receive the Torah and the Heavens were bent down to the mountaintop to give it to him.

The Hebrew word for house is בית which is twice the *gematria* of the inner two letters of light, א-ור. This represents the two aspects of light, that which shines in Heaven and that which descends to the Earth. When Moshe Rabbeinu brought the Torah down to Earth, these two lights became connected, completing the "house" of creation. It was as if a sturdy peg was driven into the ground, to hold up the tent of creation.

When Chazal say that the snake slithers "between the fences," they meant that it divided the fence of Earth from the fence of Heaven, and the light of Earth from the light of Heaven, such that Hashem's glory would be evident only in Heaven, but hidden here on Earth until mankind would be able to reveal it again through our mitzvos. Of this it is written, "**The Heavens are Hashem's, and the Earth He gave to mankind**" (*Tehillim* 115:16).

The snake was the "**slanderer who separates people from their Master**" (*Mishlei* 16:28). When a person sullies his lips with forbidden speech, he empowers the *yetzer*

hara to spread evil and destruction, and gives rise to the wicked and the *apikorsim* in the world.

For this reason, the punishment for *lashon hara* is worse than for any other sin. No sin has such power to spread impurity in the world, as does *lashon hara*. This sin stands in direct contrast to the mitzvah of Torah study, whose reward is also unparalleled. All other mitzvos count as just one mitzvah. For example, sitting in a sukkah for seven days counts as just one mitzvah. However, when a person studies Torah, each word is counted as a mitzvah unto itself. Each word creates an entire world of holiness.

The opposite is true of *lashon hara*. Each word creates its own destructive force of evil, which cast impurity upon his soul after he dies, as the Vilna Gaon writes in his letter. For each word of *lashon hara*, the soul is thrown from one end of the world to the other in punishment. Just as *lashon hara* causes division among people and robs them of their peace, so too the soul of the person who spoke it will know no peace.

Of this it is written, "***A man of (evil) tongue will not stand upon the land. A man of evil extortion will be hunted to hell,***" (Tehillim 140:12). A person who speaks *lashon hara* will never find peace. The evil forces he created have no sustenance of their own, other than that which they extort from the side of holiness. These forces will hunt him down and chase him from one end of the world to the other.

With this we can understand that not only is the sin of speaking *lashon hara* so terrible, but the sin of listening to *lashon hara* – even if one does not believe it – is also terrible. The very sound that goes into his ears damages his soul. The evil words infect the air that carries them with a powerful force of impurity. They drive away the holiness wherever they go, leaving in its place evil and destruction. This air enters the ears and mind of the person who listens, confusing his minds with the letters of the evil *lashon hara* that he heard.

To prevent this, Hashem gave us fingers shaped like tent pegs, which we can place in our ears to prevent ourselves from even hearing *lashon hara*. There is deep symbolism in this advice.

The 28 letters of the Torah (22 basic letters and 6 end letters) are inscribed upon the 28 joints of the hands. The various combinations of these letters into words create awesome powers, through which the world was created. Of this it is written, "***When I see Your Heavens, the work of Your fingers***" (Tehillim 8:4), and "***My hand established the Earth and My right hand measured the Heavens***" (Yeshayah 48:13).

Therefore, putting one's fingers in one's ears represents using the 28 letters of the holy Torah to protect oneself from the impurity of *lashon hara*. Protecting the two ears constitutes a fence (גדר) on each side. The *gematria* of two times יתד is גדר (tent-peg), which also equals twice the *gematria* of אור (light), showing that the light of the Torah is a fence that protects us from *lashon hara*.

Chazal tell us that the remedy for those who speak *lashon hara* is to increase their Torah study, as is written, "***The Tree of Life heals the tongue***" (Mishlei 15:4; Erchin 15b). According to what we wrote above, this is well understood. Just as he sinned with his speech, creating forces of evil that destroy the worlds of holiness, each word of

Torah that he studies creates holy angels. Every word of Torah that a person speaks is repeated by Hashem, bringing new angels into existence (*Chagigah* 14a).

Torah study is a remedy not only for *lashon hara*, but for every sin in the world. It is more effective than hundreds of fasts and the most severe self-affliction, as Chazal often teach us.

Rain and Dew

"Let my lessons fall like rain, and my words flow like dew. Like winds on the grass" (*Devarim* 32:2). The Sifri (*Haazinu* 1) comments that the word "lessons" refers to the lessons of the Torah.

Torah is compared to rain. Just as rain brings life to man by causing crops to grow from the Earth, and without it he would die, so too a person who sins is dead in the sense that the limb with which he sinned is devoid of holiness (as we explained above). Torah allows that holiness to return and revive him.

Rain descends from Heaven to saturate the Earth and cause plants to grow, but really the potential for that growth already exists in the seed that is planted in the Earth. The entire tree, its branches and its fruit, all exist in potential in the seed. However, this potential cannot be brought out without rain.

The same is true of Torah. Each person has his own mission to accomplish in this Earth. No two people are alike. Each person was born with the special traits and skills that he needs to perform his task. However, all this is only in potential. Like a seed that grows only when watered, so too his potentials come to the surface only when inspired by a spirit sent from Heaven. This inspiration comes from Torah, which is compared to rain.

The double wording of the verse, *"Let my lesson fall like rain, and my words flow like dew,"* refers to two different kinds of water, with a vast difference between them. Dew falls gently, causing no hardship or inconvenience. However, it has less effect than rain. It is just enough to preserve the moisture in the Earth, so that the seeds do not wither and die. Rain, on the other hand, can cause trouble, as is written, *"Rain drips on the day that people are locked (inside to avoid the storm)"* (*Mishlei* 27:15). However, it provides much greater benefit, since it provides enough water for the seeds to grow and produce fruit.

So too, there are two kinds of Torah study. A person can learn things that are simple, and do not require great effort. He can learn Tanach or interesting stories of *agadatah*. Such study has a great influence to help a person overcome his bad *middos*, inspire him towards *yiras Shamayim*, and prevent him from being swept away by the foolish distractions of this world. In this sense, Torah study protects him from sin, just as dew prevents seeds from dying in the Earth. However, it will not make him produce fruit, by turning him into a learned Torah scholar who knows the specific details of *halachah*. The study of *halachah* in depth requires hard work, as Chazal say, "The words of Torah cannot be preserved until a person kills himself over them," (*Berachos* 63b) and, "If a person said that he worked hard but did not succeed, do not

believe him. If he said that he did not work hard but he succeeded anyway, do not believe him. If he said he worked hard and succeeded, believe him" (*Megillah 6b*).

"*Let my lessons fall like rain*" refers to the parts of Torah that require hard work, concentration and difficulty in order to understand them. The Hebrew word used for "fall" is *ya'arof*, which can also mean kill (as we find in the context of the *eglah arufah* – the calf slaughtered in atonement for an unsolved murder). This symbolizes how a person must "kill himself" with hard work in order to achieve the aspect of Torah that is compared to rain and makes fruit grow.

The Hebrew word for lessons is "*lekach*," which literally means "takings." It is the portion of the *Torah She'Baal Peh* that Moshe Rabbeinu received during the forty days that he stood on Har Sinai, as the Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah 11:10*) says:

Moshe said to Bnei Yisrael, "How much difficulty I endured for the Torah. How hard did I have to work for it. I was there for forty days. I walked among the fiery angels, whose breath could burn the entire world. I gave my life and my blood for it. Just as I worked hard for it, so too should you work hard to study it."

"Like Winds on the Grass"

The verse then continues, "*Like winds on the grass.*" Personality traits, both good and bad, are ingrained on a person's spirit from the moment he is born, such as anger, mercy, generosity, arrogance, humility, compassion, cruelty, stinginess, wastefulness and the like. Each personality trait and its opposite can be used for good in the service of Hashem, or *chas v'shalom* the opposite. Each person's spirit contains a mixture of good and bad, as a result of Adam's sin in eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which caused good and bad to become mixed together.

Man was created in order to bring his good potential to the surface, and separate the good from the bad. Of this Chazal say that we must serve Hashem with all our "hearts." The plural form of the word is used, signifying that we must serve Hashem with both hearts, the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hara* (*Berachos 54a*), by harnessing even our bad traits in the service of Hashem.

Chazal tell us, "There is no mussar other than Torah" (*Sifri, Haazinu 1*), as is written, "**Hear my son the mussar of your father and do not abandon the Torah of your mother**" (*Mishlei 8:10*). 'Hear my son the mussar of your father,' refers to the Written Torah. 'Do not abandon the Torah of your mother,' refers to the Oral Torah.

A person should not think that character perfection can be achieved without Torah study, for example by following ethical doctrines like those of Aristotle. It is impossible for a person to purify his *middos* and transform his bad traits into good, except through the holy Torah. Torah guides a person on the straight path of Hashem. It teaches him how to use each character trait in the right way, and avoid the opposite.

As a person studies the Torah and the words of Chazal, he will see clearly mapped before him all the paths of Hashem. He will understand the proper guidelines for each personality trait. For example, generosity is a good trait, but it too has its limits. Chazal teach us, "Even the most generous person should not give away more than one fifth of his income, lest he become poor himself and need to take charity from others" (*Kesubos* 50a).

Humility is also a good trait, but Chazal teach us that a Torah scholar must have "one eighth of one eighth of arrogance" (*Sotah* 5a), lest he disgrace himself and bring dishonor to the Torah.

Man's character traits are apt to grow haphazardly. That is how Hashem created us. The trial of character improvement is to make order out of them, placing each in its appropriate place. In this sense, character traits are like grass. When Hashem commanded the trees to grow, He said, "**Let the earth sprout ... fruit-bearing trees by their species.**" When He commanded the grass to grow, He said, "**Let the earth sprout grass,**" but He did not say "to their species." Nonetheless, the blades of grass also sprouted individually, each in its proper place: "**And the earth gave forth grass according to its species**" (*Bereishis* 1:11-12).

The Gemara explains that the grass (or rather, the angel that oversees grass) realized that this was Hashem's will. Therefore, the blades of grass grew individually and in proper order, as Hashem desired, even without having been commanded to do so (*Chullin* 60a).

This is an example of how Hashem's will for creation is carried out, even without His express command. The same is true of our character improvement. He did not decree that we must be righteous, just as He did not decree that the blades of grass grow in proper order. He left room for us to choose for ourselves whether to be righteous or wicked. He created us with good and bad character traits, and left it up to us to cultivate our traits for good.

Still, it is His will that we be righteous. His plan for creation was that we choose good of our own accord. This plan will inevitably be carried out.

Through this we can answer the question we posed at the beginning of this essay. Although Hashem clearly wants us to be good, and His will be inevitably be carried out in the end, He left it up to us to choose good over bad from our own free will. These thoughts of His were never expressly commanded in the Utterances through which the world was created. This leaves us responsible to recognize and fulfill His will by ourselves, just as the grass did when it decided to grow individually without having been told to do so.

Hashem's Unspoken Thought

Whereas everything else was created through Hashem's speech, the Torah was Hashem's thought that preceded His speech. The word "*Bereishis*" is considered one of Ten Utterances through which the world was created (*Rosh Hashanah* 32a), even though it was not preceded by, "And Hashem said." This was the original intent that preceded Hashem's speech: *Bereishis* – for the sake of *reishis*, for the first and foremost

thing in the world, which is the Torah, "*reishis chochma – the beginning of wisdom*" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1, *Tehillim* 111:10).

Only through the Torah can a person cause the good within himself to overpower the evil, as was Hashem's unspoken thought and will for creation. Without the Torah, a person is left uncertain whether the good within him will triumph or the evil. Nothing else can help him uproot the evil that has taken hold of him and return to a path of holiness. It is impossible for anything within the framework of "spoken" creation to help, since this would undermine the free choice that is integral to creation. The only thing that can help him is the unspoken "thought" of Hashem, which was not vocalized as one of the Utterances of creation. This is the Torah, which is our only means of defeating the *yetzer hara*, as Chazal say, "I created the *yetzer hara* and I created the Torah as its antidote" (*Kiddushin* 30b).

Hashem created the *yetzer hara* as an essential part of creation, to maintain the balance between good and evil and ensure that people will have their own free will. It is impossible to circumvent this balance by any means other than reaching up towards something that is beyond the spoken Utterances of creation, which is the Torah, as Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes (*Nefesh Hachaim* 4:32).

The Torah is the unspoken will of Hashem, which allows a person's *middos* to develop in the proper way, just as the blades of grass grew individually, each in their own correct place, rather than in a chaotic mixture. This goal of cultivating the good *middos* and harnessing the bad *middos* towards good can be achieved only through the Torah. Therefore, the Torah is compared to, "*winds on the grass.*"

Wisdom Before Birth

Chazal tell us that in the mother's womb, a candle shines over the head of the fetus. By its light, the fetus can see from one end of the world to the other. There, the fetus is taught the entire Torah, but as soon the baby is born an angel slaps it on its face and it forgets everything. Before it is born, it is sworn to an oath, "Be righteous and do not be wicked" (*Niddah* 30b).

These teachings seem odd. What point is there in taking an oath to be righteous, if a person will forget it as soon as he is born and be thrown to the devices of the *yetzer hara*? What point is there in learning the entire Torah, if it will be forgotten the moment he is born? The very idea of a fetus studying Torah seems strange to our understanding. What does all this mean?

Such enigmatic teachings of our Sages have been the subject of ridicule for the fools and the wicked, but this is simply because they are so far from the path of wisdom that they do not have the means to decipher its meaning. All these teachings are perfectly true, and can be understood quite literally, to those who have the wisdom to understand them.

The point of these teachings is as follows. The soul of man is an ethereal spirit of understanding, but the physicality of the body forms a partition that blocks its perception. While the fetus is being formed in the womb, the soul is only partially attached to the body. The aspect of the soul that has not yet descended to the body

hovers over it, with nothing to hinder its vision. This aspect of the soul is the candle that shines over the fetus, allowing it see from one end of the world to the other.

Before birth, the soul is taught everything it is capable of knowing from the Torah. The soul receives the portion of the Torah allotted to it from Har Sinai, according to its root in Heaven. This latent Torah wisdom assists the person after he is born in overcoming the *yetzer hara*, correcting his deeds and perfecting his inborn *middos*.

Although a person has the free will to act as he chooses, he is assisted by the portion of Torah he received before he was born. This portion of Torah is itself the oath that binds him to be righteous.

He forgets everything when he is born, since he is then chained to the physical body, which blocks his sight and clouds his wisdom, thus leaving room for free choice between good and evil. Nonetheless, the Torah he learned in his mother's womb is a great benefit to him, since it allows him to regain through his studies the Torah that he once knew. As he regains his portion in the Torah, it assists him in withstanding the *yetzer hara* and fulfilling his oath to be righteous.

This dormant wisdom produces the thoughts of *teshuva* that rise into a person's consciousness. Even the worst sinner sometimes has thoughts to be good. This comes from the holy Torah that was embedded in his soul before he was born. These good thoughts sink to the bottom of his subconscious, as the *yetzer hara* drags him into the vapid frivolities of his times, but in the end the good thoughts will rise to the surface. These thoughts are the chain that we discussed above (see page 38), which is the lifeline attached to each person, through which Hashem draws him back up so that he will not drown in a sea of evil.

The Key to Eternity

The Torah that a person learns before he is born is his key to eternal life. It is the means through which he will merit the World to Come, and to rise for the resurrection after the six millennia of this world are completed.

This is a deep point, to which Gemara (*Bava Basra* 79a) hints:

Rav said: Anyone who abandons Torah study will be consumed by fire, as is written, "***I shall set My face against them. They have abandoned the fire (of Torah), and fire will consume them***" (*Yechezkel* 15:7). When Rav Dimi came (to Bavel), he said in the name of Rav Yochanan: Anyone who is lax in Torah study will fall into Gehinnom, as is written, "***He who strays from the path of wisdom will rest in the assembly of Refaim***" (*Mishlei* 21:16). *Refaim* refers to Gehinnom, as is written, "***He does not know that that Refaim is there, and in the depths of the Abyss are those she summoned***" (*Mishlei* 9:18).

Fire is used as a metaphor for a destructive force. Fire has incomparable power to decompose that which it consumes, and disassemble the base elements from which that thing is formed. In this sense, fire annuls that which exists.

The same is true of the proverbial "fires" of Gehinnom. They feed from the forces of evil, which as we explained above are nothing other than the vacuum left from the absence of Hashem's light. Evil is essentially the force of nothingness.

The judgment of Gehinnom is a process in which Hashem's light and kindness are hidden from a person, in order to punish him for his sins. Since the bad deeds that a person committed in his lifetime created forces of evil and destruction, these forces must be removed from him. The side of evil takes back that which belongs to it, leaving the person with only that which is good. This is the meaning of the verse, "**The time in which one man rules over another for his evil**" (*Koheles* 8:9). These are the "fires" of Gehinnom, which consume that which is evil in a person, and leaves only the good.

A certain element of evil becomes attached to a person as soon as he is conceived, as is written, "**I was formed in sin, and with sin my mother warmed me**" (*Tehillim* 51:7). Chazal tell us that the Hebrew words for man (אִישׁ) and woman (אִשָּׁה) both contain the Hebrew word for fire (אֵשׁ). This refers to the destructive force of evil that is present in each person from his conception. To separate this force of evil, everyone who is born must ultimately die. Chazal tell us, "There is no death without sin" (*Shabbos* 55a). This refers to the vacuum of holiness, which is the potential for evil that exists within each person.

However, the words for man and woman also contain Hashem's Name. The word for man (אִישׁ) contains the letter *yud*, and the word for woman (אִשָּׁה) contains the letter *heh*. This is the root of supernal holiness that joins them in their union and invests holiness in their child. This is what enroots their child in holiness even before his birth. It is another aspect of the Torah that is taught to him before birth, as we discussed above.

Although the evil that was born with him will ultimately cause him to die, so that he can be cleansed of his evil, the holiness that was born with him ensures him that he will then rise for the resurrection. The letters of Hashem's Name, *yud* and *heh*, are so holy that the forces of evil have no power over them. These are the "**might and joy in His place**" (*Divrei HaYomim* I 16:27), referring to the place of eternal life (*Shaar Hakavanos*, *Tefillas Hashachar* 1).

Of this it is written, "**The dead will not praise Hashem** - לֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ יְהוָה" (*Tehillim* 115:17) referring to the letters *yud-heh*, through which the world beyond death was created. This potential for immortality was ingrained in a person before his birth, through the letters *yud* and *heh* of Hashem's holy Name. Throughout his life, whenever he studies Torah, the other two letters *vav* and *heh* also shine within him, causing the complete Name of Hashem to rest upon him. The Written Torah is represented by the letter *heh*, and the Oral Torah by the letter *vav* (see page 39). Through this Name, he merits eternal life and will rise for the resurrection in the seventh millennium.

To create the potential for this destiny to be fulfilled, it had to be inherent from the original inception of man. Therefore, he is given his portion in the Torah while he is in his mother's womb, even before he comes out into the world. This gives him the ability to perfect himself so that he will rise for the resurrection and earn eternal life.

This power is also compared to fire. It is the purifying fire of Heaven, of which it is written, "**My words are as fire, says Hashem**" (*Yermiyahu* 23:29). Chazal tell us that "fire consumes fire" (*Yoma* 21b), referring to the fire of holiness that consumes the evil fire of Gehinnom.

This is the holy fire that descended from Heaven to consume the sacrifices that were offered in the Beis Hamikdash (*Yoma* 53a). When a person sinned, he would offer an animal as a sacrifice, representing the animalistic nature of his spirit, which gave rise to all his sins. The fire that descended from Heaven would consume the animal sacrifice, and purge man's animalistic spirit of its sins.

Therefore, Chazal warn, "Anyone who abandons Torah study will be consumed by fire" (*Bava Basra* 79a). By abandoning the Torah, he loses his fire of holiness. He is left with only the fire of emptiness and lack that were ingrained within him from the fire through which he was conceived. This is the fire that burns in Gehinnom, for which reason the Gemara concludes, "Anyone who is lax in Torah study will fall into Gehinnom" (*ibid*).

The Cleansing Power of Torah

This is another aspect of why the Torah is compared to dew, as we quoted above from the verse, "**Let my words flow like dew**" (*Devarim* 32:2). The Gemara explains the verse, "**The dew of light is your dew**" (*Yeshayah* 26:19) to mean that all those who engage in the "dew" of Torah study will be revived by it for the resurrection. However, those who neither study nor support Torah study will not be revived (*Kesubos* 111b).

There is great depth to this metaphor. The verses in *Iyov* compare man to a tree that grows old and dies. However, its roots remain in the ground, and when nurtured by water they sprout new saplings, as if they were just now planted (*Iyov*, 14:8-9). The Torah that a person learns in his lifetime to the best of his ability is the moisture that causes him to be reborn from the Earth for the resurrection.

The verse states, "**Take with you words and return to Hashem**" (*Hosheia* 14:3). The Midrash explains that these are the words of the Torah (*Sifri*, *Haazinu* 1). This refers specifically to the "words with you," meaning the words of Torah that stem from the root of your soul, were taught to you in the womb, and were born with you into the world. These are the words that help a person overcome the *yetzer hara* and return to Hashem.

In the verses before the repetition of the Ten Commandments in *Sefer Devarim*, the Torah states, "**Hashem our God sealed a covenant with us at Chorev (Sinai). Not with our forefathers did Hashem seal this covenant, but with us, we who are here and all alive today**" (*Devarim* 5:2-3). From here we learn that all the souls that would ever be born were present at Har Sinai. Each one received the portion of Torah that corresponded to the root of his soul. All are "alive today," since they received the potential for eternal life. The Ten Commandments encompass the entire Torah, with all the details of halachah and even the insights that students would one day suggest to their teachers (*Megillah* 19b).

After the Ten Commandments, the Torah states, "*These are the words that Hashem spoke to the entire congregation from amidst the fire*" (Devarim 5:19). Just as the fire that descended to the Mizbei'ach purged the impurities of sin from the souls of those who offered the korbanos, the same is true of Torah study. Torah is a fire from Heaven, as is written, "*My words are as fire, says Hashem*" (Yermiyahu 23:29). It is greater than all the korbanos. Whereas each particular korban atones for a specific sin, Torah study atones for all sins (Zevachim 7a, Menachos 110a).

"*Take with you words and return to Hashem. Say to Him, 'Bear all our sins, take instead our good deeds, and let the words of our mouth be in place of cows (korbanos)'*" (Hosheia 14:3). Just as the korbanos uplifted the good intents of those who offered them to the highest heights, to give *nachas* to Hashem, so too do the words of our Torah study.

The Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 38:4) comments on this verse that Klal Yisrael say to Hashem that we cannot afford to bring all the korbanos we owe Him. HaKadosh Baruch Hu answers, "I ask only for your words of Torah, and I will forgive all your sins."

Similarly, the Tana D'vei Eliyahu (*Rabbah*, 18) compares Torah study to a mikveh that cleanses people from their impurities. "See how great is the power of Torah. It purifies the sinners of Klal Yisrael when they do *teshuvah*, even if they had been guilty of idolatry, as is written, '*I shall sprinkle upon you pure waters and you will be made pure*' (Yechezkel 36:25)."

The Shofar Blast of Sinai

One of the reasons given for the mitzvah to blow shofar on Rosh Hashanah is to recall the shofar blast that was heard on Har Sinai. For this reason, the beracha for Shofaros in Rosh Hashanah Mussaf begins with a reference to Kabbalas HaTorah: "You were revealed in the cloud of Your glory upon Your holy nation to speak with them."

The first day of creation was the 25th of Elul. The sixth day was Rosh Hashanah, when Adam was created, sinned and banished from Gan Eden. That was when the power of evil rose in the world, and permission was given to the Satan to wage accusations against mankind. Therefore, it became a day of judgment for every year to come, when the Satan demands justice before the Court of Heaven (*Zohar* II, 32b).

When Adam sinned, darkness fell upon the world. The light of holiness became hidden by the cloud of evil that arose. Therefore, Rosh Hashanah is called "the holiday that is hidden" (*Tehillim* 81:4). As opposed the other holidays, which fall in the middle of the month when the moon is full, Rosh Hashanah falls on the beginning of the month when the light of the moon is hidden.

In Hashem's great mercy, He taught Klal Yisrael to blow the shofar to awaken the supernal light that shines from a world that is above sin, and untainted by Adam's fall. This is the world of *teshuvah* that preceded creation. This is the same world from which the Torah was given. Therefore, when the Torah was given, the Satan was confounded and unable to interfere (Tosefos 89a s.v. *Torah*).

For this reason, the Torah was also given amidst a mighty shofar blast and a revelation of light from the supernal worlds, which drove away all the forces of evil. The same shofar blast will signal the redemption, the ingathering of exiles and the destruction of evil forever.

The power of the shofar was introduced to the world by Akeidas Yitzchak. Through this, Avraham Avinu, the first forefather of Klal Yisrael, laid the foundation by which his descendants would be able to receive the Torah, overcome the *yetzer hara*, and escape judgment. By binding his son Yitzchak, who represents justice, he subdued the force of harsh judgment under the hands of his descendants.

The Akeidah created a precedent by which Avraham's descendants would be able to sacrifice their lives in sanctification of Hashem's Name, and devote themselves entirely to Torah and mitzvos to fulfill Hashem's will. This made them worthier than any other nation to receive the Torah. To signify the self-sacrifice that made Kabbalas HaTorah possible, Hashem gave the Torah amidst the shofar blast of a horn made from the ram offered in place of Yitzchak (Rashi, *Shemos* 19:13).

Each year on Rosh Hashanah, when the Satan raises its accusations as it did on the first Rosh Hashanah when Adam sinned, we blow the shofar to awaken then supernal light that subdues the forces of evil and frees us from their power. Such freedom is made possible through the light of Torah, as Chazal say, "*The writing of Hashem was engraved (charus) on the Tablets* – Do not read this as 'engraved' (*charus*), but 'freed' (*cheirus*)" (*Shemos* 32:16; *Avos* 6:2).

For this reason, the Satan is confounded when it hears the shofar blown on Rosh Hashanah. It senses the awakening of the same light that will shine in the future when evil will be destroyed forever, and feels that its end is near (Tosefos, *Rosh Hashanah* 16b).

The Light of Yom Kippur

The second set of Tablets were given when Moshe Rabbeinu descended from Har Sinai on Yom Kippur, signifying that Hashem had forgiven us for the sin of the Golden Calf. When Bnei Yisrael worshipped the Golden Calf, they lost all the heights that they had achieved with Kabbalas HaTorah. The forces of evil were empowered, and Moshe was forced to pray for our forgiveness. His prayers succeeded in drawing down a light of *teshuvah* from a world beyond sin, a world where evil has no grasp.

This light is revealed again each year on Yom Kippur. Therefore, it became a day of forgiveness and acceptance of *teshuvah*. The Satan has no power to raise accusations on Yom Kippur (*Yoma* 20a). When the Beis Hamikdash stood, the shofar was blown every fiftieth year on Yom Kippur, signifying the release of all the slaves (*Vayikra* 25:9). So too, it signifies our release from the slavery of the *yetzer hara*.

In this sense, Yom Kippur is also a day of Kabbalas HaTorah. Chazal tell us, "There were never such joyous days for Klal Yisrael as Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur ... as is written, '*Go out and see, O daughters of Tzion ... on his wedding day and on the day of his rejoicing*'" (*Shir Hashirim* 3:11; *Taanis* 26b). His wedding day refers to Kabbalas

HaTorah, when we receive the Torah that inspires us to return to Hashem in *teshuvah*.

With this we can understand the Midrash with which we began this discourse. "*Hashem is my light and my salvation*": *my light* – on Rosh Hashanah, *and my salvation* – on Yom Kippur (*Tehillim* 27:1; *Vayikra Rabbah* 21:4). Hashem is my light on Rosh Hashanah, when the supernal light first begins to shine into this dark world, through the shofar blast that subdues the *yetzer hara*. This brings our salvation on Yom Kippur, when the Satan is struck silent and unable to accuse. It is then that we are forgiven for our sins.

Call to Action for Yom Kippur

Therefore, my dear Jewish brethren, rise from your slumbers. Awaken before the arrival of the great day of Hashem, Yom Kippur, when the gates of mercy are opened and a Divine flow of bounty descends on the souls of Bnei Yisrael. This is similar to the light that will be renewed in the World to Come, in the seventh millennium, when total forgiveness will be achieved for all the sins of Klal Yisrael from the beginning of time until the end, as is written, "*At that time, says Hashem, the sins of Yisrael will be sought but there will be none, and the sins of Yehuda will not be found, for I will forgive all who remain*" (*Yermiyahu* 50:20), and "*I shall sprinkle upon you pure waters and you will be made pure*" (*Yechezkel* 36:25).

A spark of this great light is kindled each year. Everything that occurs over the course of the year reawakens on Yom Kippur, and all the wrongs of the year are then corrected. So too, everything that occurs over the course of history will reawaken when the seventh millennium arrives, and all the wrongs of history will then be corrected.

However, the gates of forgiveness can be opened only through our own preparations. Therefore, these holy days of *teshuvah* are days of introspection. Each person must set aside time each day to make an accounting with the Creator, examine his deeds of the previous year, and purify himself of his sins through sincere *teshuvah*, remorse, confession and tears. These days include within them all the days of the year. Each of the seven days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is an opportunity to correct all the sins we committed on that day of the week throughout the year. We receive special help from Heaven to return in *teshuvah*, through the supernal light that now shines upon our souls, as we explained above.

The Ten Utterances through which the world was created are heard during the Ten Days of Teshuvah, when the world is recreated anew each year. All the days of the year are included in these ten days, through which they ascend and are brought to perfection. This mirrors the seventh millennium, which will include and bring to perfection all six millennia of this world. The seventh millennium will be the World to Come, in which there will be no eating or drinking, and the righteous will sit with their crowns upon their heads and bask in the radiance of the Shechinah (*Berachos* 17a).

So too is Yom Kippur, when all of Klal Yisrael become like pure and holy angels, who neither eat nor drink. Even the Satan is forced to admit that Klal Yisrael are like holy angels on Yom Kippur (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*, Ch. 45).

Yom Kippur parallels the tenth of the Ten Utterances, "*I have given you all the vegetation that is planted on the face of the Earth and all the fruit bearing trees as your food*" (*Bereishis* 1:29). When Adam sinned, he was punished by having his food cursed, with edible and inedible mixed together. This parallels the Tree of Knowledge, which caused good and evil to become mixed together. To correct this, we were commanded to abstain from all food and drink on Yom Kippur, and to become pure and holy like the angels.

Just as Adam did *teshuvah* and was acquitted in his judgment, so too Yom Kippur was prepared as a day of atonement and forgiveness for all future generations. It is a day when Heaven and Earth connect and are bound together by the souls of Bnei Yisrael.

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 21:4) comments on the verse, "*Hashem is my light*" – on Rosh Hashanah, "*and my salvation*" – on Yom Kippur, "*from who should I fear?*" (*Tehillim* 27:1). The Midrash then adds the verse, "*My song and salvation is Hashem (yud-heh)*" (*Shemos* 15:2).

The *yud* through which the Heavens were created is attached to the *heh* through which the Earth was created, by means of the Torah studied by Bnei Yisrael, as we explained above. The Torah is the light that shines upon the souls of Bnei Yisrael from above, inspiring us to return in *teshuvah* so that we will not drown in the evil of this world. Unlike the other nations, every Jew is assured that he will reach his spiritual perfection, and no one will be lost.

When the Satan is Powerless

The verse concerning Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur then continues, "*When the wicked approach to consume my flesh*" (*Tehillim* 27:2). This refers to the angels appointed over the nations of the world, who complain about the favoritism shown to Bnei Yisrael. "Master of the Universe! They also worship idols, commit illicit relations and murder. Why do they not descend to Gehinnom like the gentiles do?" (*Vayikra Rabbah*, 21:4).

These angels accuse us of the sins we listed above, which are as severe as idolatry, illicit relations and murder. Terrible accusations are raised in Heaven. "How are they any better than the gentiles?" the angels ask. Nonetheless, Bnei Yisrael are indeed distinct from the other nations, through the Torah which maintains our attachment to Hashem no matter how low we may fall.

On Yom Kippur, this attachment is strengthened. A light descends upon us from Heaven to inspire us to return in *teshuvah* and atone for our sins throughout the year. This was the day on which the Torah was given again through the second set of Tablets. Therefore, the Satan has no power to raise accusations against us on this day.

"They are my assailants and my enemies" (ibid). The Midrash comments that there are 365 days to the year, but "The Satan" (שטן) in *gematria* equals 364. It is authorized to assault us on 364 days of the year, but on Yom Kippur it is powerless.

"If an army encamps against me, I shall not fear" (ibid, 3). This refers to the forces of evil, which draw us towards sin. *"In 'this' I trust"* – in the power of the Torah, of which it is written, "This is the Torah that Moshe placed before Bnei Yisrael" (*Devarim* 4:44) and was given to us again with the second Tablets on Yom Kippur.

Before Whom Do You Purify Yourself

With this we can explain the teaching of Chazal (*Yoma* 85b) that we quoted above:

Fortunate are your Yisrael. Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven, as is written, *"I shall sprinkle upon you pure waters,"* and *"Hashem is the mikveh of Yisrael."* Just as a mikveh purifies those who are impure, so too does HaKadosh Baruch Hu purify Bnei Yisrael.

We are fortunate in the assurance that Hashem will purify us from our sins on Yom Kippur. However, we should may not rely on this alone, since Yom Kippur atones only together with our *teshuvah* (*Yoma* 86a). Therefore, we must prepare ourselves for Yom Kippur by purifying ourselves before Hashem in *teshuvah*.

This is comparable to a person who immerses in a mikveh. Even if the waters of the mikveh are perfectly pure and valid, it will not purify him unless he first cleans his body from the dirt and grime that separates his skin from the water. Otherwise his immersion in the mikveh is worthless.

The same is true of our preparations for Yom Kippur. We must cleanse ourselves of our sins through sincere remorse, confession and resolving never to repeat them. We must also be careful to avoid the twenty-four things listed by the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah*, 4:1), which prevent a person from returning in *teshuvah*.

Another parallel between Yom Kippur and immersing in a mikveh is found in the Gemara (*Yoma* 85b), which states that if a person says, "I will sin and then do *teshuvah*," he is not given the opportunity to do *teshuvah*. If he says, "I will sin and Yom Kippur will atone," then Yom Kippur does not atone. By relying on Yom Kippur to atone for his sins, he shows that he does not really regret them. He is not ashamed of his misdeeds. He feels confident to sin as he pleases, knowing that he can rely on Yom Kippur to escape punishment and then sin again.

This is like immersing in a mikveh while holding a *sheretz* in his hand. He believes that the purity of the mikveh will cleanse him not only from the impurities of his past, but even from the impurities of the present and the future. This is a false assumption. The mikveh cleanses only from the impurities that a person has already abandoned (*Nedarim* 75b).

Therefore, the Mishna states, "Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you?" We must purify ourselves in *teshuvah* before Hashem comes to purify

us on Yom Kippur, just as person must remove the dirt from his body before immersing in a mikveh. Then, our Father in Heaven will purify us through the great light that is revealed on Yom Kippur, which distinguishes Klal Yisrael from all other nations. This is the light of the Torah, which is a link that attaches every Jew to his source, so that he will never be lost.

Of this it is written, "*This day shall atone for you to purify you...*" (Vayikra 16:30). In truth, the holiness of the day itself brings atonement for Klal Yisrael. The awesome light that is revealed on Yom Kippur crushes all the forces of evil. Therefore, the Satan has no power to wage accusations on Yom Kippur. However, we must lend our own assistance to this, as the verse continues, "*... from all your sins, purify yourselves before Hashem.*" We must purify ourselves through *teshuvah* before Yom Kippur arrives.

The Mishna cites a proof for all this from the verse, "*Hashem is the mikveh of Yisrael.*" Hashem compared the purification of Klal Yisrael to a mikveh. First a person must cleanse his body, including the hidden places which represent that sins that we are so accustomed to performing, that we forget they are even forbidden. These sins prevent people from returning in perfect *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* must also include a sincere commitment to change. Otherwise, it is like immersing in a mikveh while holding a sheretz in his hand.

If a person does *teshuvah* properly, there is no doubt that he will be forgiven, purified of his sins, and judged favorably for a good year, Amen.