LIVING IN HIS IMAGE • BOOK TWO

# BEIN ADAM LE'ATZMO

*Mitzvos Between Man and Himself: Wisdom and Holiness*

ENCOMPASSING SEDER 4 (LIMUD) • SEDER 5 (CHUKIM)

# LIVING IN HIS IMAGE

BOOK TWO • BEIN ADAM LE'ATZMO

**Living in His Image • The Chavrusa Edition**
A Comprehensive Curriculum of Halachah, Hashkafah, and Character Refinement

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**PRIMARY RABBINIC SOURCES & HALACHIC FOUNDATIONS**

Primary halachic rulings and moral dilemma analyses drawn from the works of *Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein shlit"a* (including *Chashukei Chemed*, *Veharev Na*, and *Shiurei Torah L'Rof'im*), alongside the classical commentators: the *Rambam*, *Ramban*, *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Tur*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Mishnah Berurah*, and the *Sfas Emes*.

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# MISSION STATEMENT & CURRICULUM GUIDE

## MISSION STATEMENT

This Sefer has five goals. They are:

### I. A COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM OF ALL HALACHAH AND HASHKAFAH

To create a comprehensive curriculum for teachers and mentors that teaches both the philosophy and practice of all of Judaism through the prism of all the mitzvos, both d'Oraisa and d'Rabbanan, that are practiced today

### II. HOW EACH MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER TO RESEMBLE AND DRAW CLOSE TO HASHEM

To demonstrate how the goal of all of the mitzvos is to help us perfect our character so that we become similar and close to Hashem. This sefer studies each mitzvah and teaches how it helps to either perfect our character or inspires us to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem.

### III. THE HALACHOS AND HASHKAFAH OF EACH MITZVAH

To briefly teach the basic halachos of each mitzvah and the philosophy that is taught by each mitzvah

### IV. THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN THE MITZVOS

Chazal teach that each mitzvah is connected to all of the rest. (Taryag mitzvos hateluim bo). This sefer demonstrates the interrelation between each mitzvah, and how they are unified towards the goal of perfecting our character and perfecting the world in order to resemble and come close to Hashem. This teaches that the mitzvos are not disjointed, but all work together synergistically to achieve the goals of the Torah.

### V. THE SYSTEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE MITZVAH SYSTEM

To teach the systematic structure and categories of the mitzvah system. This teaches that the Torah is an organized and systematic system.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

This book is primarily made for mentors who are studying with someone who is growing in their observance, or as a resource for teachers to teach this course.

## WHAT IS THIS CURRICULUM?

Many of us know that the purpose of the mitzvos is to bring us closer to Hashem, but it is not clear how each mitzvah help us achieve that. There often seems to be a disconnect between what we know is the goal of the mitzvah system, and the mitzvos themselves. In addition, Mitzvos are often perceived as disjointed, unrelated to each other, and not part of a cohesive whole. Each of the mitzvos, as well any specific point of Jewish philosophy are often mistakenly seen as part of a jumble of disparate and separate items, and don't relate to each other in an organized system with a single defined purpose.

This curriculum, based on the works of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, attempts to demonstrate how the goals of the mitzvah system are connected to the mitzvos themselves. It demonstrates how every mitzvah is part of an integrated system to perfect our middos (character) to make us similar and consequently close to Hashem. It shows how every single mitzvah, even the mitzvos that are bein adam lemakom, have their purpose in helping us achieve shleimus, or character perfection.

The program uses the classic works of the Sefer Hamitzvos of the Chofetz Chaim and the Sefer Chareidim as its primary texts. The mitzvos are taught using Rav S.R. Hirsch's structure as he has outlined in his books The Nineteen Letters, and Chorev. This structure beautifully illustrates how all of the Mitzvos lead toward the single goal of shleimus, which is to resemble Hashem's perfection.

There are five goals of this Halachah and Hashkafah program:

1. To create a comprehensive curriculum for teachers and mentors that teaches both the philosophy and practice of Judaism through the prism of all the mitzvos, both d'Oraisa and d'Rabbanan, that are practiced today

2. To demonstrate the interrelation between each mitzvah, and how they are unified towards the goal of perfecting our character to resemble Hashem and to perfect the world

3. To teach the systematic structure the mitzvah system

4. To briefly teach the basic halachos of each mitzvah and the philosophy that is taught by each mitzvah

5. To study each mitzvah and teach how it helps to either perfect our character or inspire us to perfect our character

This curriculum is also attempting to fill a current void. Many people who begin learning with someone who is looking to learn more about Judaism are faced with the dilemma of what to learn. Some begin to learn Jewish philosophy, like Derech Hashem or Strive for Truth. But as they progress, they feel that while they are teaching fundamental ideas of Jewish thought, they aren't presenting any concrete Yiddishkeit. It seems abstract, theoretical, and "airy-fairy". They may begin to feel that they are not learning how to live as a Jew. On the other extreme, others begin with Halachah like Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, but for a beginner that can be dry, technical and very intimidating.

This program offers one solution to that problem by presenting the student with a wholesome balance of both Halachah and Hashkafah; to teach all of the mitzvos and their basic halachos, and use those mitzvos as a springboard to teach important principles of Hashkafah (Jewish thought)

This book is divided into several sections. The first section is entitled "All of Torah on One Foot". It is an explanation of the structure of the mitzvah system, based on the teachings of Rav Hirsch and Rav Moshe Chaim Luzatto. It is the philosophical introduction and underpinning of the program.

The next section is the actual curriculum that you use to learn with. It includes a comprehensive listing of all the mitzvos, based (with slight modifications for clarification) on the structure of Rav Hirsch's Chorev.

The mitzvos are presented in the following format.

This book divides all of the mitzvos into nine categories of mitzvos, called Chesed, Mishpatim, Pekudim, Limud, Chukim, Moadim, Edus, Toros, and Avodah.

At the beginning of each mitzvah category, there is a basic overview of the purpose of the mitzvos in that category, and how it fits within the general framework of all of the mitzvos. All of the mitzvos in that category are broken down further into smaller mitzvah "clusters". Before each mitzvah cluster there is a brief overview of the mitzvos in the section, and how it helps to make us similar to Hashem.

Within each cluster, you will find each individual mitzvah. Each mitzvah is composed of up to six parts.

1. First, the scriptural source for each mitzvah is listed.

2. That is followed by a list of questions that the halachah addresses. These questions can be read to the student before you learn the halachah. It is often helpful to discuss the questions with the student before the halachah is read. These questions engage the student, and make it more interactive, interesting and memorable. They can be used to create an interactive discussion about the mitzvah before the text is studied together.

3. After the questions, you will find a quotation of the sefer Hamitzvos HaKatzar written by the Chofetz Chaim, based on the Rambam's Sefer Hamitzvos. I have chosen this text because it is a brief description of the fundamental halachos from that mitzvah. I believe it is worthwhile to study the text of a classical book, rather reading a list of selected halachos. For the mitzvos that the Sefer Hamitzvos Hakatzar does not quote, I have used the short text from the Sefer Chareidim. I have chosen to use the Sefer Chareidim as well is because the Sefer Chareidim is a comprehensive list of all of the mitzvos that the Rishonim count. It has many mitzvos d'Oraisa that the Sefer Hamitzvos leaves out. (They were left out by the Rambam because he held that they were details of other broader mitzvos, or because they were so fundamental and broad that they were the axioms of the other mitzvos) Additionally the Sefer Chareidim lists the mitzvos d'Rabbanan and mitzvos Medivrei Kaballa that are not listed by the Sefer Hamitzvos.

4. After the halachah, you will find a paragraph describing how that mitzvah works in tandem with the rest of the mitzvos to help perfect our character, to make us similar to Hashem, and therefore how it can make us close to Hashem.

5. Next you will find a listing of additional ideas, lessons, and explanations behind the mitzvah. These explanations are in addition to the central concept of the mitzvah being either an emulation of Hashem, or an inspiration to emulate Hashem.

6. Finally you will find a list of suggested Hashkafah topics that relate to the mitzvah. Rav Hirsch taught that the entire worldview and hashkafah of the Torah, can be seen through the prism of the mitzvos themselves. I therefore have added a list of suggested fundamental hashkafah topics that relate to each mitzvah. The teacher is of course

welcome and encouraged to add any hashkafah that he or she thinks is appropriate.

On the top of each page, you will find a short description of the purpose of the mitzvos in that section. This also serves to remind the student where the specific mitzvah fits within the broader framework of all of the mitzvos.

May it be Hashem's will that we all succeed in being marbitz Torah, and succeed in bringing many people closer to Him.

## HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

As we mentioned earlier, the goal of this curriculum is to teach the basic halachos of all the mitzvos, their philosophical ideas, and how all of the mitzvos work together to help perfect our character to make us similar to Hashem.

This program is designed to be an engaging dialogue rather than simply a unilateral and didactic lecture.

You begin with the introduction called "All of Torah on one foot". This can either be taught by having the student read it independently ahead of time, it can be read together, or the teacher can teach it in his own words. This section gives the general overview of the program.

After that is complete, you begin to learn the mitzvos. The book is divided into nine sections. Before each section there is an introduction of the mitzvos in the section. This should be read together

Next within each section, the mitzvos are clumped together in clusters. Before each mitzvah cluster, there is short a description of how these mitzvos help to make us more similar to Hashem. This should also be read together.

You are now ready to begin the individual mitzvah. Begin by reviewing where this mitzvah fits within the mitzvah chart. You can use the headings at the top of the page to review where it fits.

Next, read the description of the mitzvah and its scriptural source. You can now ask your student their opinion to some of the question that will be addressed in the Halachos of the mitzvah. These questions should lead you into an engaging discussion. Ask their opinions, and what they intuitively feel the answer should be. Next read the text of the halachos. This will either be the text of the Sefer Hamitzvos Hakatzar or the text of the Sefer Chareidim.

Then read the description of how that mitzvah helps to perfect our character to make us similar and so close to Hashem.

Next, share some of the additional reasons and insights given by the other commentaries. After you finish the reasons, you can move on to discuss the related Hashkafah topics.

After the student feels satisfied, you are ready to move on to the next mitzvah. In an average session of an hour you can usually complete 2 or 3 mitzvos.



SEDER FOUR • SECTION ONE: EMULATING HASHEM

# LIMUD: TORAH STUDY & WISDOM

*Mitzvos of Emulating Hashem's Wisdom*

## OVERVIEW

The first three categories all primarily relate to how we interface with others in a way that resembles Hashem (Bein Adam LeChaveiro). However, these next two categories deal with relating toward our very selves in a way that resembles Hashem, called by our Sages as Bein Adam LeAtzmo. This brings us to the fourth category of mitzvos, called Limud, which helps us to resemble Hashem's wisdom.

Just as we are to resemble Hashem in his Kindness, we are also to resemble Hashem in his wisdom. Because our goal is to resemble the Almighty, not only are we to resemble the Almighty in His perfect character, but we are also to resemble the Almighty by sharing His wisdom, and becoming wise like Him. When we study the Almighty's will and make it our will as well, we are now becoming more similar to the Almighty. When we study the depths of the Torah and strain our minds (Ameilus) to try to understand the way the Almighty thinks, and we consequently also begin to think that way, we become more similar to Him. When we incorporate Hashem's wisdom into our minds, we begin to become wise like Him, and emulate him. So the first role of Torah study is that it makes us similar to the Almighty by allowing us to share His will, and to share the way He thinks. This helps us to expand, sharpen, and develop our mind in a G-dly way.

But there another important role for this category of mitzvos. The mitzvah of learning should not be relegated to being merely an intellectual exercise of expanding and sharpening our minds. Learning is a prerequisite to action and learning must be completed by action. It is impossible to be G-dly if people do not know what it means to be G-dly. Just as one cannot become a doctor without first studying how to be one, then one certainly cannot be similar to the Almighty before studying how to do so. If a person who isn't medically trained attempts to dispense medical care, he or she may have the noblest intentions, but can likely cause more harm than good with their actions. Similarly, without knowing how to act in a G-dly, one may try to do something with the best of intentions trying to be G-dly, and yet in reality do the very opposite.

For example, it is very possible that people advocating assisted suicide, or unlimited on-demand abortions, have noble motivations of trying to help people. They may very well believe that they are doing a moral and G-dly thing. But after one studies the laws of laws of G-dliness, it becomes apparent that it is in fact the opposite. Similarly, many well meaning people likely believe that spaying and neutering animals is a noble, responsible, and compassionate thing to do. But an education about the laws of G-dliness would reveal that in fact the contrary is true. These two examples illustrate to us that before we can become G-dly, it is first imperative that we in fact spend the time to study how to become G-dly and not leave it to the whims of subjectivity. This is the second role of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah.

Torah study also has a third role. Later we will discuss the mitzvos of kedushah that allow us to master our horse. As we will explore, those mitzvos help us put our horse in a subservient and passive state towards the neshamah. But what gives the neshamah the strength to master the horse? What gives it the power to yield in the horse's reins? The answer is, that as we will elaborate about shortly, there are different spiritual influences that give our neshamah spiritual strength to master the horse. The greatest of these influences of spiritual strength comes with the study of Torah. The study of Torah is like spiritual food for the neshamah. When the neshamah is healthy and fed with its spiritual fuel, it is more vocal and it has the strength to master the horse. But when the neshamah is not supplied with its fuel, it becomes weak and silent, and it is then much easier to fall prey to the illicit desires of the horse.

To give a basic example of this phenomenon, imagine a secular Jew who knows nothing about the laws of Shabbos. When he turns on the light on Shabbos he likely doesn't feel any pangs of conscience. But if you invite that very same fellow to spend some time to learn the laws of Shabbos with you, he may feel a bit self-conscious or guilty the next time he turns on the light. His conscience will now be much more vocal and it will bother him. Our Sages explain this as a manifestation of the neshamah gaining strength through the study of Torah. When we study Torah, our conscience, our neshamah is much more vocal and has greater influence over the horse.

To illustrate further, our Sages teach that on days that one fails to learn Torah, one will feel spiritually weak, and it will be much easier to slip and do aveiros (transgressions). The study of Torah gives the neshamah an influence of spiritual energy that gives it the strength to master the horse. This is one understanding of the saying of the Sages of Barasi yetzer hara, barasi Torah tavlin. The Almighty says, "I have created the desire for evil, and I have created the Torah to be an antidote for it". The study of Torah is the antidote, the counter-balance to the power of the horse. When we study Torah, we have much greater spiritual strength to master our horse.

We have so far discussed how the mitzvos of Limud teach us how to resemble Hashem by sharing his wisdom, how to act in a godly way, and they help give us the spiritual strength to master our impulses.

This category of mitzvos includes the mitzvos that require us to preserve the Torah the way it was traditionally passed down.

It also includes mitzvos of showing respect to the teachers and scholars of the Torah. As we will explore deeper, the more we place the pursuit of wisdom on a pedestal, the more people will decide to make that a priority in their own lives

Finally, it is important to know that we don't only learn from books, and in formal settings. We are constantly learning from the impressions and influences that are presented to us throughout our lives. That is why the mitzvos of Limud also include mitzvos that teach the imperative for us to surround ourselves with people that teach us positive things, and avoid spending too much time with people that can influence us negatively.

## THE STUDY AND TEACHING OF TORAH

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask us to emulate Hashem by internalizing and comprehending His wisdom, and by sharing it with others.*

# 1. To study and teach Torah

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 14, Sefer Chareidim Divrei Kivushin 125**

*As the Torah says and you shall teach them diligently to your children (Devarim 6:7, Parshas Va'eschanan).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- How much Torah is one obligated to study?
- Is someone who is very busy with work or school exempt from studying Torah?
- How often is one obligated to study?
- Who is it a bigger mitzvah to teach Torah, one's own son, or a neighbor's son who would not otherwise study Torah?
- Is one obligated to teach his grandchildren?
- At what point should a father start teaching his child Torah?
- Which is the greatest mitzvah of the Torah?
- Why is Torah study so great?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

It is an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh) that the words of the Torah be so fluent and sharp in a person's mouth that if asked a question, he does not stammer or hesitate, but responds with absolute clarity.

Every Jewish man is obligated to establish fixed times for Torah study by day and by night, regardless of his circumstances — whether rich or impoverished, vibrant in health or afflicted with suffering, in the prime of youth or advanced in years, or even a destitute pauper sustained by charity who goes door-to-door for sustenance. As Scripture states: "You shall meditate upon it day and night" (Yehoshua 1:8). He remains bound to this study until his final day, as Scripture warns: "Lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life" (Devarim 4:9).

A father has a direct biblical obligation to teach Torah to his sons, and instructing his own child takes precedence over teaching anyone else. He is likewise obligated to teach his grandchildren, as Scripture commands: "And you shall make them known to your children and your children's children" (Devarim 4:9). As soon as a young child begins to speak, his father must begin teaching him Torah by reciting with him the foundational verse: "Moshe commanded us the Torah, the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov" (Devarim 33:4). A father is also obligated to hire a competent teacher to instruct his son if he cannot do so himself.

Women are exempt from the formal obligation to study and teach Torah. Nevertheless, a mother receives profound reward for facilitating her children's education and ensuring that they do not grow up ignorant of the Torah and its laws.

The mitzvah of Torah study is equal in weight to all 613 mitzvos of the Torah combined, because study leads directly to faithful action. This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men.

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is taught in Pirkei Avos: "Shammai says: Make your Torah study a fixed fixture" (Avos 1:15). That is, one should establish a definitive daily quota — a set number of folios of Talmud and specific sections of Halachah each day — resembling the daily task assigned to a servant by his master. For just as we were once enslaved to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim, where each laborer was compelled to produce an exacting quota of bricks daily, so too are we servants to the Almighty, obligated to fulfill our daily service of Torah study with unwavering devotion.

## HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

When we study Torah, we emulate Hashem by sharing His wisdom. For example, when we strain our minds to understand a complicated section of Gemara (Talmud), we are expanding our minds to think in a Godly way.

Additionally, when we learn Torah, we absorb a spiritual energy, a hashpa of kedushah that sanctifies us and helps us become kadosh, holy like Hashem.

Finally, this mitzvah a basic prerequisite to the Torah. We can't become g-dly and emulate Hashem, unless we learn the Torah to learn how to do mitzvos to emulate Hashem

All of the mitzvos of this category enjoin us to learn Torah, and help others learn Torah.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

**SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 419)**

If one learns Torah, he or she will know and understand the ways of Hashem. This ability is the primary distinction that makes us different than animals.

**RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:2)**

Studying Torah is absolutely necessary because without it you can't know what to do and studying it gives you shleimus.

Of all of the hashpaos, Hashem gives to creation one hashpa he gives is the greatest possible hashpa. It is the closest we have to Hashem's essence and it has the same mala as Hashem's maala. Hashem himself gives this hashpa to his bria.

This hashpa is attached to limud hatorah. We can absorb this hashpa by reading the Torah and by understanding it. However you have to follow specific instruction to access the hashpa.

Every portion of Torah has a different level of hashpa that comes with reading or understanding it, provided that the specific directions are kept.

The greater the haskala, the greater the hashpa you will get, but every level brings a hashpa. Even simply reading brings a hashpa, but it is less than understanding. In this manner most of Yisrael can be zoche to this hashpa.

The same way that Torah brings a hashpa to himself, it also brings a hashpa to the entire universe. Every part of Torah corrects and perfects a different part of the universe. Therefore everyone has to learn the entire Torah in order to perfect all of the universe.

**RALBAG (DEVARIM 6:7)**

If one learns Torah himself, he will have a much greater clarity about how to perform the Torah, than if he simply asks a rabbi how to perform it.

Additionally, he will be more motivated and inspired to perform it if he learned it himself.

Finally, one will understand the kavanos of the Torah, the intent of the Torah much more if he learns it. This will help him develop a Torah mind.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 4)**

In order to attain true watchfulness (zehirus) and maintain a meaningful daily cheshbon hanefesh, one must learn mussar every single day. Daily mussar study impresses upon the heart the supreme gravity of our spiritual mission (chomer ha'avodah).

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 5)**

The Almighty created the venom of the yetzer hara, and He created only one true antidote: the study of Torah ("Barasi yetzer hara, barasi lo Torah tavlin"). The Creator who engineered the human soul and its inclinations knows the precise formula that subdues this venom. No worldly philosophy, psychological exercise, or mortal wisdom can subdue the yetzer hara — only the sacred light of Torah study possesses the spiritual power to master it.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)**

The essential path to developing nekiyus (moral cleanliness) and tearing away self-rationalization is studying the intricate details (dikdukim) of halachah. Only when a person masters the precise legal boundaries does he stop deceiving himself with convenient justifications.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)**

Studying mussar every day sensitizes the conscience and reveals subtle character flaws and rationalizations that would otherwise remain hidden from one's own eyes.

**SFAS EMES**

• The Midrash compares the words of Torah to oil. If you pour oil into water, wine, or juice, what happens? Oil refuses to blend. It immediately floats straight to the surface. In 5654, the Sfas Emes sees two distinct spiritual realities in this image. For righteous tzaddikim whose blood is saturated with Torah (divrei Torah nivla'im b'damam), their souls remain completely untouched by worldly impurities. They float above the mud like pure

olive oil. What about those of us who have stumbled into mistakes and feel spiritually stained? The Sfas Emes shares a breathtaking comfort. The prophet Hoshea urges us: "Kchu imachem devarim v'shuvu el Hashem" — "Take words with you and return to Hashem" (Hoshea 14:3). The pure oil within us floats back to the top. Torah connects us with a core of divine purity that sin can never extinguish, giving us the power to do teshuvah and rebuild our lives (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5654).

• Citing his grandfather the Chiddushei HaRim, the Sfas Emes explains that the mitzvos were given so that man should live through them, drawing his vitality directly from Hashem. When an individual consumes heavy food and wine merely to escape reality or indulge lust, he temporarily suffocates his higher intellect. Holy temperance preserves the sharpness of the mind so that our thoughts remain tethered to the eternal. As Rashi cites from the Sages (Sanhedrin 72a), the ben sorer u-moreh is judged 'al shem sofo'—on account of his ultimate trajectory, because addictive gluttony eventually leads to violent robbery and bloodshed. In Parashas Vayikra (5636), the Sfas Emes teaches that every small habit of self-restraint in food and drink guards the purity of our entire future life (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Vayikra 5636).

• The Sfas Emes recalls an ancient tradition: the Torah was given as black fire written upon white fire (eish shechorah al gabei eish levanah). In 5638, he explains that the white fire represents the radiant clarity of Torah (behirus) that remains concealed at first. Before we can reach that serene light, we must pass through a stage of blackness and obscurity (shachrus). When we open a complex page of Gemara or face a difficult question in life, our minds often feel confused and overwhelmed. Learning requires loyalty during the hours when the text seems hard and obscure. The struggle itself refines our minds to receive Hashem's truth (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5638).

• The verse states: "Ya'arof ka-matar likchi" — "My doctrine shall drop as the rain" (Devarim 32:2). Why does the Torah compare its teachings to rain? In 5634, the Sfas Emes notes that rain does not create seeds out of nothing. Rain falls upon earth that already contains dormant seeds, nurturing them until they sprout into flowers and grain. In the exact same way, every single Jew possesses an inner spark of vitality (nekudas chiyus) that Torah waters and brings to life! He connects the word for man (adam) with the earth (adamah). Through our daily study and mitzvos, our dormant spiritual potential bursts into bloom. The seed comes from Hashem, but we must water it through our devoted learning (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ha'azinu 5634).

• In 5631, the Sfas Emes offers a straightforward definition of studying Torah for its own sake (Torah lishmah): learning in order to understand and fulfill what Hashem asks of us. The true challenge of learning is what we must surrender. It is very easy to use our intellect to defend our preconceived biases and confirm what we already want to believe. But the authentic avodah of Torah study is "l'vateil sichlo v'da'ato k'dei leida u-l'havin r'tzon Hashem Yisborach v'da'as ha-Torah" — to surrender our private ego and personal opinions in order to know and understand the true will of Hashem and the wisdom of the Torah! When a person admits that he has no independent power without Hashem, his heart becomes like a quiet desert. Torah study creates an inward reverence (yirah) that becomes part of his very bloodstream, directing his thoughts and deeds long after he closes the book (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Bamidbar 5631).

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- Explore the idea of being different than animals by being sichli, mindful people
- Explore the idea of becoming a Talmid Chacham yourself and not being dependent on another to ask them questions. Balance that with the need to have a Rav.

**MORAL DILEMMAS:**

Rav Weiss lived in Israel. He was asked to be Mesader Kiddushin, to officiate the wedding for a young couple. He agreed but told them that he would have to leave immediately following the chuppah. He needed time to arrive at the well attended weekly Torah class that he had been teaching for years. During the chuppah, someone whispered to Rav Weiss that the friends of the bride and groom were waiting for the Rav to leave. As soon as he left they planned to remove the mechitzas and begin a special inappropriate dance. Out of respect for the Rav, they were waiting for him to leave. Rav Weiss was then torn with the following dilemma. It appeared that if he would stay for the entire wedding, they would cancel that dance. Should he quickly send a message that he would cancel the class and stay for the rest of the wedding. Or perhaps the mitzvah of giving the class is greater. Which mitzvah is more important: Stay at the wedding to prevent the mass desecration of the mitzvah to act with modesty, or proceed to the other location and teach his uninterrupted weekly Torah class? What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question of whether the Rav should miss giving his class to stay for the rest of the wedding, Rav Zilberstein answered that he should stay for the whole wedding to keep them away from a great transgression.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Volume Two, p. 481*

A phone operator asked a man whom he recognized to be religious (because of accent) questions of halachah. The man wondered if he may share divrei Torah with him in the middle of his work shift. Can he share words of Torah in the middle of his shift if the operator insists that hearing Torah helps him work?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the caller is not permitted to discuss words of Torah with the telephone operator while the operator is on duty during work hours. Even though hearing Torah inspires the operator and he claims it helps him perform his work, his time during his work shift is legally owned by his employer who is paying for his undivided professional attention; taking time away to study Torah constitutes a form of gezel (theft of company time). Instead, the caller and the operator should exchange contact information to establish a personal connection and learn Torah together off the job, during the operator's personal free time. (Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 83)

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 83*

A dedicated Maggid Shiur delivered a daily Daf Yomi shiur to a regular group of approximately twenty men in his community. As the group progressed through the tractate of Bechoros, the upcoming daf dealt with the physical blemishes (mumin) that disqualify a Kohen from serving in the Beis HaMikdash, detailing the halachic definitions of a hunchback (gibben). One of the most faithful and earnest participants in the daily shiur was a man who suffered from severe spinal curvature and was visibly hunched. The Maggid Shiur became deeply distressed. He realized that reading through the Talmudic discussions and Rashi's descriptions of hunchbacks would inevitably draw the eyes of the room toward this student, causing him excruciating public shame and embarrassment (halbanas panim). The Maggid Shiur wondered: Should he skip the detailed discussion of that daf entirely to protect the man's feelings? On the other hand, the foundational principle of Daf Yomi is complete, page-by-page Torah coverage without skipping, and skipping a page might prevent the group from reciting Hadran and making a valid siyum at the tractate's completion. What should the teacher do? What do you think?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein quotes the ruling of HaGaon Rav Nissim Karelitz zt"l, who ruled that the Maggid Shiur should skip the detailed discussion of that daf in order not to humiliate the student. Causing public shame to a fellow Jew (halbanas panim) is comparable to bloodshed and overrides the public recitation of those specific lines of Gemara.

Furthermore, Rav Nissim Karelitz ruled that skipping that daf does not invalidate the group's future siyum; because they completed the overwhelming majority of the tractate (rubo k'kulo) and omitted that portion solely out of profound compassion to preserve a fellow Jew's dignity, they are fully entitled to make the celebratory siyum and recite the Hadran.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 288*

Yair was a businessman. He lived in Eretz Yisrael, but traveled often to Jordan for business. Jordan is one of the few Arab countries that has a peace accord with Israel. One day Yair was in Jordan and bought something in an open market. The vendor handed Yair the change. The change included a bill worth 50 Jordanian Dinar. All of a sudden, there was a strong gust of wind, and the bill flew out of Yair's hand. The 50 Dinar bill was being blown down the street. Yair raced after it, as he didn't want to waste his money. Finally, to prevent the bill from blowing any further, he stuck his foot out and put his foot on the 50 Dinar bill. After stopping it with his foot, he bent down and picked up the bill, and put it in his pocket. Yair turned around to go back to his hotel, but he was stopped by a frowning Jordanian police officer. "What is the problem," Yair asked the officer. The police officer said. "You just broke the law." Yair was surprised. "What do you mean, sir?" The officer said, "You broke the law. You showed disrespect to our king, King Hussein. King Hussein's face is on the 50 Dinar bill and it is a crime in Jordan to show disrespect to our king by stepping on a bill that has the king's face on it. Because this is your first time, we will let off with just a fine. You now must pay a 1000 Dinar fine. If you are ever caught stepping on a bill again, you will be jailed. Without any other recourse, Yair paid the fine. He never made that mistake again. He was not going to step on a Jordanian bill again and show disrespect. A while after that happened, Yair was back in Eretz Yisrael. He was holding a sefer, and in the sefer he had a photocopy of a page of Gemara. All of a sudden, there was a strong burst of wind and the page of Gemara flew out of his sefer and began to tumble down the street. Yair had a strong flashback to his incident in Jordan. He ran after the page, and his impulse was to step on the page of Gemara to prevent it from tumbling down the street further. He felt that if he didn't step on it, it might fall into a curb gutter and get lost forever. As Yair was about to step on the Gemara page, he had the following thought. He knew that he would not step on a bill in Jordan, because it would disrespect the Jordanian king. Why should he treat Hashem any differently? Perhaps he should not step on the Gemara to show respect to Hashem. If he would not step on a Jordanian bill, but he would step on the Gemara maybe he would be showing Hashem less respect than the king of Jordan. We are not sure what Yair did in practice at the moment, but he brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? If Yair would not step on a Jordanian bill, would he be allowed to step on a page of Gemara if that would be showing Hashem less respect than he would show for a human king?

**Answer:** Regarding the question of whether a person who would not step on a picture of a Jordanian king can step on a page of Gemara to save it, Rav Zilberstein answered as follows. The halachah is that saving the Gemara page from potentially being lost is the way to show respect to Hashem. Therefore, if necessary, one is allowed to step on it to save it.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Shemos, p. 87*

There was once a young boy named Avi Burger. One day, his mother, Mrs. Burger, made an incentive program with him: if he got ready for bed on time every day for 30 days, he would win a prize worth up to one hundred shekels. Avi was very motivated to win the prize, and sure enough, after a month, he had filled in all the days on his chart and was able to claim the prize. His mother was very happy, so she took him to the nearby toy store around the corner to buy a toy. They went, browsed through the store, and saw a very high-quality hoverboard marked at 80 shekels. Mrs. Burger was surprised that it was so cheap, but she bought it, and Avi loved it. He was so excited about his prize and used it constantly for two days. Mrs. Burger's neighbor saw the hoverboard and said, "Wow, where did you get that?" She replied, "I got it at the corner toy store, and it was actually relatively cheap, it was only 80 shekels." So the neighbor

went into the store and wanted to buy one for herself. But she saw that the sticker price on the toy was actually 300 shekels. She spoke to the woman store clerk and asked, "Wasn't it 80?" The clerk said, "There must have been a mistake, the price is 300." So the neighbor went back to Mrs. Burger and said, "I spoke to them. They said it must have been a mistake. The price is really 300 shekels." Now Mrs. Burger realized that she must have underpaid. So she went back to the toy store and said, "I bought this for 80 shekels, but I now hear that the real price is 300 shekels. What would you like me to do about the difference?" The clerk said, "Well, the real price is 300. If you could bring in the extra 220 shekels when you can, I'd be very grateful." Mrs. Burger replied, "I never would have bought the toy for 300 shekels. The only reason I bought it was because it was 80. My whole budget was one hundred. If you'd like, I can return the item, give it back to you, and you can refund my money." The clerk weakly said, "No, please don't return it. If you return it, my boss will see that we now have a used, open-box item and will ask about it. Even though I was not the one who put on the wrong sticker, I'll get in trouble, and I'm afraid I may lose my job. So please don't return it. Instead, I ask that you keep it for now, and over time, whenever you have a little extra money, please put it aside and maybe bring it back to us." Mrs. Burger said, "I don't think that's my responsibility. I'd either like to return it and get my money back, or I'd like to keep it. And if you're afraid of losing your job, maybe you should pay the difference yourself." The clerk said, "No, I'm really afraid of losing my job. I beg you, please just keep it for now, and when you have a chance, please pay the difference." Mrs. Burger was unsure what to do, so she brought the question to Rav Zilberstein. So, what do you think she should do? Does she have the right to just keep it without paying the difference at all? Does she have the right to do what the clerk said, to keep it for now and pay later when she can? After all, she is keeping it even though she has not fully paid for it. Should she return it and get her money back, even if that risks causing the clerk to lose her job? Should she insist that the clerk pay the difference? Or maybe you have another suggestion. What do you think the right thing to do is?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about the hoverboard, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, in Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kama 605, answers that mei'ikar hadin, according to the basic halachah, the buyer may keep the toy for the price she paid and is not obligated to pay the higher price, since that was the price listed on the toy. However, it would be meritorious for her to go beyond the letter of the law and pay the difference. She does not need to pay it all at once. She may pay it whenever she has a few extra shekels available, and she may even use maaser money for this purpose.

***— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kamma, p. 605***

Ari was the owner of a large and successful kosher supermarket in Israel. Over the years, he tried many different incentive programs to increase customer loyalty. He tried giving out gift cards after people spent a certain amount of money. He tried a program where money was donated to a cause of their choice after they spent a certain amount. He tried giving out frequent flyer miles. However all of these incentive programs were not nearly as successful as Ari had hoped. One day Ari had an idea. He set up a falafel and shawarma stand in the front of the store. A large sign announced that everyone who spent 200 shekels would get a free falafel or shwarma with unlimited toppings and salads. The smell filled the store and the area outside the store. To Ari's delight, the incentive program was a huge success. It brought more sales than ever before. He was delighted at the huge surge in sales. But his joy was tempered with feelings of doubt. Ari understood why this particular campaign was successful. In fact, that was the reason he thought of it. People were spending so much more with this campaign because they were coming to the store with the intention of eating lunch or dinner after they shopped. They were shopping on an empty stomach with the intention of eating the delicious shawarma or falafel right after. He was familiar with a 2015 study by the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management, cited by Forbes Magazine, that when people shopped when they were hungry, they tended to spend much more. The whole purpose of offering the large meal incentive was to ensure that people came to shop hungry. And because of that, people were unwittingly spending much more. Ari was not sure if this incentive was

Glatt Yosher, perfectly ethical. On the one hand, he was not telling them to spend the extra money; they were spending money of their own free volition. Also, any store can do it, so it was not necessarily unfair competition. But on the other hand, he was subtly tricking people into spending more. Perhaps that was wrong. Ari had this question sent to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? According to the Torah, is this incentive program permitted?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about the shawarma incentive, which was designed to ensure that people shopped in a state of hunger and therefore spent more, Rav Zilberstein wrote that "it is fitting to avoid doing this" because it is causing people to lose money.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Shemos, p. 130*

There was once a group of men who got together daily for a Daf Yomi shiur at their local shul. The group was diverse, including people of different economic backgrounds. The group had a long standing policy that whenever they were ready to begin a new masechta, one man would purchase new Gemaras for the entire group. There was a rotation, in an attempt to be fair to everyone. Inevitably, those individuals who were wealthier would purchase full featured, expensive Gemaras, like an Artscroll or Mesivta Gemara. These gemaras were more expensive but they truly made the learning experience more rich and productive. People had much more material to learn and discuss. People who had less means would buy simple gemaras which had much less sophisticated features than the expensive ones. Whenever someone sponsored the gemaras that had many more commentaries everyone got excited. But when others bought the basic gemaras some people would grumble and complain. This sometimes led to the purchaser feeling bad, or inadequate. The Rav who led the group had the following question. Should he change the policy and decide that everyone should purchase the basic Gemara? This way no one would be comparing, feeling bad, or feel embarrassed. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to sacrifice on the level of learning to prevent any misgivings. But on the other hand the learning was truly enhanced when the expensive Gemaras were bought. There was a marked decrease in the quality of learning when the basic gemaras were bought. Perhaps it would be better to allow those who could afford it to continue to purchase the expensive Gemaras, so that everyone could learn well whenever possible. What would you answer?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that it appears the Rav should establish a uniform policy requiring everyone to sponsor the identical standard, basic edition of the Gemara, so that no member is ever publicly shamed or made to feel inadequate. This enacts the classical Talmudic precedent (Taanis 26b; Moed Katan 27a), where Chazal instituted uniform standards across various communal customs—such as mandating identical, inexpensive plain linen shrouds for both wealthy and poor burials—specifically "shelo lebayesh es mi she'ein lo" (in order not to embarrass those who cannot afford more). This principle is especially urgent here, because if poorer members feel humiliated or grumbled at by their peers, they may become discouraged and stop attending the Daf Yomi shiur altogether, leading to a catastrophic loss of Torah study. Preserving human dignity and keeping every Jew connected to daily Torah learning overrides the optional luxury of having expanded commentary volumes during the shiur.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 451*

A person comes to a shiur on bava kama to learn tricks of deception, should the teacher change the topic?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the maggid shiur should continue teaching the Gemara and its vivid cases normally and should not cancel or censor the shiur on account of one dishonest attendee. The narratives of the Gemara are pure Torah ('yesharim darchei Hashem'), and a person bent on commercial trickery has plenty of secular avenues to learn schemes; one must never deprive the upright audience who thirst for Hashem's word.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Sanhedrin, p. 556*

A dedicated educator and outreach director in a developing Jewish community was blessed with a generous grant that funded ten hours of specialized Torah teaching per week. Two compelling groups approached him requesting these hours: The first group consisted of adult secular Jews who had recently begun exploring their heritage and wished to learn how to keep Shabbos, put on tefillin, and understand basic Jewish law. As adults, they were fully bar mitzvah and actively obligated in all 613 mitzvos every day. The second group consisted of primary school children from non-observant backgrounds whose parents were open to enrolling them in an intensive after-school Torah program. While these young children were below the age of bar mitzvah and not yet personally obligated in mitzvos, their minds were pure, impressionable, and receptive, offering the potential to build an enduring lifelong foundation in Torah before secular habits became entrenched. With insufficient hours to teach both cohorts, which demographic takes halachic precedence: teaching adults who carry immediate personal obligation in mitzvos, or investing in young children whose long-term spiritual benefit (to'eles) is significantly greater? What do you think?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if the long-term spiritual impact and constructive outcome (to'eles) with the young children will be greater and more lasting, they take precedence over teaching adults, even though the children are not yet bar mitzvah. While adults bear an active, personal obligation in the mitzvos right now, Chazal emphasize the singular, irreplaceable sanctity of educating tinokos shel beis rabban (young children), whose Torah study sustains the world and leaves an indelible imprint upon the soul ("girsa d'yankusa"). When resources are scarce, pedagogical priority is governed by where the ultimate enduring spiritual harvest (to'eles) for Klal Yisrael will be highest. (Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 155)

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 155*

There was once a young man, Tzvi, who applied to two yeshivas in Israel. One was considered the top yeshivah in the country, while the other was also reputable but not as prestigious. To his delight, Tzvi received acceptance letters from both yeshivas. A short while later he received a call from the director of the less prestigious yeshivah. The director mentioned that he had heard about a friend of Tzvi who was struggling to gain admission to any yeshivah. The director made Tzvi an enticing offer: They really wanted Tzvi to attend their yeshivah. If Tzvi agreed to attend their yeshivah, they would also accept his friend. It would be almost like two for the price of one. This put Tzvi in a difficult position. On one hand, he could help his friend by choosing the second yeshivah. On the other hand, he could choose the top yeshivah, which might be best for his personal growth and learning. Now, the fate of his friend was dependent on Tzvi's choice. The decision weighed heavily on Tzvi. He wondered whether he should prioritize his own learning at the more prestigious yeshivah, or whether he should attend the other institution to help his friend. Tzvi questioned whether he was even allowed to turn down the second yeshiva's offer, as doing so might prevent his friend from attending any yeshivah at all. But on the other hand, perhaps he had an obligation to go to the best yeshivah where he might grow the most. Torn between these options, this question was brought before Rav Chaim Kanievsky. What do you think the Torah would say in such a case?

**Answer:** Regarding the question from the Yeshivah administrator at the lower level school, who offered a student the opportunity for both him and his friend (who was unable to gain admission to a Yeshivah) to attend if he accepts, Rav Chaim Kanievsky answered as follows. It's said in Mishlei (16,7), "When a man's way's please Hashem, even his enemies will make peace with him." The Yerushalmi (Terumos 8:3) says that the enemies here refer to the Yetzer Hara. Rav Chaim therefore said that in this case, it means if the student does the chesed (kindness) of helping his friend, both of their yetzer haras (evil inclinations) will be greatly diminished and both will have much more success in their learning. (From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, p. 142)

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ It happened with Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus that his father had many plowmen who were plowing soft, level furrows, while Eliezer was given rocky, stony ground to plow. He sat down and wept. His father asked him, 'Why are you weeping? Are you distressed because you are plowing rocky ground? Come now and plow in the soft, level furrow!' Eliezer sat down on the soft furrow and continued weeping. His father asked him, 'Why are you still weeping? Are you distressed to plow in the soft furrow?' Eliezer answered, 'No.' 'Then why are you weeping?' his father asked. Eliezer replied, 'Because I desire to study Torah!' His father said to him, 'Behold, you are already twenty-eight years old, and now you wish to study Torah?! Rather, take a wife for yourself and have sons, and you can take them to the study hall!' Eliezer fasted for two weeks without tasting anything until Eliyahu the Prophet, remembered for good, appeared to him and asked, 'Son of Hyrcanus, why are you weeping?' He answered, 'Because I desire to study Torah!' Eliyahu told him, 'If you desire to study Torah, go up to Jerusalem to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai!' Eliezer immediately arose and traveled to Jerusalem to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, where he sat and wept until Rabban Yochanan asked why he was crying. When Eliezer answered, 'Because I wish to study Torah,' Rabban Yochanan took him in—out of sensitivity, Eliezer did not even reveal that he was the son of the wealthy Hyrcanus—and he grew to become one of the greatest luminaries of Israel.

*Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 1:1*

❖ R' Dosa ben Harkinas stated that when R' Yehoshua ben Chananyah was still an infant his mother used to bring his cradle into the beis midrash so that his ears might become accustomed to the words of Torah.

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Yevamos 1:6*

❖ R' Yehoshua's grandson was accustomed to recite to him the weekly Torah portion every Friday afternoon. One week R' Yehoshua forgot to listen to his grandson's recitation, and he only remembered after he had entered the bathhouse and had gotten undressed. He immediately redressed and went to his grandson. R' Chiya bar Abba expressed his surprise that R' Yehoshua extended himself to such a great extent to hear his grandson recite the Torah portion. R' Yehoshua told him, "Chiya, my son, is listening to the Torah portion unimportant in your eyes? Whoever hears the Torah portion from his grandson, it is as if he is hearing it from Mt. Sinai..."

*Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 30a; Talmud Yerushalmi, Shabbos 1:2*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Man is engaged in a constant war against his archrival, the yetzer hara. How can man emerge victorious? The Chofetz Chaim imparted the answer to us by means of the following parable: Two kings had been waging a fierce war for many years, with each one taking turns gaining the upper hand. One clay, the kings decided to put an end to their war. The two met and resolved to wage one battle that would last a total of four days. Whoever would emerge triumphant from this final clash would be proclaimed the victor, and the loser would submit entirely to the will of the conqueror. The kings began preparing for the deciding battle, and their finest generals taught the soldiers new war tactics and strategies. When the war commenced, it was clear that both armies were powerful, proficient, and of equal strength. Indeed, on the first day of the fighting, one of the armies proved triumphant, and on the second day, the other was victorious. Towards evening of the third day, one of the generals gathered the heads of his troops and exclaimed, "Men! Tomorrow is the final and decisive day of this war, and we must emerge victorious at any cost. However, as the sides are evenly matched, we must utilize a brilliant plan. Our spies," he continued, "have reported that the enemy's artillery is located in a specific storage room. It occurred to me to send an elite team of soldiers to steal the artillery from the enemy's camp. Without any weapons, the enemy is sure to be defeated." Everyone agreed, and they implemented the plan. A squad of fierce soldiers secretly entered the enemy camp and stole their weapons. The next day, there was a loud trumpet blast and the war was on. But when one of the armies rushed to arm themselves, they were shocked to discover that their artillery room was empty. Left with no other choice,

they surrendered. So it is with man's war against the yetzer hara, explained the Chofetz Chaim. The yetzer hara battles a man all the days of his life. There are occasions when the yetzer hara emerges victorious and other times when man proves triumphant. It is at that point that the yetzer hara devises the shrewd strategy to steal man's only artillery — i.e., the holy Torah, in the merit of which he is capable of defeating the yetzer hara. We must therefore take caution, concluded the Chofetz Chaim, that the yetzer hara not steal our lone weapon. For even if the yetzer hara has recently prevailed, man must not despair. Rather, he must gird himself to study the holy Torah, and only then will he triumph!

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When R' Shlomo Meyer was still a bachur, he once spent Shavuos in Union City. The beis midrash was packed. People had come from all over to spend Yom Tov with the Klausenberger Rebbe (Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam). It was in the middle of davening when a Yid from Williamsburg named R' Gershon Weiss, who suffered from some sort of intestinal ailment, came to the Rebbe to say he was not feeling well. On the spot, the Rebbe told him to take a car—yes, a car, on Yom Tov—to see Dr. Schwarz, a non-Jewish doctor in Weehawken, New Jersey, whom he often sent patients to. The Rebbe asked me to accompany R' Gershon. When we arrived, Dr. Schwarz immediately did an EKG, but it was normal. "It must just be your stomach," Dr. Schwarz said. He handed R' Gershon some medication and sent us back to Union City. We walked down the three flights of stairs from his office to the ground floor. To our great surprise, a police officer was waiting for us at the bottom of the steps. "Mr. Weiss," the officer said, "I am here to take you to the hospital." "What?!" R' Weiss spluttered. "But the doctor just said I am okay and sent me home!" "No," the officer insisted. "Dr. Schwarz changed his mind. He called the police and asked us to take you to the hospital." We got into the squad car and were off. Just after we arrived at the hospital in Jersey City, while R' Gershon was being put on the gurney, he suddenly sustained a massive heart attack. He had to be shocked multiple times until a pulse was found. Once he was receiving medical care, I walked back to Union City to update the Rebbe. I arrived toward the end of Yom Tov and told the Rebbe what had happened, and that the situation was critical. The Rebbe immediately announced that he was giving a shiur, and the zechuyos from that shiur would be transferred as a merit for R' Gershon Weiss. In the meantime, Dr. Jones, a cardiologist, had taken over R' Gershon's care. Dr. Jones studied the EKG and was puzzled. Why had Dr. Schwarz sent this man to the hospital? There had been no indication of heart distress on the EKG. Dr. Jones called Dr. Schwarz to ask him. "You are right," Dr. Schwarz explained. "Initially, I attributed the way he was feeling to his stomach issue, because his EKG was perfect. After I sent him home, however, I thought about it and realized that the Rabbi would never send someone to the doctor in a car in the middle of the holiday just because he wasn't feeling well from a routine stomach issue. I know the Rabbi for too long. He sees things that we don't. So, I concluded that if the Rabbi sent him here on the holiday, he should be seen at the hospital." In the end, R' Gershon survived and lived for another ten years.

*From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Daniel is a professional who is married and raising a fine religious family in a neighborhood whose streets are dotted by shuls and batei midrash. Daniel says, "Daf Yomi saved my life." He explains: "As a yeshivah high-school student, I was not very successful in my Torah studies. I had trouble grasping some of the more difficult concepts and had difficulty retaining whatever I did manage to understand. "One day, I was studying in the yeshivah's beis midrash and thought of what seemed to be a good question on the Gemara which I was learning. I approached one of the older beis midrash students whom I knew well. When he heard my question, he could not help but smile. 'Daniel,' he said, 'that's a question that only an am ha'aretz (ignoramus) would ask. You had better start working harder at your learning, or that's exactly what you're going to grow up to be an am ha'aretz.' "His words cut through me like a knife. I assumed that his assessment of me as an am haaretz was correct, but he was wrong in thinking that I wasn't trying hard. I was, it just didn't come easy to me. I decided then and there that it was no use trying any more I was doomed to failure. "I graduated high school, left yeshivah, and rarely opened a sefer for many years. It was very painful to me when my children would ask me to help them with their learning and I could not. "In 1982, the siyum (completion) of Daf Yomi generated great excitement worldwide. In my neighborhood, new

shiurim (lectures) were beginning and some of my friends were joining up. I felt caught up in the excitement and decided to give it a shot. I began to attend a shiur and was amazed to discover that I understood it! "To make a long story short, I now study the daf five times a day. I attend a shiur in the morning before work, listen to it again in the car on the way to work, then again on the way home from work. I then go to a second shiur on the same daf at night after work, and then I review it on my own. And guess what? Not only do I understand the Gemara, I even retain a lot of it. "Yes, Daf Yomi saved my life."

*Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ It is well known that the Steipler Gaon married the Chazon Ish's sister. What is not as well known is that when the Chazon Ish's sister arrived at the inn where they were going to meet, the Steipler had just recited HaMapil and was lying down to sleep before he met her. He decided to sleep a little bit and then come down to meet her. How did a bachur who had come to the inn to meet a prospective bride end up needing to sleep immediately upon arrival? The Steipler's normal schedule was to be awake for thirty-six hours and sleep for six. This means he would wake up Sunday morning and learn Torah nonstop, except for basic needs, until Monday night, when he finally went to sleep. Then he would wake up Tuesday morning and learn until Wednesday night. When his shidduch was arranged, he realized that he had a six-hour train trip ahead of him. He didn't want to waste the time, so on the night before the meeting he pushed himself to stay up all night learning, figuring he would sleep all six hours on the train. When he got on the train, however, he saw that the upholstery on the seats might be a forbidden shaatnetz mix. Rather than lying down to sleep, he stood the entire way and recited mishnayos by heart. When he arrived at the inn, he was understandably a bit tired.

*Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ We, too, are becoming spiritually blind — we make the essential secondary, and the unessential primary. People occupy themselves with preparatory activities (the machshirei mitzvah) but never perform the mitzvah itself. An illustration is given in the Chayei Odom: Someone needed a garment, which had to be stitched with a needle. So the person began to learn how to make a needle. This project occupied his entire life, and he died without ever sewing the garment. We, too, occupy ourselves with many unessential activities, and thus allow the evil inclination to deprive us of Torah. Like a thief who is caught and then slips out of the hands of his captors, mingles with the crowd and shouts along with everyone else, 'Stop, thief, so does the evil inclination toy with us and advise us how to combat the evil inclination. He will suggest any alternative in order to keep us from studying Torah, which is the yetzer hara's nemesis. Through our excessive preoccupation with the means, we forget the objective. "I heard this holy utterance from the Chofetz Chaim of blessed memory: 'The evil inclination does not care if a man fasts and cries and prays all day, as long as he does not study Torah.' The proof is that although Abraham was the pillar of chased and Yitzchak the foundation of Divine worship, the archangel wrestled only with Jacob — because he was the pillar of Torah. The situation may be compared to the case of two equal adversaries who strive interminably against one another. Even if one were to gain an advantage today, the other might be able to overpower him tomorrow. When do we know if there is a clear victor? If one attacks the other and seizes his weapons, thus leaving him defenseless, then the war is over. Torah study is our only weapon against the yetzer hara. If Jews commit other transgressions, there is still hope. But when they cease studying Torah they lose their weapon. Even if Israel merely slackens its dedication to Torah study, the forces of Amalek become strong." His pure faith would not allow him to remain silent. Knowing that the spiritual and ethical state of Israel was declining, and that the Torah foretold dire consequences in the event of such a decline, he could not rest. He had to go to his fellow Jews with the bitter cry, "Repent, O Israel!"

*Reb Elchonon, By Rabbi Aharon Sorasky, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Tendler was asked to speak at the siyum for the sheloshim of his mechutan, Rabbi Pesach Skulnick's father. The speech was given before a modern community. In the hadran, the special prayer recited at a siyum, we ask that the Torah not leave our mouths or the mouths of our descendants. If you had a choice of having a child who will be either a successful doctor who is not religious, or a child who will learn in kollel for his entire life, which would you choose? Chazal, in instituting this prayer, reminded us that learning Torah is what we want for all of our children. Pesach's father, although his son had a profession by which he could support himself, understood that the main objective in life is to learn Torah, and sent him to Ner Yisrael.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 357*

❖ We were once sitting in The Brisker Rav's home, engrossed in a Torah debate, when R. E.M. Shach walked in. The Brisker Rav turned to him right away and presented an answer to a question he had been struggling with for several days. "Some time later (a little discouraged, I admit...) I asked The Brisker Rav: Since, after all, he had been dealing with the subject for several days, why had he not shared the answer with us? Why did he wait until R. Shach arrived to say it? '"It was only right that I tell R. Leizer first,' answered The Brisker Rav. 'And why so? Sometimes, I am involved in a difficult sugyah, and I wrestle with it for a long time. It gets to the point where I feel I cannot continue... I have no more strength left to deal with it.' "But when I remember,' continued The Brisker Rav, 'what pleasure and joy it will cause R. Elazar Shach when I give him an answer, I gather up the very last of my energy to continue the struggle... Since this is the case, he is the one who deserves to hear the chiddush first!'" The following is a portion of the speech given by R. Shach in the Ponevezh yeshivah on the occasion of the end of The Brisker Rav's shloshim: His words of Torah were so brilliant and brought so much joy! I remember once, I left his home so happy — I met a certain talmid chacham, and in my great joy I told him that indeed I don't know if I deserve Olam haba, but if I do have some reward coming to me, I have just received it in the form of the joy I experienced from the chiddush I heard from the Brisker Rav.

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 211*

❖ A skilled goldsmith renowned for his expert craftsmanship was in heavy debt and was forced to abandon his home and family and to travel far away. He missed his loved ones dearly during his travels, and on more than one occasion let out a deep heart — rending sigh. One thought consoled him, however; that the day would come when he would return to his home and family, and provide them with a comfortable livelihood as he had in the past. Some time later, the man indeed returned to his home and the joy was overwhelming. But when he approached his worktable and opened his toolbox, he discovered that over the years that he had been away his work tools had rusted severely and were completely ruined. Needless to say, they were no longer useable. The more he looked around and observed the damage that had occurred, the more he realized just how sorry a predicament he was presently in... The man broke out into bitter sobbing and exclaimed, "All the days of my exile, I was consoled by the fact that I would one day be restored to my former stature; but now I realize that such a thought was mere fantasy." Hashem, said the Dubno Maggid, vested us with precious abilities so that we would be able to perform all of the mitzvos to perfection. But because of our sins we have been exiled from our Land, and our Beis Hamikdash has been destroyed. Languishing in our bitter exile, we are unable to fulfill all of the mitzvah and utilize our skills as servants of Hashem. It is therefore imperative to try to keep our tools fresh even in the Galus. This can be done by learning those halachos.

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A father had an only son whom he loved dearly, and subsequently catered to the boy's every request. When the son grew older, he very much wanted his father to buy him a watch. The father went to a professional watchmaker and asked him to fashion a stylish gold watch with an engraved casing. When he presented his son with the watch, the young man's joy knew no bounds. Now, the father was well aware of his son's spoiled nature, and he knew quite well that the lad would quickly grow tired of the watch. He therefore devised a clever plan. The father, in his wisdom, forbade his son to open the case.

After some time had passed, the son indeed grew tired of the watch. Only then did the father permit him to open the case. When the son caught a glimpse of the delicate hands expertly crafted by the skilled watchmaker, he experienced a new feeling of elation over the watch. Some time later, the son once again grew tired of the watch. The father therefore opened the back of the watch and showed his son the fine wheel movements which operated it harmoniously. In this way, the son enjoyed the watch for quite a long time. In His great love for the Jewish people, said the Dubno Maggid, Hashem desired that we rejoice in the precious gift that He granted us — the holy Torah. He therefore concealed within it a plethora of novel ideas that are revealed day after day, which constantly renew the experience of Torah study. The more an individual exerts himself in Torah study, the more he reveals these extraordinary novel ideas that serve to gladden his heart.

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Before the Global Financial Crisis, an entire world of Torah institutions and chessed organizations were funded by multi tiered strata of the religious population. Now the rug had been pulled out from under them not just the rug, but also the floor and the foundation. Only people of substantial means were left to support what had previously been shouldered by thousands of others. This meant that the truly affluent, those who had already been targeted by numerous charitable organizations, were now on the crosshairs of triple conceivably octuple — the number of causes. (And this did not include the natural charities to which they were expected to contribute proforma — like the local shul, the local Pesach fund and Tomchei Shabbos, their alma mater, and their children's and grandchildren's yeshivos and Bais Yaakovs.) So, just like so many others, this gvir, who was being actively pursued by Team Mir, did not answer his phone nor reply to emails. No one was really surprised. Therefore, personal agents who were friendly with him and associated with the Mir were dispatched to request an appointment. The gvir was noncommittal to these agents, undoubtedly knowing full well that Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel would not be content with a check for $3,600 or $7,200 for that matter. They begged that he at least meet with the Rosh Yeshivah and even for this they could not secure his agreement. But he did not say no, he just did not say yes. Such a reply is maddeningly frustrating to any organization in need, as the fundraisers cannot know if they are pursuing someone who may ultimately capitulate if they persist in their attempts, or if they are chasing a shadow who just won't say no, even though this is what he means. On Motzei Shabbos, to the utter, heart-arresting shock of everyone — and we're not talking garden variety wide-eyed surprise, we're talking full-octane mouth-gaping wonder — the gvir himself walked in to the home where the Rosh Yeshivah was staying. One of the Rosh Yeshivah's entourage nearly crushed a Styrofoam cup of hot coffee in his bare hand, and the head of the Mir's New York office looked like carbolic acid had just been thrown in his face. Meanwhile, the Rosh Yeshivah also saw who had entered, but he was talking to a bachur about his Torah studies. Everyone started gesticulating wildly to indicate Look who's here! But Reb Nosson Zvi continued to hear out a boy who was explaining his extraordinarily long and exceptionally protracted diyuk in Rashi. The kid was taking what seemed to be an eternity — at least-to make his point, and meanwhile Mr. Elusive was in their clutches. Yet the Rosh Yeshivah continued to listen with patience and concentration, while everyone else in the room was going insane. Two of the yeshivah's activists in New York, who had high-fived each other when the gvir walked in, were now emitting involuntary gasps as their pupils ricocheted like the puck in air hockey. Even the air seemed to be holding its breath while the boy droned on and on and on. One of the many admirable things about the Mirrer Yeshivah staff is that everyone recognizes that the Rosh Yeshivah is indeed, the Rosh Yeshivah. In the case of Reb Nosson Zvi, his brothers-in-law, and even those more senior and more learned than he, never, ever challenged his authority or leadership. And even in that exasperating moment it was no different. But it certainly was exasperating, However, the Rosh Yeshivah, as much as he needed the money, never forgot what he wanted it for. And that is: To expand Torah. To strengthen Torah. To teach Torah. First and foremost, he was an educator, and not only did he teach Torah, he taught Torah values and Torah priorities. And at that existential moment, there was nothing more important than a diyuk in Rashi.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 280*

❖ Rav Shach's insatiable desire for truth in Torah grew in his formative teenage years, and found expression in verbal debate. As Rosh Yeshivah, he said his shiurim in a manner that displayed his primary objective: He wanted the bachurim to think, to challenge, to argue. The Rosh Yeshivah was obviously influenced by his great cousin, Rabbi Aharon Kotler. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, described his initial entrance faher (exam) for Slabodka, which he took with Reb Aharon. The Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein, explained a logical construct from the Ketzos HaChoshen (a classic commentary), and then challenged the young men: "Now argue against it." My grandfather recounted to me how he sat in shock: "We were taught that we cannot argue against a revered commentary like the Ketzos." In contrast, Reb Aharon jumped from his chair: "Shoin ein mohl veil ich dingin' oif der Ketzos! I most certainly will argue with the Ketzos!" I remember a shiur klali, in which Rav Shach posed a difficult question on the Rambam. After the usual din, he opened the sefer of Reb Chaim HaLevi (Soloveitchik) and began, "Zagt Reb Chaim. Scanning the content looks on the faces of the boys who were familiar with Reb Chaim's brilliant answer to the question, he snapped the sefer shut and declared, "Altz iz meyshushuv" Everything is resolved!" He then proceeded to move off the platform as if there were no need to think on our own — Reb Chaim did the thinking for us. After this dramatic gesture, the Rosh Yeshivah returned to point out the difficulties in Reb Chaim's approach, and offer his own response to those issues.

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, came to discuss a matter with Harav Ovadia. He was ushered into the Rav's study, along with his entourage and the media crews covering the visit. Harav Ovadia was studying a work on Hilchos Challah. Each time he reached a source, he would stop for a moment, scour his memory until he was able to recall the exact words of the source, and then continue studying. Prime Minister Netanyahu was awed by the Rav's complete immersion in learning, and shocked that the hullabaloo of the camera crews jockeying for the best positions hadn't caused him to lift his eyes from the sefer. After a few minutes, MK Eli Yishai, who had arranged the visit, told Mr. Netanyahu that he would inform the Rav that the prime minister had arrived. "No, no," Mr. Netanyahu said, waving him off. I never get to see anything like this." By now, the cameramen had also grown enthralled by the sight, and they started snapping photos of Harav Ovadia engrossed in his sefer. Mr. Netanyahu continued watching in fascination, wondering how long it would take the Rav to notice the dozens of people in the room. Finally, after a long while, Rav Moshe Yosef explained that if no one interrupted Harav Ovadia, the prime minister would wait all day. Rav Moshe crouched down next to his father and said, "Abba, the Rosh Hamemshala is here. " Harav Ovadia looked up in surprise, and said, "Ah, Baruch Haba, Baruch Haba."

*Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Once the Chofetz Chaim and the Rav of Charkov needed to speak to Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk, who was then living in Warsaw. The two arrived at the home of R. Chaim when he was in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei. They stood in the corner of the room, waiting for him to finish. In the meantime, a Jew entered who did not seem to be in full possession of his wits. "Rebbe," he called out, "why are there so many disagreements in Shas?" R. Chaim was just finishing his Shemoneh Esrei. He took three steps back, thought for a moment and then turned to the man, "That is incorrect! In comparison to the many statements in Shas that are not disputed, the number of disagreements is fewer The Chofetz Chaim began his discussion with R. Chaim, and upon its conclusion he left with the rav of Charkov to get the train that would take them back to Radin. Normally the Chofetz Chaim was very talkative — he would constantly say divrei Torah and discuss the state of Yiddishkeit in the world and the possibilities of improving things — however, on this journey he was silent. To the surprise of the Rav of Charkov, for the entire way back to Radin the Chofetz Chaim was deep in thought. For many hours, he said almost nothing. Finally, as the train was about to arrive at their station, he awoke from his trance and exclaimed, "R. Chaim is a gaunt" Only then did the rav of Charkov realize that for the entire trip, the Chofetz Chaim had been reviewing all of Shas in his mind, and had now finally come to the conclusion that R. Chaim was correct. The number of disagreements is indeed fewer than the number of places where there is no argument.

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 50*

❖ The following, which occurred while The Brisker Rav was still young, served as a powerful lesson for him about the necessity to exert oneself to his utmost in learning halachah in depth in spite of the difficulties such efforts present. It gave him ammunition to resist the temptation to take "shortcuts" in learning: R. Chaim, his father, put tremendous energy into the baking of matzos. His degree of intense concentration on the task and the care he took in it are well-known. His sons and talmidim helped him in the work. Each person had his particular job. The Brisker Rav and his brother R. Moshe were in charge of examining the matzos as they came out of the oven. They decided which were considered kefulos ("folded"). Some of the matzos invariably broke during the baking, and they had to decide which pieces among the broken matzos that came out of the oven belonged to matzos that had been "folded in the oven," for those pieces would also have the status of "kefulos." The two brothers would work long hours in the heat of the bakery, matching pieces of matzah in an effort to determine the origin of each one. One year, a bachur, who was a regular visitor in R' Chaim's home, came to help them in this tedious and time-consuming task. They noticed that while they had to work long and hard to match the pieces, this young man — who was a simple-minded though God-fearing person — would quickly and easily match the pieces of matzah, showing no signs of stress. Naturally, they wondered at his ability to complete this arduous task so quickly, and asked him for an explanation. With his answer, it all became clear. "It is very simple," he said. "When I find two pieces that don't quite match, I break off a few little pieces of each one until they match perfectly..." The Brisker Rav turned to his brother and pointed out that the same idea is true regarding learning Torah: There are those who, when learning a sugyah, recall another source that contradicts the sugyah they are dealing with. They expend great effort in examining solutions to the problem. Much time and brain power are needed to reach a satisfactory conclusion. However, there are others who, when encountering such a contradiction, twist the meaning of one source, smooth out the other one, cutting corners until finally the two sources seem to agree with each other. But, of what value is such a solution?"

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 263*

❖ A great — grandson related that once, when it was his turn to spend the night with Rav Elyashiv, there was a major thunderstorm throughout Israel, and shortly after Rav Elyashiv awoke at 2:20 a.m. there was a blackout. Rav Elyashiv continued sitting in his place and learning as usual — saying the Gemara, Rashi, Tosafos aloud in his pleasant melody, asking questions and answering, without pause. The great — grandson approached Rav Elyashiv and waited for a long while until his great-grandfather noticed him and asked whether there was anything that could be done. "I already tried everything," the great-grandson said. "We need an electrician to come." He lit some candles, and Rav Elyashiv directed him where to place them. Rav Elyashiv then asked the great-grandson to bring him a safer, and the great-grandson searched for the safer in the dark room, but could not locate it. Rav Elyashiv then rose himself and said, "It's possible to see in the dark, too." He went over to the bookshelves and immediately found the sefer he wanted. A short while later, after attempting unsuccessfully to learn by candlelight, he said, "It's possible to learn by heart, too." (This was a rare statement on his part.) He then continued learning energetically and aloud until daybreak. On another occasion, on a long winter Friday night, Rav Elyashiv awoke to learn, but the electricity in his house blew, plunging the house into darkness. Without thinking twice, he took his large Gemara over to the window, and, holding it toward the streetlight, he continued to learn while standing for another few hours. What was remarkable about this episode is not that Rav Elyashiv wouldn't give up his learning session due to a blackout, even though he was in his 90's at the time, but rather that he persisted in learning out of a Gemara even though he knew all of Shas by heart, as is apparent from the previously mentioned incident! He occasionally told people that learning by heart does not compare to learning out of a sefer, and when he learns out of a Gemara he delves deeper into the sugyah. And for this seemingly minor difference, he exerted himself to stand by the window holding his Gemara for hours on end.

*Rav Elyashiv, By Yehuda and Malky Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 222*

❖ A new talmid in Adelphia asked a question in shiur. 'That's some question, I can't believe a boy your age is asking so good, come with me." Rabbi Trenk pulled the timid young boy by the arm. "Come to my office, we have to call Rabbi Frankel." Together, they called Rabbi Yehuda Frankel, menahel at the Mirrer Yeshivah at the time, and the one who had sent the bachur to learn in Adelphia. "Reb Yudi, you sent me something special. I called to thank you," Rabbi Trenk told his dear friend.

*From Just Love Them: The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, by Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, considered one of his primary tasks in chinuch to be inculcating the inestimable value for Torah in the bachurim. He felt it was imperative that they appreciate the importance of Torah, the value of recognizing what they were doing. "I remember when I was in ninth grade, I forged a chavrusa partnership after Maariv (which was ostensibly on our own time) with another bachur in my shiur. We kept our Gemaras in the mesivta beis medrash, but this particular seder, we learned in the beis medrash reserved for the beis medrash bachurim. Therefore, we would have to search for Gemaras to use every night. One day, we noticed a large 'Chassan Shas' Gemara sitting on the table in the beis medrash. It had no name, so I took it and used it. A few days passed in this manner, when suddenly a beis medrash bachur came over and informed me, 'Did you know that you have been using the Rosh Yeshivah's own personal Gemara?' "'No,' I answered, 'how should I have known?' "It was only then that I realized that the Rosh Yeshivah himself had been going to get a different Gemara to use during that seder, which was devoted to chazaras hashiur. He did not say a word to us ninth-graders because he lent such importance to our seder that he didn't want to bother us."

*From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The last two shiurim of Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin's life were given after he was released from Overlook Hospital before he returned for his final hospitalization. He suffered from great difficulty breathing. Nevertheless, he insisted on delivering the shiur. He was so weak at the time, he knew he would not have the strength to deliver the shiur if he would even walk the approximately one hundred feet from his apartment to the shiur room. Thus, he reluctantly agreed to have a bachur wheel him in a wheelchair to his seat in the shiur room. After giving a draining shiur, while pinching his neck the entire time, it was time to go home. To return home, he chose to walk, stopping every few feet to catch his breath and gather his strength. The walk that normally took him about thirty seconds now took fifteen minutes! The bachur who wheeled him to the shiur asked him, "Why couldn't the Rosh Yeshivah let me wheel him back to the apartment?" The Rosh Yeshivah's response was astounding. He replied, "If I wouldn't have let you wheel me to the shiur, I wouldn't have had the strength to say the shiur, but now, stam, to make a bachur shlep me?"

*From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ After the '67 war there was a strong push to draft all yeshivah boys into the army. Moshe Dayan, though secular, opposed it. When Rav Yitzchak Hutner asked him why, Dayan explained that as a youth in school he had been assigned to recite Chaim Nachman Bialik's famous poem "HaMasmid," which asks: "Mi atah shamir, u'mi atah chalamish la'amod mipnei naar ha'osek b'Torah". He said if Bialik said that Torah is the rock that prevented the Jewish people from shattering for the 2000 years of galus, who am I to shatter it?

*Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 195*

❖ Rabbi Kotler showed Bunim startling parallels among the three great waves of Jewish immigration to America. The seventeenth century's Sephardic Jews brought a belief in avodah (prayer) to the new world and therefore built palatial synagogues, but they became empty in little more than a generation. Roughly two centuries later, the German Jews did not teach or support Torah; instead they stressed the supremacy of chesed (charitable works). They spent millions on hospitals, life care centers and Jewish alliances. But with no Torah to guide them, both the Sephardic and German Jewish communities saw their own children assimilate and their communities disintegrate. At the turn of the twentieth century, those Eastern European immigrants who had experienced dire poverty became staunch materialists. They too were engulfed

by assimilation." Rabbi Kotler learned from history, and history showed that the only ground upon which the Jewish nation builds a solid future is Torah lishmah. Torah is the life-breath of the Jewish people," he wrote, "the goal Jewish existence, its purpose and destiny. Jewry stands or falls in direct proportion to the measure of its devotion to Torah study." He added, "There is only one way to produce Torah leaders: by concentrating every resource on Torah learning." With American Jewry teetering on the brink of assimilation and European Torah centers crushed by Nazi madmen, Rabbi Kotler's solitary goal was to transplant the once-renowned academies of learning to these shores, a goal which Bunim shared zealously.

*A Fire in His Soul, By Amos Bunim, Published by Feldheim*

❖ The following incident made a profound an impression on Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz. When he was a very little boy he prayed at home and was crying during his prayers. His mother heard and asked his father "why is he crying"? Maybe need something that we haven't given him maybe something is bothering him that we don't know about it. His father answered her "I imagine he's run across something in his learning he doesn't understand. Reb Baruch Ber was just a child at the time but after hearing that exchange between his parents he realized that as far as his father was concerned if something was disturbing his little boy to the point that he was crying about it can only be one thing something in his learning was not clear to him. From his father's response Reb Baruch Ber understood how much his father loved the Torah. Indeed his father's words have been so natural so matter of fact what else could be bothering him? Having heard those words he prayed more intensely that God grant him understanding and have him grow steadily and succeed in Torah.

*Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim*

❖ I heard a story from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, In his shul, the door was locked, and a certain masmid wanted to enter to learn. He attempted to climb in through a window, and in the process shattered the glass. When R' Miller came to the shul, he heard this man studying in a loud and beautiful voice. He was learning Bava Kamma, which discusses the laws of damages and thievery. Obviously what he was learning did not penetrate his heart or guide him to correct his ways.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 263*

❖ When speaking of the love of Torah that burned in Rav Chaim Ozers heart, Rav Shach said that, after spending hours dealing with matters of public concern, Rav Chaim Ozer would smile and say, we've been busy taking care of the affairs of the next world; now we sit down and enjoy a bit of this world. Let's learn some Gemara!"

*Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 361*

❖ I heard the following story from Reb Moshe Carlebach shlit'a who was a rebbe in Ohr Sameiach over 35 years ago. This story has occurred repeatedly throughout our nation's history. When the Torah is kidnapped from the members of her nation, she always comes back to them. This is the story of the Jews from the former Soviet Union from whom the Torah was taken and burnt. The grandmothers and grandfathers davened that their children not be lost to their people. Frank, a college student living on the end of Long Island, had a friend who spent a summer in Israel and was becoming interested in learning more about his Jewish heritage. Although Frank had no interest in going to Israel he nevertheless kept up with his friend. Upon learning that his friend was considering becoming more observant, Frank told him not to go overboard. "They are brainwashing you." His friend challenged him. "You only say that out of ignorance, perhaps you are the one who is brainwashed." They decided that Frank would go to Israel for a week and meet with his friend. His friend was learning at Ohr Samayach in Yerushalayim. The Yeshivah welcomed Frank for that week and he met with some of the Rabbis and attended some classes. By the time the week was over, Frank felt that he needed more time. He spoke to his parents who were not at all happy with the turn of events but allowed him to stay one more week on condition that he returned immediately after the week. That second week turned into a third week and naturally, Frank's father became irritated. After spending three weeks at Ohr Samayach Frank decided that he needed to stay an entire year. When he sent his parents the message that he planned on staying an entire year, Frank's father sent him a letter stating that if he did not return immediately he would be cut out of the family for all matters. His father was totally unaccepting of Frank's decision. After

giving some thought to the prospect of being disowned by his family, Frank committed himself to staying no matter what consequences would follow. He was now alone without his family. True to his word, Frank's father did not communicate with him for the entire year. He did not know what he would do the following year but he continued his studies at the Yeshivah. At the end of the year Frank received a package from his father. It was a sefer, a book of Torah discourses, written by Frank's paternal grandfather who died before the War. Frank's father went through the Holocaust and rejected Judaism and everything it represented. When he moved to America he settled on Long Island far from any Jewish community. He was set on erasing everything Jewish from himself and his family. Now that Frank had made the choice of returning to his roots, his father recognized that he was unsuccessful in his attempt to abort Judaism from his family. On the opening page of the sefer, Frank's grandfather had written a quote from the Prophets "This Torah will not leave your mouth, your children's mouth and your grandchildren mouth, it will be with you forever." Frank's father underlined that quote and accepted him back into the family once again.

*Table Talk, Edition 171 (Parshas Terumah), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ Rav Shimshon's concern and effort in Torah wasn't limited to his talmidim, but began with himself as one who strove constantly to reach the point of emes. To him, learning was life, and every question and clarification had the potential to build or destroy worlds. One evening, he attended a wedding in Yerushalayim and gladly offered a ride home to another guest, a bachur learning in Yeshivas Tifrach. The long ride passed in pleasant dialogue about a particular sugya until their opinions diverged, and the tranquil discussion turned stormy. The bachur insisted on his perspective on a Tosefos, and Rav Shimshon strongly refuted it. "This can't be the pshat in Tosefos!" Rav Shimshon declared, effectively closing the debate. Their discussion turned to other points until they finally reached their destination. True to his habit, Rav Shimshon drove him all the way to the dormitory in Tifrach before returning home well after 2:00 a.m. Less than five hours later, the bachur awoke to the excited voice of his roommate urging him to get up fast because Rav Shimshon Pincus was waiting for him in the beis midrash! "Rav Pincus... now?" The bachur rubbed his bleary eyes, wondering what the Rav could want of him at this hour. Spurred by his curiosity, he dressed and reached the beis midrash in record time. As soon as he appeared in the entranceway, he was greeted by Rav Shimshon's excited voice. "I couldn't sleep after our discussion, and I delved deeply into the Tosefos that we thrashed out last night until I discovered that, indeed, your pshat is right!" And with that, he left.

*From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll*

❖ The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, was undergoing treatments, which caused water to have a metallic taste, making it painful for him to drink. At a wedding during that time, a bachur came over to ask if perhaps the Rosh Yeshivah wanted a drink of water. The Rosh Yeshivah said no. A bit later, another bachur brought him water without asking. The Rosh Yeshivah thanked him heartily and drank the water. Those close to him realized that he clearly did not want to embarrass the bachur, who had brought him the water with the purest of intentions. The discomfort of drinking it, the agony as it would go down his throat, was well worth saving another Yid from embarrassment!

*From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ "When he was a bachur in the Lomza Yeshiva in Petach Tikva, my father's (the Steipler Gaon, Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky's) roommate was Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik. Rabbi Moshe had a very caring neshamah, and when he saw how the Israeli government was taking the Sephardic immigrants and stripping them of their religion, he would go door to door every night, on foot, trying to convince the parents to send their children to frum schools. He would return every night at 2 or 3 a.m. "Rabbi Moshe had a kevius to learn Daf Yomi, and Abba watched how, when he returned at 3 a.m, he would open his Gemara to study the daf. Every five minutes, his head would droop... and then he would snap awake and try to learn some more. After falling asleep numerous times, he would finally finish the blatt. "Abba asked Rabbi Moshe, 'Did you

understand what you just learned?' "Rabbi Moshe replied, 'Not really.' He continued, 'You are right that I will gain nothing from that one blatt, but from the hundred blatt I learn after that, I will gain a lot! If I stop the kevius, I won't end up learning the next hundred blatt either!'"

*From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll*

❖ On one occasion, R' Ari Stern, one of the Yeshiva's major supporters was in the neighborhood and decided to stop into the yeshivah for a few minutes. It was 1:25 p.m. R' Elya Meir was about to deliver the shiur. R' Ari exclaimed, "It was impossible to talk with him about anything! His mind was completely occupied with the shiur to the exclusion of all else." The electric company once came to shut off the yeshivah's electricity due to non-payment. They walked in while the Rosh Yeshivah was preparing for the shiur. The yeshivah's administrator came to the office to consult with R' Elya Meir in the hope that something could be done. The Rosh Yeshivah couldn't process what he was telling him. After three unsuccessful tries, he gave up, and the electricity was shut off. After the shiur the Rosh Yeshivah went over to him and incredulously asked him, "Why didn't you come and tell me that they were shutting off the power?" That was his total immersion.

*From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Someone once asked the Chasam Sofer the secret to his success in Torah. "I became a talmid chacham in five minutes," the Chasam Sofer said. "Really?" asked the man. "All those five minutes that go to waste in the course of one's lifetime - I made sure to maximize the use of them. That is why I say I became a talmid chacham in five minutes. Five minutes here and five minutes there."

*Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ The Brisker Rav was once in Schuls, Switzerland, and a man approached him requesting a berachah for success. "May you be successful," responded The Brisker Rav. The man persisted: "What I meant was that The Brisker Rav should bless me to be successful in learning." "What do you think the first berachah was for?" replied The Brisker Rav, as it was clear that success meant success in learning specifically.

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 147*

❖ Chaim Bressler would volunteer his time at an old age home near his house. He would visit a man named Mr. Lieberman. Mr. Lieberman's time in the old age was spent watching television and other very boring, non fulfilling activities, and so he really looked forward to Chaim's visits. One day Mr. Lieberman was walking down the halls with Chaim. They saw two elderly men, two chavrussas, learning Gemara very excitedly together. Mr. Lieberman just stared at them. He then started to cry. He said zei huben ales, uhn ich hub gornisht. That left a major impression on Chaim - that with Torah you have everything, without it nothing and he became the Rosh Yeshivah of Scranton.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 168*

❖ JJ Gross was a marketing executive who sponsored an ad on the front page of the New York Times that listed the new York Shabbos candle lighting times. He stopped it in 1999. In Jan. 2000, the NYT had three front pages. From 1900, from 2000, and from 2100. On the 2100 it had the Shabbos candle time. He called the manager of the NYT, and asked why he put the ad in. He said we don't know what will happen in the future, but one thing is certain, in 2100 there will be Jewish women lighting candles.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 147*

❖ Ely Levi was 12 years old and was going with his father to Madison Square Garden from Baltimore for the siyum hashas in 2005. They got there a bit early and Ely's father asked him if he wanted to go down near the dais to meet the gedolim. Eli wasn't in the mood because he knew it would be a big shlep. In order to convince Eli, he said he would buy him anything he asked for. Eli thought of getting a new Game Boy or video game. He told his father he was going to ask for something really

good. His father agreed. Ely met the gedolim and was very inspired. He later was extremely inspired by the whole siyum Hashas. On the car ride home his smile could not leave his face. As he was about to fall asleep, he said, daddy, remember that you said I can choose anything I wanted. I decided what I want. I want that the next time we go to the siyum hashas, you will be one of the people making a siyum too. His father was shocked, but he already made the commitment. He agreed.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 138*

❖ During the 1950's a full-time Torah scholar who had an army deferment was not permitted to leave the country unless there were extreme circumstances, such as illness. On one occasion I questioned the prime minister and defense minister, David Ben Gurion, as to the need for this hard line. "The yeshivah students don't serve in the army anyway..." I pointed out. "You maintain that Torah study protects the country more than the army does," he replied. "So I want them to learn here and protect our country, not America..." He accordingly gave unequivocal instructions not to allow anyone exempted from army service as a full-time yeshivah student to leave the country.

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ About seven years before his passing, Harav Ovadia Yosef was complaining of terrible stomach pains, and his son Rav David accompanied him to the hospital. The doctors ordered a battery of tests, and they uncovered an issue that required immediate laparoscopic surgery. But at his advanced age, and considering his weak overall medical condition, the doctors felt that it was dangerous to place him under anesthesia. "It will him take several weeks to recover from the anesthesia, " they explained. "That's when he'll come out of it. " They told Rav David that they would do the half hour surgery without anesthesia, but they warned him that the procedure would be extremely painful. "We're going to summon several staff members just to hold him down, " they said, "and you must remain outside because you won't be able to handle the sight of him suffering so much. If you want to remain right outside the operating theater, you may, but be prepared for his shrieks of pain. " Rav David asked the doctors to describe to the Rav what the procedure would be like, so that he wouldn't be shocked when the pain began. "B'seder, " Harav Ovadia sighed upon hearing the plan. "If this is a pain that I have no choice but to suffer, it should be kaparat avonot (an atonement for my sins). But please bring me my Gemara and I'll try to distract myself from the pain as much as possible. " "I brought him his Gemara - he was learning Bava Basra at the time — and I left the room, " relates Rav David. "A large group of doctors and other hospital staff entered the operating room, but I did not hear a single sound emanating from within. Finally, after about half an hour, the doctors came out and said, 'We were shocked — ' he didn't utter a peep.' "I went inside and asked, Abba, how are you feeling?' He looked up at me and said, slightly irritated, Ask the doctors how long they're going to make me wait. Let them start already!' "He was so utterly engrossed in his learning that he had not felt them operating."

*Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One Chol HaMoed after the Steipler's passing, Rav Chaim Kanievsky visited Rav Elyashiv for his regular Yom Tov visit, and he related two incidents that had occurred during the last Yom Kippur of the Steipler's life. The Steipler was already very weak, so a bed was placed in a side room of the Lederman shul so that it would not be necessary for him to go home to rest. At the beginning of the night, however, it occurred to the Steipler that there was a possible halachic issue related to the shul's ownership of the room he was in (which had been owned in the past by Mrs. Lederman), and he left the room and remained in the shul the entire night, without sleeping. The Steipler stood on his feet for many long hours that Yom Kippur, and at some point, a bowl of water spilled on him accidentally. Terrified of violating the prohibition of sechitah (squeezing water from a garment), the Steipler held his foot in the air — standing on the other foot A for two hours, until his sock dried. This was when he was already ill and weak, on a fast day, and after a night without sleep! Upon hearing this, Rav Elyashiv responded, "It's true that standing with one's foot in the air for two whole hours is a mofes [marvel], but when talking about the Steipler, it's not necessary to tell stories like these, because much bigger mofsim happened with the Steipler every day and every moment! The biggest mofes of the Steipler was that he was tormented with yissurim, but he

exerted himself to learn b'iyun, in depth, and to understand every Tosafos." "Holding his leg aloft was difficult," he added, "but that lasted for only two hours. Learning biyun when he was no longer able to do so — that was something he did every day, every hour, and that is far more difficult than standing with one's foot in the air."

*Rav Elyashiv, By Yehuda and Malky Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 238*

❖ A child was visiting the Chazon Ish with his grandfather. Bored by the adult conversation, he started playing with a coin. It was not long before he popped it into his mouth and accidentally swallowed it. Panic ensued. Someone flipped the child upside down to try to dislodge the coin. The Chazon Ish said loudly, "We have to bring him to the Ponevezher Rav because he is an expert at getting money out of people..." Everyone laughed, including the child. This dislodged the coin, and it emerged into the open. Rav Chaim Kanievsky's comment on the incident: "Happiness saves people from all tzaros."

*From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll*

❖ Creature comforts were few and far between. But the Weinbergs had not come to Israel for its physical amenities. They had come so that Rav Noach could learn without distraction. And that is what he did. Initially, he returned to the Mirrer Yeshiva. He learned virtually around the clock. As a bachur in Ner Israel, Shmuel Bloom visited for a couple of weeks together with Rav Noach's nephew, Mattis Weinberg, in 1963. They slept on a rollout couch in the Weinbergs' living room, and remember Rav Noach staying up all night learning. Rabbi Chaim Uri Freund spoke of how Rav Noach did not sleep more than three or four hours in a twenty-four-hour cycle: "I can testify that many times I saw he was completely exhausted, and I told him, 'Noach, rest for a few minutes.' He gave me permission for fifteen minutes, for twenty minutes, but how he'd reproach me if I had mercy on him and let him sleep a minute more." When he took brief naps to refresh himself, he often did so on the hard floor so that it would be easier for him to awaken again. For many years, he left the house at five in the morning and only returned home at midnight. When he learned in the kollel of Rabbi Mordechai Elefant, Rebbetzin Weinberg used to bring him his lunch in the beis midrash. Asked how she could live with a man who was so rarely at home, which left the whole burden of the house on her shoulders, Rebbetzin Weinberg replied, "I'd rather spend five minutes a day with a man who is learning twenty hours a day than many hours with one who is not."

*From Rav Noach Weinberg, By Yonason Rosenbloom, Published by Mosaica Press*

❖ Yuri Zilber was a mathematician working at a government job in Russia. He would secretly learn Torah. He would tear out a page of Gemara, and hide it in his pocket. When he had time he would read from the page. He finished shas tearing out page by page. In 1973 he was able to get a visa with his family to Israel. He was so excited to be able to learn Torah in freedom. As soon as he landed he went over to the first person with a yarmulke - a security guard and pulled out his page of Gemara and said can you please explain this Tosafos to me. The guard looked at him like he was crazy. He was shocked to learn that in the freedom of Israel the guard did not know what Yuri was talking about. Yuri started to cry, realizing how much he was able to accomplish under tyranny, and how it was such a waste that not everybody made the use of their freedom.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 158*

❖ In the first years of the Riverdale Yeshivah, when money was extremely tight, the custodian quit and the dirty dishes were stacking up. Left without a choice, the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Avraham Ausband called together the rabbeim and they all went to the kitchen to wash the dishes themselves. Hearing about it, the bachurim came over to offer to clean in their stead. Rav Avrohom told them, "Bachurim, do you think I founded this Yeshivah so you could wash dishes? It's my responsibility to supply clean dishes, but you? You are here to learn Torah and nothing else!

*From Chayeinu Magazine*

❖ After hearing that all of the talmidim were exceptional, Reb Leib Rubin decided that the only way to find out for sure who would be a good student appropriate for his daughter was to check himself. Accordingly, he delivered a shiur in the yeshivah followed by a difficult question posed to the students. Left unsaid was that the one who could answer the question would earn his daughter's hand in marriage. Silence, long silence, filled the room. No one in the hall crammed with supposed lamdanim could resolve the difficulty. It was therefore time for Reb Leib to depart and continue his search elsewhere. Rabbi Rubin had already loaded his wagon and was clippity-clopping out of Radin when a panting student, Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman ran up and begged, "Rebbe, asked a difficult question, but what is the answer? With that one dramatic act, which displayed his true thirst for learning, Yusha Kuhler had indeed answered his father-in-law's question.

*Builders, By Rabbi Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ It is impossible to describe the depth and breadth of the influence of Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz's shiurim. After a shiur, there was not one talmid in the yeshivah who did not know precisely what Reb Baruch Ber had said. For the entire day, to say one word about anything other than the shiur was virtually out of the question. According to the gaon R. Avraham Rhein, Reb Baruch Ber's shiur would be the main topic of conversation for the entire week in the beis midrash, while the bachurim walked to their lodgings, while they ate and any other time they conversed. Aside from reviewing his actual words, they would discuss and debate exactly what they thought he meant by each point and each part of the shiur. The gaon R. Eliyahu Mishkovsky recalled that on "shiur days," he personally would be thoroughly exhausted at the end of the day. He had exerted himself to the limit, concentrating on every one of Reb Baruch Ber's words and listening for every nuance so as not to miss any detail. Regarding the bachurim's great thirst to fully understand the shiurim, one of the talmidim related that once, after a shiur, having not understood it sufficiently, he went to some of the yeshivah's top bachurim and asked them to explain it to him. These were the bachurim who were specially selected to review the shiurim with the less-gifted bachurim to make sure that everyone understood. These bachurim tried their best, but the bachur still did not understand. He was so disappointed that he went to one of the side rooms and cried. It is not surprising that the yeshivah's talmidim knew the shiurim so well they would accurately say them over even many years afterwards. One talmid recalled the bitter years of suffering in exile in Siberia, when he and other Kamenetz talmidim were forced to do hard labor. They had no sefarim, so they set up a system where they would take turns reviewing aloud Reb Baruch Ber's shiurim. (The same talmid also related that they often sang songs that they remembered from Reb Baruch Ber. This too, greatly helped uplift their spirits). One of the talmidim of that group, the gaon R. Chaim Shalom Leibowitz related that he contracted tuberculosis in Siberia. He lay in bed in the attic where he stayed, burning with fever. The day came when it was his turn to say a shiur, but he was so ill, that he felt it would not be possible. Suddenly, however, he remembered Reb Baruch Ber's recount of his days in Kremenchug during WWI. He recalled how Reb Baruch Ber told the bachurim that despite the bullets whizzing through the city and the danger they posed to anyone in the streets, he would walk to the yeshivah anyway to say his shiur, so great was the importance of a shiur. R. Chaim Shalom then rose to his feet and went to say a shiur. After the shiur, when he returned to the attic to rest, he saw, to his amazement, that the attic had collapsed. In the merit of saying the shiur, he had escaped death.

*Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim*

❖ The Pasuk refers to the ways of Torah as "darchei noam," ways of pleasantness. "If it is not noam, if the behavior of one who learns Torah is not sweet, then what he is learning is not Torah. He should sit down and learn the sugya again. When a person closes the Gemara after learning, the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Dovid Feinstein, would say, then he should be a bit kinder, a bit more compassionate, and a bit more selfless than when he sat down to learn. That sweetness, that ne'imus, radiated from the Rosh Yeshivah, who spent so many hours by the Gemara.

*From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ During a certain period, Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk needed to take daily walks for health reasons. He would tell Velvele to "pack up provisions" for the walk. What were the provisions? A new kashe of R. Akiva Eiger. He would prepare the kashe, and then the two would set out, discussing it as they walked?".

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 89*

❖ Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotsk once made the following comment to his chassidim about his son-in-law, Reb Avraham of Sochatchov, the author of Avnei Nezer: "Do you know why the rav of Biala was privileged to be granted a son like that? "One Purim it so happened that all the tzaddikim and scholars were engaged in the mitzvah of eating their festive Purim seudah. That meant that there was no one anywhere studying Torah - except for the rav of Biala, who sat alone and studied. Heaven was well pleased with this, for if not for him the whole world at that moment would have been void of Torah study. "And that is why they granted him this gift - a son who would illuminate the whole world."

*A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ "I spoke to my grandfather, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, several times about married women wearing a sheitel (wig) as opposed to a kerchief," shared R' Avraham Yeshayah Shteinman. "I told him that many people are saying it is better to wear a kerchief, and I asked about the practice of the Chazon Ish's wife. 'She wore a sheitel,' Sabba replied. Is it preferable to wear a kerchief?' I asked. 'Our mothers and grandmothers wore sheitels, and that is the correct thing to wear,' was his response."

*From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll*

❖ Someone asked Reb Dovid Feinstein where to find a specific Gemara. Reb Dovid told him in which masechta it was located, and said that it was between Daf 14 and Daf 18. Veteran talmidim smiled to themselves, because they understood exactly what the Rosh Yeshivah was doing. He knew precisely what daf it was on, but he did not want to answer accurately for fear of appearing haughty. But his generosity of spirit would also not allow him to leave the person without an answer, so Reb Dovid gave the person an answer that would make it easy for him to find the Gemara he sought, but in a humble way.

*From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When Rav Shlomo Rothenberg was already very weak, a visitor happened to stop in when he was sitting by the dining room table with his Gemara open. Considering Rav Shlomo's situation, it was a very impressive sight to see. He was so very weak, yet he was using his last remaining strength for Torah. The visitor was visibly moved by the holy sight. When Rav Shlomo noticed how impressed the man was, he quickly joked, “Ah, it looks good, it looks good-looks are superficial!" He couldn't take any honor, even when he was deserving of it.

*From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Shimon Schwab related how he was told by a young man, "At my school we are currently 'doing' (Maseches) Bava Kama." Rabbi Schwab replied, "When I went to yeshivah we didn't 'do' Bava Kama but Bava Kama did "something to us."

*Five Great Leaders, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ As Rav Yechezkel Abramsky lay deathly ill in Sha'arei Tzedek Hospital, barely responding, the hospital's director Prof. Mayer encouraged the talmidim who were staying with the Rav to speak divrei Torah near him so that he could hear them. Although there was no visible reaction, the monitoring equipment indicated that these periods of learning strengthened him and gave him energy.

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ In his speech, Rabbi Sherer pulled from his wallet a copy of an order, issued November 23, 1940, from the German High Commander I.A. Eckhardt to the German Army of Occupation on Poland, which he always carried with him. In it Eckhardt commands that the Ostjuden, the Eastern European Jews, must not be allowed to escape because they comprise the majority of the rabbis and "Talmud teachers." If the "Talmud Lehrer" escape, warns the Nazi commander, they can bring about the spiritual regeneration of world Jewry, even American Jewry. Those words would prove as prophetic as those of another enemy if Israel, the prophet Balaam.

*Rabbi Sherer, By Rabbi Yonasan Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 604*

❖ Reb Dovid Feinstein gave a shiur at the Agudah convention one year, sharing the halachic approach to understanding brain death. A very dedicated askan was in attendance, and though he was not very learned, he felt that Reb Dovid's psak was wrong, and he began to argue. At one point, he stood up and started to shout passionately, feeling that Reb Dovid was being too lenient. No one was quite sure how to react - except Reb Dovid. He bowed slightly toward the askan and said, "And now, rabboisai, you heard another opinion." Then he continued with the shiur.

*From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Frand told a small anecdote that personified Rav Kulefsky, his love of Torah, and his love of sharing a good vort. He once met Rav Kulefsky next to the freezer section of Giant Supermarket, and Rav Kulefsky said to him, "I have to tell you a vort. The entire Giant was created so that I'd have a place to tell you this vort!"

*From Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Reb Isser Zalman would say about Rabbi Shach, "If you would cut his veins, you would not see blood flowing; you would see Rashbas and Rav Akiva Eigers!

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ His Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Leib Malin, often challenged his students: "You think that you learn in the beis midrash, sleep in the dormitory, and eat in the dining room? No! You learn in the beis midrash, eat in the beis midrash, and also sleep in the beis midrash! It's just that the dormitory is a beis midrash for sleeping, and the dining room is the beis midrash for eating."

*From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll*

❖ When the Brisker Rav's son, R' Yosef Dov was a boy, the Brisker Rav asked one of his talmidim to learn Bava Kama with him in his home. The Brisker Rav would supervise their learning sessions, wanting to know — besides the quality of their learning — whether they were learning with the proper amount of simchah!"

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 154*

❖ When young Mordechai Susna graduated Yeshivas Rabbi Jacob Joseph in 1951, Rabbi Kalman Goldberg of the Lower East Side urged his parents to apply to Bais Medrash Govoha in Lakewood under HaRav Aharon Kotler. One evening, without prior warning, Rabbi Goldberg knocked on the Susnas' door and rushed the nervous teen—who had had no time to prepare a Torah topic—straight to an interview with Rav Aharon on the Upper West Side. Rav Aharon warmly put the boy at ease and tested him on the Gemara he was learning, but as the questions grew deeper, Mordechai froze up and felt certain he had failed miserably. Rabbi Goldberg asked Mordechai to step into the hallway for a few minutes while he spoke privately with the Rosh Yeshivah. Ten minutes later, Mordechai was called back inside—and to his utter astonishment, Rav Aharon welcomed him with a glowing smile as the youngest talmid accepted into Lakewood! Only years later did R' Mordechai discover what had transpired behind that closed door during those ten minutes. Seeing that the boy was young and nervous, Rabbi Goldberg had told Rav Aharon about the boy's father, R' Yonah Susna. Arriving in America as a thirteen-year-old orphan from Russia, R' Yonah had been taken in by a righteous shamash on the Lower East Side and vowed to build a home of boundless chesed. Every morning after Shacharis at Beth Hamedrash Hagadol, R' Yonah brought

the destitute, homeless men who slept on the back benches into his own dining room, where his wife served them hot coffee and fresh rolls—and even after lice forced them to move the breakfasts to the shul, R' Yonah brought hot food there daily. One freezing morning, a ragged pauper whispered that his clothes were falling apart and he desperately needed a suit of clothing. Knowing he had no spare suit with him in shul, R' Yonah stepped into a side room, took off his own suit and shirt, handed them to the shivering pauper, buttoned his heavy winter overcoat over his undergarments, and walked home in his coat alone. Upon hearing that story, Rav Aharon Kotler declared without hesitation: "The son of such a holy baal chesed I most definitely want in my yeshivah!"

*Visions of Greatness, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers*

❖ During World War I, many Jews evaded military service in the Polish army. Due to rampant anti-Semitism in the armed services, even those inducted absconded at the first opportunity. The closest haven was Hungary, and many of the escapees found their way to the Galanta Yeshivah. These young men were longing to continue their Torah studies. Despite their physical and psychological hardships, living in an alien land and subject to arrest and deportation, they dedicated themselves with gusto to their studies. At the time, the yeshivah was headed by the illustrious Harav Yosef Zvi Dushinsky, who also served as Rav of the city. Years later, he was elected to the prestigious position of Rav of Yerushalayim. One day, the military police made an unexpected foray into the yeshivah's district in search of undocumented aliens hiding in the city. News of the operation did not reach the yeshivah in time. Suddenly, while the Rosh Yeshivah was in the middle of his lecture, the school was surrounded by soldiers, headed by a high-ranking officer. A shudder went through the spines of the Polish students, for upon arrest they would immediately be extradited to their homeland, where long prison sentences, perhaps even the death penalty, awaited them. The foreign boys instinctively ran for cover, attempting to jump out of windows, hoping to escape via the courtyard. But this option was also closed, as the entire building was surrounded. The Rosh Yeshivah motioned to everyone to return to his seat. His cool style and self-confident manner calmed them somewhat, and the lecture continued as before. After several minutes, the officer entered the beis medrash and announced that he came in search of illegal aliens. Words cannot describe the panic and anguish of the Polish students as they realized that there was no escape. Yet, the Rosh Yeshivah's demeanor was strangely incongruous to their state of mind. Even at this critical point, his calm did not leave him, as if he were oblivious to the impending crisis. Suddenly, the Rosh Yeshivah turned to the students, pointing out the Polish citizens one by one and ordering them to line up. It became crystal clear, even among the bravest of the group, who until then had maintained a semblance of composure, that Rav Dushinsky was not ready to sacrifice the entire yeshivah for a few Polish aliens. Apparently, the Rosh Yeshivah had come to the conclusion that each of these boys would be considered what the halachah terms rodeph, a person about to cause death to another person. The halachah specifies that in such cases one may save the victim, even by causing death to the rodeph. After they lined up, the Rosh Yeshivah turned to the commanding officer and declared: "I wish to point out that these young men whom I've ordered to line up are longtime students at the seminary. I know each of them on a personal basis; they are all loyal Hungarian citizens and your honor does not need to bother establishing their documentation. However, those remaining seated include some new students and I cannot personally vouch for them." The Rosh Yeshivah's deportment, along with his absolute command of the situation, impressed the officer greatly and it did not dawn on him to challenge the "facts." Upon examining the documents of the "new" students who had remained seated, he was satisfied that everything was in order and the soldiers left on a friendly note. Only then did the Polish boys breathe a sigh of relief. Everyone sensed that what had occurred was, in fact, what the Mishnah (braissa) in Pirkei Avos alludes to with the statement, "Everyone learning Torah lishmah [for the sole objective of serving Hashem] is zocheh to many things and it gives him kingship and governing powers [leadership qualities of the highest caliber]." A fascinating postscript: Following this incident, the yeshivah never again was visited by any law enforcement agents. In fact, not one of the hundreds of yeshivah boys in the city was ever stopped, even for a routine ID inspection, throughout the entire four-year period of the war.

*Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ At the time that R' Yitzchok Hutner was learning at the Slabodka Yeshivah, the Haskalah movement worked tirelessly to draw as many Torah Jews from yeshivos as they could. Their efforts were unfortunately successful in many cases. Having heard of R' Hutner's brilliance, the future rosh yeshivah of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin was a prime target of theirs. They sent messenger after messenger to R' Hutner, offering him everything they could muster, from money to fame, if he would leave Slabodka and join them. R' Hutner stood steadfast, however, frustrating the Maskilim. Growing impatient, they sent him a message: "Tomorrow morning, meet us at the train station at seven o'clock and you will be on your way to seeing the 'light' in university. But if you don't show up, our offers are withdrawn." R' Hutner later related that he spent the night thinking through the matter. On one hand, there was the holiness, the Torah learning, and the yiras Shamayim of the Slabodka Yeshivah, under the direction of the Alter of Slabodka. On the other hand, the promises of financial success and security were quite tempting. In the middle of the night, after debating internally, R' Hutner made his decision: He'd be staying in Slabodka. What had clinched his decision? R' Hutner had recalled an incident from his youth. "One day, as a young boy, I ran into my home and told my mother that the next day at cheder, we'd be completing a perek in Maseches Bava Kamma and would be having a siyum in honor of this achievement. The next morning," continued R' Hutner, "I woke up to find my mother and sisters dressed in their Shabbos finery. 'Why the fancy clothing?' I asked. 'Why are you all dressed up?' My mother, in a voice filled with emotion, told me, 'You're making a siyum today!' 'And therefore?' 'Well,' said my mother, 'you are on the way to becoming a talmid chacham. It's a dream that every parent has... and baruch Hashem, my dream is starting to be fulfilled!' 'But why are the girls dressed up as well?' 'If it was the night of your wedding, you wouldn't ask why your sisters are dressed up. Your simchah is their simchah!' When I came home that day, the table was set beautifully and filled with delicacies, as though it were a Yom Tov. My mother had shown me that Torah is the most precious thing to her. "Thus, at 4:30 in the morning, as I contemplated my future, I remembered that episode. I asked myself: How could I ever leave yeshivah? How could I do this to my mother? She loved Torah so much. It was the thing that made her happy, hoping that her son would be dedicated to Torah. I decided to stay in Slabodka."

*From Moments Of Greatness By Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger*

❖ Some held Reb Betzalel Milchiger up as a model of synthesis between Torah and the working life, proving that it's not necessary to learn full-time in order to remain deeply connected to Torah. But, Reb Shmuel Auerbach said, Reb Betzalel had told him that the day he was forced out of full-time learning into the world of work was as sad for him and his family as Tisha B'Av; he'd done so only when there wasn't a morsel of bread left to give his children. And Reb Shmuel would recall how his father would commiserate with Reb Betzalel, sharing his deep pain over having to leave his natural home, the beis medrash. Knowing Reb Betzalel's inability to pass up any chance to talk in learning, and not wanting to undermine his parnassah, Rav Sholom Schwadron would hide the moment he'd see him off in the distance making his delivery rounds. One morning, Reb Sholom spied Reb Betzalel coming down a Shaarei Chesed street, milk bottles in tow, and quite obviously mulling over a difficult sugya in his mind. Reb Sholom ducked into an alleyway, but it was too late—Reb Betzalel had already caught sight of him. He started running in his direction, shouting, "Reb Sholom, Reb Sholom, I have such a powerful question on Tosfos!" and as he ran, he began explaining what was bothering him. Reb Sholom pretended not to hear and continued walking quickly in the opposite direction. But Reb Betzalel pursued him, shouting, "Reb Sholom, why are you running away? Do you not like my question?" Reb Sholom realized he was going to have to explain himself to Reb Betzalel. He stopped, and as Reb Betzalel caught up with him he said, "Reb Betzalel, if we start speaking, you'll lose the money you need to make. After all, selling milk is your parnassah." "No, Reb Sholom," Reb Betzalel corrected him. "Torah is the parnassah."

*From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press*

❖ It is well known that when R. Yisrael Salanter came to Paris and saw the open chillul Shabbos there, he commented that when God-fearing Jews become somewhat lax in observing Shabbos in all its details, it has a negative influence on Jews in faraway places, where the result is blatant desecration of the Shabbos. In Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk's responsa, we

find a similar idea: A man wrote him complaining about those sitting and learning in Volozhin. "It's a shame you don't go learn in Paris; your presence would prevent great numbers of our brethren from losing their faith, God forbid." R. Chaim responded that he was making a mistake: their learning here in Volozhin was indeed preventing people from giving up the faith in Paris.

*The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim, p. 499 (heard from Rav Meshulam Dovid Soloveitchik)*

❖ Rav Chaim Berman told a story in the name of the Ponovezher Rav, Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, a story he used to illustrate true ahavas haTorah. Rav Avraham Burstein was the rav of the city of Tevrig in Lithuania. During World War I, there was a curfew placed on the city. No one was allowed to have any lights in their homes lest the enemy be able to spot their homes and attack. Rav Avraham disregarded the warning and left on a very small light, enough to enable him to see the page he was learning. Nevertheless, the soldiers noticed it and barged into his home, accusing him of being a spy. Rav Avraham tried to explain that he was only using the light to study, but the soldiers would hear none of it. They demanded that he admit to his crime. Rav Avraham stood by his story and would not admit to any wrongdoing. The soldiers, determined that he must be a spy, prepared to shoot him. But just before they did, Rav Avraham asked for one last wish: 15 minutes. In those 15 minutes, Rav Avraham opened a Rambam, explaining to the soldiers that he had been studying something and had not figured it out, so he needed a bit more time with it. This was his dying wish. A few moments later, a siren sounded to call the soldiers together; they needed to move on to the next village. They immediately left, leaving Rav Avraham alive to figure out his Rambam.

*Touched By Their Tears, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ In a famous incident, the Novaradok yeshivah was besieged by Bolshevik soldiers in the year 1919; The Alter of Novaradok was away at the time, but a short while earlier had responded with a telegram to his talmidim's request for guidance in the fate of Bolshevik threats that they cease their Torah studies. The telegram read: "Av Harachamim" Father of Mercy, the opening words of the prayer recited Shabbos morning for the martyrs of our people, The message was clear: they should be prepared to die, if necessary, rather than give in to the Bolsheviks' demands. The commanding Bolshevik officer led his soldiers into the beis midrash, marched straight to the rabbi in charge and demanded that the yeshivah close its doors immediately. The young scholar rose and unbuttoned his shirt. Fully composed, he said, "Shoot." His students lined up behind him and unbuttoned their shirts as well. The officer and his men were thrown off balance by this show of spiritual strength. They turned and left.

*The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Not only did the words flowing from Rav Gifter's lips leave their mark, the kisses of his lips had a power of their own. At the end of every shiur, as he carefully and somewhat reluctantly closed his Gemara, Rabbi Gifter would bend over his cherished tome and give it a big, resounding kiss. This kiss was so full of tender love and yearning that it spoke volumes, and constituted an entire shiur on its own. One talmid related that when he was a fledgling teenager in high school he was going through a difficult period, discouraged and plagued with doubts. His learning was suffering and he felt very down. One day, Rabbi Gifter delivered a shiur to his class, and when he concluded, he gave his Gemora his customary kiss. The talmid says that there was so much ahavas Torah, pure emunah, and positive energy in that one kiss, that it dispelled all of his doubts and gloom, and infused him with so much love for Torah that he has not left the Beis HaMidrash to this very day, almost fifty years later! May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for Your love is dearer to him than wine.

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When the Novardok Yeshivah was exiled to Siberia, the bachurim were starving, yet their greatest hunger was for one thing: Torah. Given a single opportunity to request food packages, they asked for 22 packages of cheese wrapped in the 22 blatt of Maseches Makkos. That way they were able to get a complete Gemara. That is all they cared about. The issue of

shaimos was secondary because they felt like it was pikuach nefesh without the ability to learn.

*Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 189*

❖ The Brisker Rav was once discussing a sugyah with a talmid chacham, sharing with him a chiddush of his on the subject. The chacham felt that this was contradicted by an explicit Gemara in another place, and said gently, "The rav most probably knows the Gemara..." mentioning the Gemara he was referring to. "No," answered The Brisker Rav immediately, "I don't know it!"

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 16*

❖ At the funeral of the Vilna Gaon, only those who could repeat Torah thoughts which they had personally heard from the Gaon were permitted to speak. One speaker quoted the Gaon's explanation of the following Talmudic passage (Bava Metzia 85b): R' Chiya once related how he had succeeded in preventing Torah from becoming forgotten. "I planted flax from which I made nets and trapped deer. I fed the deer to orphans, and from the skins I made parchment scrolls on which I wrote the Five Books of the Chumash. I then went to a town, taught each of the Books to five different children, and the Six Orders of the Mishnah to each of six children. Why couldn't R' Chiya have purchased ready-made scrolls? Why did he spend so much valuable time preparing them himself? Answered the Vilna Gaon: For Torah study to have its desired effect, every facet of its learning must be pure. If the scrolls from which R' Chiya's students had studied would have been produced through dishonest means, then this would have had a negative effect on the children's learning. Similarly, if a person purchases a sefer with funds borrowed with ribis (interest), people who study from that sefer will not have proper success in their learning. In the words of the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal, "The noblest intentions do not permit taking a single dishonest cent from either the government or a private individual. In fact, the noblest goal of all is to be mekadeish shem shamayim, to sanctify Hashem's Name. The way to accomplish this is by strictly adhering to the Torah."

*Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ In 1949 Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach began delivering lectures at the Kol Torah Yeshivah. His very first shiur was attended by all of the yeshiva's rabbanim, to award the youthful genius the respect and honor that he deserved. Not long after the start of the shiur, R' Yonah Mertzbach, one of the founders of Kol Torah, interrupted with a question. After a few seconds of silence, R' Shlomo Zalman declared without hesitation, "Ta'isi — I have made a mistake." He then began a new topic which was the focus of the remainder of the shiur. When he returned home and his Rebbetzin asked how he had fared, R' Shlomo Zalman replied, "Not so well. The shiur had hardly begun when I admitted to a mistake. Actually, I had three different answers to offer. But I felt that the question was closer to the emes (truth) than any of my answers.". R' Shlomo Zalman was informed that he had been accepted for the position. Years later, R' Mertzbach told R' Yehudah Addas, Rosh Yeshivah of Kol Yaakov, "Do you know why R' Shlomo Zalman was appointed to his position? When I asked him that question and he answered, 'I'm mistaken,' it was clear to me that with such a level of emes, he should be our Rosh Yeshivah!"

*From Jerusalem His Word, By Rabbi Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Two ninth-grade students at Yeshivah of Staten Island came to Reb Reuven Feinstein for a "din Torah." One had borrowed a cassette recorder from the other and had swung it by its strap, causing it to hit a wall and break. They wanted to know whether the borrower was liable for damages. At that time, the yeshivah was learning Bava Metzia which discusses the laws of shomrim (watchmen), including a sho'el (borrower). Reb Reuven asked the borrower, "What are the responsibilities of a sho'el?" The bachur replied correctly that a sho'el is liable even for unavoidable accidents (onsim). "And certainly he is liable for pshi'ah (negligence)," responded Reb Reuven, meaning that there was no question he was liable in this case. The boys walked away satisfied that their question had been resolved, but Reb Reuven was troubled that they had come to him with a question whose answer was so plainly obvious. That night he asked his father, "How can it be that they are learning these halachos in yeshivah and they cannot apply it to their own lives?" Reb Moshe responded, "Ask them what they learned for haschalas Gemara." Reb Reuven followed this directive and discovered that both boys had begun with

Maseches Berachos. Reb Moshe was not surprised. He said, "in Berachos, they learned some things that to their minds are not put into practice. They learned that the ideal time for praying the Shemoneh Esrei of Shacharis is at sunrise, but how many people actually do this? They learned that there is a deadline each morning for the recitation of Shema and Shemoneh Esrei, but they may have seen their fathers or older brothers daven late and miss these required deadlines. So what have they learned? That there are things in Yiddishkeit that are nice to do, but it's all right if you don't do them. So they apply this logic to Bava Metzia as well."

*Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ There was a school, called Beis Dovid that was hit hard by the recession in 2008. They decided to institute a rule that parents who were unable to pay a certain amount of tuition will not be able to keep sending their kids. Rabbi Davis was third grade rebbe. There were three boys in his class whose parents had fallen behind on paying the minimal amount. The office told Rabbi Davis to give the three boys sealed envelopes. They had to bring the envelopes to their parents, and could come back when they brought the envelopes back to school. Rabbi Davis felt bad that one of the boys on the list was Binyamin Harter. His father had passed away two years ago and his young mother was raising two sons by herself. She tried her best to pay what she could of the tuition, but she was unable because of the circumstances. Rabbi Davis felt terrible sending Binyamin home, but he felt unable to stand against the management. In the morning he gave Binyamin the envelope, and optimistically said I'm sure "I will see you soon". Binyamin went home. Right after lunch, as Rabbi Davis was beginning the class, he saw Binyamin's face in the door window. Binyamin walked in holding his lunch box. Rabbi Davis assumed he didn't even go home. He went over to Binyamin's desk as Binyamin was about to put his lunch box down. He tried to catch the lunch box, but it fell to the ground. It opened with a crash. Rabbi Davis saw the lunch, some snack, and a diamond ring with a note attached to it. The note read. "Tov li toras picha mealfei zahav vachesef. This ring should cover Binyamin's tuition for the rest of the year. Rabbi Davis looked at the ring with deep awe. This ring was Mrs. Harter's last connection to her beloved husband. She was willing to give it away for the sake of her child's learning. Rabbi Davis brought the ring and the note to the administration and convinced them to abolish this new policy, and of course return the ring. But Binyamin never forgot the message that his mother sent to him about the importance of learning.

*Stories That Warm The Heart, By Rabbi Binyomin Penzik, Published by C.I.S. Publishers, p. 51*

❖ In Vienna a 12-year-old girl named Rosa (Rachel) Schiff had an incredibly beautiful singing voice. A talent scout discovered her and offered for her to become a soloist at a world renowned theater, connected with the famous Gustav Mahler. The opportunity at fame was extremely powerful for her. It would be virtually impossible for her to maintain a religious lifestyle if she would do it though. Her parents asked if she could speak to the Kapishnitzer Rebbe before she made her decision. They went to him. He gently asked her why she wanted to become a soloist? I will be known throughout the world. I will be famous". The rebbe thought for a while. He opened his eyes and said, it is the desire of every Jewish mother to have a child who will light up the world with learning. I promise you now, if you give up your chance for fame, you will be blessed with a child who will be known through the whole world as one of the greatest Torah authorities. You will get your fame through him." She thought deeply about it, and agreed. When she got married and had a son, she would always tell him, "Learn well and be an ehrlicher Yid, dear Shmuel; you have no idea what I sacrificed for you." He grew up to be Rav Shmuel Wosner, author of Shevet HaLevi.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 234*

❖ Naming a baby is often tricky. Meir and Ahuva finally had a boy after a number of girls and decided to name him after Ahuva's grandfather. Ahuva then started having second thoughts. "My grandfather was a very nice man and a fine person," she said to her husband, "but he wasn't a talmid chacham. He was just a 'poshuta Yid.' Maybe it would be better if we name the baby after a gadol." Meir went to ask his rav, a major rosh yeshivah. "When did her grandfather live?" he asked. "He came to America in the thirties and worked in the curtain business. He was niftar a few years ago," Meir told him. "And where are

his children today?" the Rosh Yeshivah persisted. "All of them are frum and all his grandchildren are bnei Torah." The Rosh Yeshivah gave Meir a piercing look. "Anyone who lived in America in the thirties and forties and raised a family that produced bnei Torah is not a 'poshuta Yid.' Name the baby after him. I think the same could be said for anyone who lived in America in the fifties, sixties, seventies.

*Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Rav Gifter appreciated emes in every form and became distressed when he sensed that something did not portray the complete truth. The yeshiva's official letterhead originally bore the name Rabbinical College of Telshe. However, the name was officially changed to Telshe Yeshivah because the term "rabbinical," according to Rav Gifter, implied that its purpose was only to develop rabbis. And in Rav Gifter's estimation, that was not true. He felt that the purpose of a yeshivah was to produce the next generation of Klal Yisrael. Hence, the original title was misleading.

*Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## A. TO STUDY THE WEEKLY PARSHAH EVERY WEEK, WITH ITS TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 72,11**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If you have to finish it with the community, when can you begin?
- When is the best time to learn this?
- How should one read it? Should they read each passuk and then do the Targum?
- Is it ok to speak in the middle of reading the portion that you are doing?
- Should you read the haftarah as well?
- If one only has a Chumash without Targum, should he just read the Hebrew, or should he not begin if he can't do it with the Targum?
- Should one learn Rashi as well?
- What if he doesn't understand Rashi, should he read an English translation of the parshah?

### KITZUR SHULCHAN ARUCH

Every man must complete the Parshah of the week with the congregation. That is, you should read the weekly portion of the Torah twice and the Targum (Onkelos) once.

From Sunday and after it is considered reading with the congregation' (for the congregation has already started reading this portion at Minchah on Shabbos). But the mitzvah done in its perfection is to be read on Erev Shabbos in the afternoon?

You should [first] read each chapter two times and after that the Targum. It makes no difference if the Chapter is a closed or open one. And even if the chapter ends in the middle of a verse, you should stop there. After finishing the Targum you should read one verse from the Torah in order to conclude with the Torah. It is best not to interrupt the reading with conversation?

It is also customary to read the Haftarah, and some are accustomed also to say Shir Hashirim after that?

If you are traveling and you have only a chumash without Targum, you should read the weekly Torah portion two times, and when you come to a place where a Targum is available you should read the Targum?

> Every G-d fearing Jew should also study Rashi's commentary on the Sidrah. If you are not capable [of learning Rashi], you should study a commentary in Yiddish (or English) such as the sefer Tzenah Ure'enah in order to understand the subject matter of the Sidrah?

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ When the synagogue attendant called Rabbi Akiva to read from the Torah scroll in public and he declined to go up, his students asked why. Rabbi Akiva explained that he never read a Torah portion before the congregation without first reviewing it twice and three times in private; just as Hashem Himself reviewed the Ten Commandments before speaking them at Sinai.

*Midrash Tanchuma, Yisro 15*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ A few years after the passing of the Gerrer Rebbe, The Beis Yisroel, a taxi driver picked up a Gerrer chassid and told him a story. Decades earlier, as a young man, he had driven the Gerrer Rebbe, who asked him what he was thinking about as he drove. The driver answered honestly. 'I am thinking about getting to the destination as quickly as I can so that I can collect the fare and pick up another customer.' 'But how do those thoughts benefit you?' the Rebbe asked. 'Why not use this time to think about ideas that can make your life better?' 'Like what sort of ideas?' the driver asked, intrigued. The Rebbe informed the driver that Rabbi Pinchas Kehati had recently begun to publish a weekly digest of Mishnayos, a perek each week explained very clearly. 'If you learn Mishnayos in the morning, before work,' the Rebbe said, 'you can review and memorize them all day when you are in the car. In this way, you can eventually know all of Shishah Sidrei Mishnah by heart.' The driver turned around to face his passenger, a proud smile on his face. 'Today, I am in the middle of Mikvaos, and I already know all of Shishah Sidrei Mishnah by heart,' he said proudly."

*Table Talk, Edition 386 (Parshas Pesach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ A group of maskilim complained to Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk that he was too stringent in his rulings. He answered that they had no reason to be concerned; he would be pleased to share with them a number of leniencies. As they wondered what he meant by this, he opened up the Shulchan Aruch" and read to them the law about reading the weekly portion, "shnayim mikra v'echad targum." There it states that one who fears Heaven should not only read the pasuk with Onkelus, but should also add the commentary of Rashi. "Now," he said to them, "in spite of the fact that it says here that one who fears Heaven should learn Rashi, I am lenient and I permit even one who doesn't fear Heaven to learn Rashi."

*From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim*

❖ A wealthy man came once with $10,000 — a huge sum in those days — intended for the kollel. This would have been enough to cover the kollel's needs for quite a long time and spare the Brisker Rav much anguish. But the Brisker Rav refused, saying: "The kollel doesn't need so much money right now.

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 14*

❖ Immediately after the war was over the Klausenberger Rebbe asked for a chumash and began to diligently review the entire year's worth of Torah readings with the Targum in order to make up for those he had missed during his imprisonment in the concentration camps.

*The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press*

❖ A project was once undertaken by the Chachmei HaKabbalah. These erudite mystics wished to compile a commentary on the Talmud in accordance with the Zohar. They commenced their massive undertaking and were dismayed to learn, at the very outset, that they had amassed reams and reams of material, and the commentary for just the first page appeared endlessly long. The scholars began to condense their work, but found that it was still too lengthy. So they condensed some more. Painstakingly deleting and abridging the work, they discovered to their astonishment that they were left with... Rashi!

*Sunset, By Rabbi Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

## B. TO LISTEN TO THE PUBLIC READING OF THE TORAH

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 37-1**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Can a listener assist the reader, and read out loud while the reader is reading?

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must incline his ear to listen to the public reading of the Torah (krias haTorah) from the reader (ba'al korei) with the utmost reverence, as if receiving it at this very moment directly from the mouth of Hashem at Mount Sinai. One should conduct himself as a mute person who possesses no mouth: no congregant should prompt or assist the reader aloud, nor should anyone utter a single word — even reciting quietly the very words the reader is chanting. As Scripture states: "And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Torah" (Nechemiah 8:3).

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:8)

Krias HaTorah brings us a great tikun, in two ways.

The hasmada of constantly finishing the Torah.

Reading the Torah on the moadim.

The first tikun is the hasmada. When we read the Torah we get its he'arah. But in order to get this hara constantly Chazal instituted the reading of the Torah. By this constant reading we get a constant hara of the kedushah.

Also on the moadim we read the parshios that pertain to them to be meorer the haara of the day by the Torah which is the strongest coach that we have.

### MORAL DILEMMAS:

Rabbi Grossmann was a chaplain in a prison in Israel. One of his roles was to organize a weekly minyan in the prison so that the Jewish inmates could daven with a minyan. One day, on a day that the Torah is read, they called up the Kohein and he got the aliya. For the second aliya they called up Eitan, the Levi. Eitan was a strong, strident man. When he went up for the aliya, he was not wearing a kippah or anything on his head. The gabbai handed Eitan a kippah, but Eitan refused. “I don’t wear a kippah”, he said sharply. Rabbi Grossman had the following question rush through his

mind. One is not supposed to read the Torah and make a blessing with an uncovered head. Eitan though, was the only Levi at the minyan. Which is preferred, to called the Levi to read from the Torah without a kippah or hat, or to skip the Levi altogether and call someone else in his place. What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the issue of giving an Aliyah to a Levi who refuses to cover his head, Rav Zilberstein answered that it would be preferred to give the Levi the aliyah, even if he chooses to do the wrong thing by not covering his head.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 478 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 82 (Chukas))*

As is customary in many shuls, Yanky's shul auctioned off the aliyos for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The purpose of the auction was to raise badly needed funds for the shul expenses. Yanky bought R'vii on Rosh Hashanah for $200. Aron, another shul member, happened to miss the auction and wanted to have an aliyah on Rosh Hashanah very badly. In his family they always tried to have an aliyah on the Yomim Noraim and it meant very much to him. When Aron realized that he missed his chance to purchase the aliyah, he asked Yanky if he would resell the aliyah to him. Yanky said, "The truth is that I wanted this for myself. But if it means so much to you Aron, I will sell it to you for $1000". Without hesitating, Aron agreed. He knew it was expensive but he felt that he was getting a great deal. Both Yanky and Aron were happy with the outcome. After the Yamim Noraim, the shul president heard about this story. He knew that Yanky bought the aliyah but resold it to Aron. The shul president approached Aron and said as follows. "I know that you bought the aliyah from Yanky, but we are the ones who are providing the aliyah. You should give Yanky what he paid for it, the $200. And you should give the shul the balance of the $800. When Yanky heard what the president asked, he felt that was very wrong. "The profit, the $800 should go to me", Yanky told the shul president, "because I sold my rights to the aliyah to Aron. Of course the shul were the ones giving the aliyah, but I bought the rights and I should get the $800." The president responded that Yanky never owned the aliyah, he was just benefiting from the service. The service was being provided by the shul and if the shul gave it to Yanky, he should pay them. If they gave it to Aron, Aron should pay them. This question was eventually brought to Rav Zilberstein. Who do you think has the rights to the $800 profit?

**Answer:** The question regarding the fellow who resold his Rosh Hashanah aliyah was brought to Rav Elyashiv, He answered that one should not resell the aliyos of the shul. However once it was done, the reseller should receive the profits, but he would have an obligation to share a portion of the profits with the shul.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Rosh Hashanah, p. 308*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ How was the King's Torah Reading (Hakhel) performed? At the conclusion of the first Festival day of Sukkos, on the eighth day at the close of the Seventh (Sabbatical) Year, they would erect a wooden platform (bimah) for him in the Temple Courtyard, and he would sit upon it, as it is written (Devarim 31:10): 'At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time...' The synagogue attendant (chazzan ha-knesses) would take a Sefer Torah and hand it to the head of the congregation, who handed it to the Deputy High Priest (Segan), who handed it to the High Priest, and the High Priest handed it to the King. Although the King was permitted to sit while reading, King Agrippa stood up to receive the Sefer Torah and read it standing, and the Sages praised him for honoring the Torah. When he reached the verse (Devarim 17:15), 'You may not set over yourself a foreigner who is not your brother,' tears streamed from his eyes because of his Herodian lineage. The people called out to him: 'Do not fear, Agrippa! You are our brother, you are our brother, you are our brother!'

*Mishnah, Sotah 7:8*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ The Rebbetzin's father, R' Elyashiv, had to be hospitalized right before Shabbos in the Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital. 'A group of R' Elyashiv's grandchildren and an askun who knew all the doctors in the hospital were with him for Shabbos. The grandchildren arranged for a minyan with a Sefer Torah to be present at R' Elyashiv's bedside, but they didn't have a baal korei to read the Torah. One of the grandchildren, walking through the hallways of the hospital, saw 16-year-old "Tuviah Schwartz" standing outside his mother's hospital room. "Are you a baal korei?" the grandchild asked hopefully. "I can lein this week's parshah," Tuviah responded. "Could you be the baal korei for R' Elyashiv?" "Absolutely!" replied the bachur, and he ran to call his father out of his mother's hospital room for Shacharis. Tuviah leined beautifully, and after davening R' Elyashiv called him over to express his gratitude. Afterward, "Mr. Schwartz" approached R' Elyashiv. "There is an interesting story behind Tuviah's knowing how to lein this week's parshah," he began. "Three years ago this week was my son's bar mitzvah Shabbos. I had told the gabbai of the shul that my son would be leining in shul and received his consent. Three days before the bar mitzvah, the gabbai called and told us that he had a big dilemma. He had apparently became confused and agreed to allow another bar mitzvah boy to lein that week in shul. The gabbai was at a loss. Who should lein? "After giving the matter considerable thought, my son decided that despite his extensive preparation for krias haTorah, he would allow the other boy to lein. "Perhaps in the merit that my son was 'mevatel' at his bar mitzvah, he had the honor of reading the Torah for the Rav today," the father concluded. R' Elyashiv smiled. "What brings you to the hospital?" he asked. "My wife has already been here for six weeks, but the doctors have thus far been unable to diagnose her illness," Mr. Schwartz replied. The medical askan who was with R' Elyashiv immediately interjected. "Professor 'Gruen' is coming to visit R' Elyashiv tomorrow. I will ask him to review Mrs. Schwartz's medical chart." The next day the specialist came by. After he finished attending to R' Elyashiv, he examined the young baal korei's mother and diagnosed a rare disease that had eluded the attending physicians. He prescribed a regimen of medications that immediately improved her condition. Several days later, Mrs. Schwartz was discharged from the hospital, full of joy and gratitude. When she recounted this story, Rebbetzin Kanievsky always drove home the point: Although Tuviah didn't lein on the Shabbos of his bar mitzvah despite having prepared the leining, Hashem paid him back by having him lein for R' Elyashiv and thereby help find a cure for his mother's illness.

*Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ For many years the Agudah of Park Heights had two main baalei kriyah, Reb Moshe Juravel z'l and l'hibadel Reb Izzy Strauss. They would take turns leining; one week Reb Moshe and the other Reb Izzy. One Shabbos morning before davening, the week for Reb Moshe was to lein, Reb Moshe approached Reb Izzy. "I have a sore throat and it will be difficult for me to lien, could you lein in my place?" Reb Izzy, a well-seasoned baal korei, told Reb Moshe that it would not be a problem. "I have not prepared but I will be able to do it." After giving a moment of thought Reb Moshe told Reb Izzy that he would like to lein the first aliyah. After that first aliyah the tzibur would already hear that it was difficult for Reb Moshe to lein. He would then step down and Reb Izzy would be called up to take over. This way, if anyone would have any doubts about Reb Izzy's leining it would be understood and appreciated.

*Table Talk, Edition 355 (Parshas Haazinu), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

## C. NOT TO READ THE WRITTEN TORAH BY HEART

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 10-2**

*As the Torah says "You shall write these words" (Shemos 34:27, Parshas Ki Sisa)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

▪ Which parts of the Torah cannot be read by heart?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Scripture states: "Write down these words for yourself" (Shemos 34:27). From this verse Chazal derived that words of the Written Torah (Torah Shebichtav) may not be recited from memory; rather, one must read the written text with one's eyes. The only exceptions are universally familiar passages that are obligatory upon every individual, such as Krias Shema, which may be recited by heart. Likewise, the sacrificial passages (parshas hakorbanos) may be recited from memory, because their verbal recitation is considered before Hashem as equivalent to offering the actual sacrifice.

## D. NOT TO TALK DURING KRIAS HATORAH

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-9**

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

▪ Can one talk about Torah matters during the reading of the Torah?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Scripture states: "And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Torah" (Nechemiah 8:3). From this verse our Sages derived that once the reader begins chanting the Torah scroll, all speech is strictly forbidden, even regarding weighty matters of halachah.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Yackov Kamenetsky once attended a bar mitzvah where the bar mitzvah boy had a difficult time with the Torah reading. In the middle of the reading, R' Yaakov had to briefly leave the shul. When he returned, he was asked if he wanted the portion to be read again from the point where he had left. R' Yaakov declined this offer, out of concern that the bar mitzvah boy would think that the portion was being read again because he had read poorly. Krias HaTorah (the public Torah reading) is a Rabbinic mitzvah, but the requirement that we not cause hurt or embarrassment to our fellow Jew is mandated by the Torah.

*5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## E. NOT TO LEAVE THE SHUL IN THE MIDDLE OF KRIAS HATORAH

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 50-8**

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

▪ Can one leave the shul in between the aliyos?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Once the Sefer Torah has been opened, it is forbidden to exit the synagogue, even between the individual portions (aliyos). Regarding one who departs and forsakes the reading, Scripture declares: "And those who abandon Hashem shall perish" (Yeshayahu 1:28).

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Reb Shlomo Haiman fell ill and passed away at a relatively young age, while still in his prime. At his funeral, Reb Eliyahu Moshe Shisgal wept so uncontrollably that it interfered with the eulogies. Some of the rabbis were annoyed with him, but one of them said, "Let him be. His is the greatest eulogy."

*Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## F. TO LISTEN TO ALL WORDS OF TORAH

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 11-1**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Hashem commanded us to listen attentively to the teachings of all who instruct the Torah. The foundational fulfillment of Torah study is dependent upon attentive listening with one's ears and heart, for if a person does not listen to Torah with focus, he cannot acquire or retain its wisdom.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ Our Sages taught: When a poor man, a rich man, and a wicked man come before the Heavenly Court for judgment, they ask the poor man: 'Why did you not engage in Torah study?' If he replies, 'I was impoverished and preoccupied with earning my livelihood,' they say to him: 'Were you ever poorer than Hillel?' It was told of Hillel the Elder that every single day he would work as a day-laborer and earn one tropaik (half a dinar). Half of it he would give to the doorkeeper of the Study Hall, and with the other half he supported himself and his household. One winter Friday (Erev Shabbos) in the season of Teves, he could not find work to earn a wage, and the doorkeeper of the Study Hall refused to let him enter. Undeterred, Hillel climbed up onto the roof, suspended himself, and sat at the edge of the skylight so that he could hear the words of the living God from the mouths of Shemayah and Avtalyon. That night heavy snow fell from heaven upon him. When dawn broke on Shabbos morning, Shemayah said to Avtalyon: 'Avtalyon my brother, every day the Study Hall is bright with light, yet today it is dark—is it a cloudy day?' They looked up and saw the figure of a man blocking the skylight! They climbed up to the roof and found him buried under three cubits of snow. They dug him out, bathed him, anointed him with oil, seated him opposite the blazing fire on Shabbos, and declared: 'This man is worthy that Shabbos be desecrated on his behalf!'

*Talmud Bavli, Yoma 35b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rabbi Paysach Diskind related the following beautiful story: Two weeks ago, Parshas Behar, my wife and I spent Shabbos at a hospital close to Lakewood. Considering that a large Ob/Gyn practice worked at that hospital we were hopeful that there would be a minyan. Friday evening came and after waiting some time we realized that it was just the six of us so we davened b'yichidus together. After Minchah someone shared a beautiful dvar Torah from Reb Moshe Feinstein (top left) on the mitzvah of Shmita. The next morning there was hope that perhaps there would be a minyan since people

may have come during the night as well as more folks discovering that there was minyan. Nevertheless, after waiting some time we realized it would only be the seven of us. There was one new arrival. We lained from a chumash, as we practiced in our Covid days, and after davening our new arrival, a chassidishe yungerman, asked if he could deliver a dvar Torah. Before sharing his thought, he introduced it as a very famous chassidshe vort from the Rebbe Reb Zusha (top right). He then began his thought which was the very same vort that was shared Friday night in the name of Reb Moshe. Not one of the other six participants said a word that might have indicated that this very vort was already shared last night. Every one of the participants recognized the value of granting another person his due respect. We really are an amazing nation!

*Table Talk, Edition 392 (Parshas Bamidbar), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

## G. NOT TO GO TO SLEEP UNTIL YOU HAVE STUDIED TORAH THAT DAY

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-22**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should not retire to sleep until he has engaged in Torah study, as Scripture states: "He who is satisfied shall sleep, and will not be visited by evil" (Mishlei 19:23). Our Sages explain that one should satisfy his soul with words of Torah before going to sleep, thereby shielding himself from harm.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The study of Torah encompassed the Lev Simcha's entire being; it was the nucleus around which all other facets of his life revolved. 'Like all studious talmidei chachamim, he would review orally and dwell on Torah thoughts at all times, even when he was walking or traveling. This was in fulfilment of the passuk, "... and you shall speak divrei Torah when you are sitting in your house and when you are going on your Way...." 13 The Lev Simcha, however, had a deeper understanding of the passuk. According to his interpretation, the learning of Torah takes on a special quality, which corresponds to the circumstances in which it takes place. The Torah's intention, therefore, is not simply to command us to speak divrei Torah at all times, which may just happen to include our Walking, going to sleep and rising in the morning. Rather, the Torah is telling us that there is a special mitzvah to speak divrei Torah while walking, while going to sleep and while rising in the morning, because the insights attained then cannot be attained when one learns Torah in the ordinary manner. Torah learned while sitting at home has its own unique qualities, as does Torah learned while performing all other mundane activities. So in addition to learning "while sitting in one's house," the Lev Simcha made a point of learning "While going" as well. During his daily Walks he reviewed what he had learned by heart, and he rarely talked with his attendants. Before leaving his house he would put a safer in his pocket so that he could learn from it when opportunities arose. When he sat down to rest during a walk, or when he was riding in a car, he would take out his sefer and learn from it.

*From The Summit, By Simcha Leib Grossbard, Published by Yeshurun Publications*

❖ When R' Meir Shapiro was a young child, his mother hired a melamed to study with him. When she ran out of money to pay the melamed, she pawned her jewelry. "One day there was a big snowstorm and the melamed didn't come. R' Meir's mother cried for a very long time that morning. "Young Meir tried to reassure his mother. 'I'm sure the melamed will come tomorrow and we will make up what we missed today,' he said. "'Meir,' she replied, 'it is important that kvius (regularity) be maintained. It is a great loss to miss a day of learning. That's why I'm so sad!" R' Meir Shapiro later gave his mother part of the credit for his idea of introducing the concept of Daf Yomi.

*Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## H. TO WAKE UP EARLY TO LEARN TORAH, THE FIRST THING YOU DO SHOULD BE TO LEARN TORAH

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-24**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

One should awaken early to engage in Torah study, as Scripture states: "Arise, sing out in the night, at the beginning of the watches" (Eichah 2:19). Our Sages taught that the true song and elevation of Torah study takes place in the quiet hours of the night. This was the holy custom of Dovid HaMelech, who arose at midnight to immerse himself in Torah; the people of Israel heard the resonance of his voice and were likewise inspired to rise and dedicate themselves to Torah study.

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ What was the beginning of Rabbi Akiva? They said: Until he was forty years old, he had learned nothing at all. Once he was standing by the mouth of a well in Lod when he noticed a heavy stone at the rim of the well that had been deeply hollowed out. He asked, 'Who carved out this hard stone?' They answered him: 'It was not carved by a chisel, but by the water and rope constantly passing over it every single day, as it is written (Job 14:19): Water wears away stones!' Immediately Rabbi Akiva reasoned within himself: 'If soft water can carve its way through hard stone simply through steady, daily persistence, how much more so can the words of Torah—which are as strong as iron—carve their way into my heart, which is only flesh and blood!' Right away he went together with his young son to the children's schoolteacher and said, 'Master, teach me Torah!' Rabbi Akiva held one end of the writing tablet and his little son held the other end: the teacher wrote down Alef and Beis for him and he learned it, Alef to Tav and he learned it, then the Book of Leviticus, and he kept going until he learned the entire Torah and comparing him to a quarryman who patiently chips away pebbles from a mountain until he uproots the entire mountain!

*Avos DeRabbi Natan, Recension B, Add. 8:14-15 (cf. Recension A 6:1-2)*

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ From the following incident we can learn about the attitudes of previous generations regarding diligence in Torah studies. The Brisker Rav heard it from his father and would often share it with his family and friends: When R. Chaim was first married and he was unable to acquire his own set of arba minim, he would use those of his grandfather-in-law, the Netziv. The custom was that the congregation would not begin reciting Hallel until R. Chaim made his berachah and shook his arba minim. One year, on the first day of Sukkos, when it came time for R. Chaim to take the arba minim, he was nowhere to be seen in the shul. When the Netziv noticed his absence, he instructed the congregation not to wait any longer and to begin reciting Hallel. A few minutes later, R. Chaim appeared at the entrance to the shul, and the Netziv hurried over to give him the chance to make the berachah as was his custom. Surprisingly, R. Chaim refused, saying that he would explain his behavior later. When the prayers were concluded, the Netziv asked him to explain why he had not taken the arba minim. "Why is this year different from all other years?". R. Chaim answered that a she'eilah had arisen regarding the Netziv's esrog. This question, he added, "applies only to me. It has nothing to do with anyone else.". "What do you mean?" asked the Netziv. "If there is a she'eilah regarding the esrog, surely it applies to me the same as to you." Only then did R. Chaim explain his reasoning: "This year is the eighth year of the shemittah cycle and your esrog came from Eretz Yisrael. Even though it comes from a non-Jew, nevertheless, it was harvested in the seventh year, and I am machmir on myself in this. "If so, said the Netziv, "Then it is a she'eilah for me as well.": The next day the second day of Yom Tov, at about four in the morning, R. Chaim was awakened by a knock at his door. It was the shamash of the Netziv, who had been sent to call

for R. Chaim. R. Chaim was quite disturbed, wondering what could be the matter necessitating his coming to the Netziv at such an early hour on Yom Tov. He got dressed without a word and rushed to the Netziv's house to find him sitting among mountains of sefarim of Rishonim and Acharonim. The Netziv welcomed him with joy, announcing, "I have good news for you; you can make a berachah on my esrog today with no problem. Immediately after our discussion yesterday I sat down to analyze the question I have been at it since then, and I have concluded beyond any doubt that it is permissible to fulfill the mitzvah with my esrog." The Netziv began to elaborate the details of his reasoning, but R. Chaim interrupted him, "I have not yet said birchos haTorah." He then stood himself in the corner of the room and began saying the berachos slowly and with great concentration, as was his custom. When he concluded his blessings, R. Chaim was astonished to see tears flowing down the cheeks of the Netziv. "What is it?" he asked. "How will I not weep," responded the Netziv, "when a young avreich like you has not said birchos haTorah by four o'clock in the morning?! What will become of the next generation?!" R. Chaim would tell this story to The Brisker Rav adding: Everyone knows about the principle of yeridas ha-doros, that subsequent generations lose something in comparison with the previous ones especially when it comes to ruchnius. But, I will tell you something more: yeridah ha-doros exists even from one generation to the next-look at the huge difference between the Netziv and myself. He could not understand how a Jew could hope to grow and become a gadol if he was still sleeping at four in the morning on Yom Tov. And this upset him so that he wept over it. And we... what do we have to say for ourselves?

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 45*

❖ Life under the rule of the Russian czar was difficult, made all the more harder for the Jews of Russia by the constant decrees that never seemed to stop coming. Many edicts were issued against the practice in observance of Judaism, a number of notorious policies against Jewish education, and monetary decrees were almost routine to the already impoverished people. Many Jews were forced to flee their homes, and Moscow which eventually became the capital city of the USSR under the Bolsheviks even forbade Jews to reside there. Only certain worker permits issued to Jews in special cases. The Rav of Moscow had been the renowned Rabbi Chaim Berlin the son of the famous Netziv. Thousands of Muscovite Jews fled the city. Rabbi Chaim Berlin remained behind determined to see that every last Jew found a place to resettle. That same year as Rosh Hashanah approached only a few dozen Jews were left in the city. One of the remaining members produced a shofar, the only one left in the city and was preparing to blow it on the holy day. To his horror and dismay however he noticed a large crack along the length of the shofar which invalidated it. The holiday would soon be upon them and there was no time to procure a second horn. Rabbi Berlin and the remaining Jews of Moscow realized that this would likely be the first time in their lives that they would be unable to perform the mitzvah of hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. With a heavy heart, the rabbi resigned himself to the situation. Well, he thought sadly, if I cannot hear the sound of the shofar at least let me study the laws of the shofar. Maybe in that merit it will allow me to somewhat make up for the loss of the mitzvah. On the first night of Rosh Hashanah the rabbi stayed up all night in the study hall studying any and all the laws pertaining to the commandment of the shofar. At the crack of dawn he left the study hall and headed towards the large synagogue for the early morning prayers. As he looked up he couldn't believe his eyes. Running down the empty streets right in front of him was a horse drawn wagon adorned on all sides with unusual crafts, historical artifacts, and an assortment of musical instruments including a ram's horn exactly like a shofar. The stunned rabbi hastily ran over to the coachman and asked "where did you get this horn from"? The coachman had been enjoying the peaceful stillness of the early morning and jumped up startled. Looking directly at the Rav he began sputtering incoherently until he finally blurted out " rabbi I didn't know it was yours. I would have never stolen it had I known it was yours" Slowly the story came out that the gentile coachman had a hobby of collecting all sorts of horns trumpets and wind instruments. When the Jews of Moscow left the city he went rummaging through the old deserted synagogue looking for anything of value. It was there that he came across this rams horn and it became one of his valued collectibles. "But Rabbi," the gentile pleaded, hoping that the Rabbi would not report his theft. "Take it, it is yours. It is the only one I found but I want you to have it. Rabbi Berlin's joy knew no

bounds. That year the Jews of Moscow merited the fulfillment of tekias shofar, and it would be quite some time before such a sound would be heard again in the city. The selfless act of staying up all night studying the laws of the shofar was the merit that allowed the Reb Chaim to obtain and fulfill the mitzvah of the shofar.

*Heroes of Spirit, 100 Rabbinic Tales of the Holocaust. By Rabbi Dovid Hoffman*

❖ R' Mordechai Leib Kaminetzky lived in Yerushalayim in the beginning of the 20th century. He would get up as early as 2 am and walk in the streets holding a lantern walking to the beis medrash. He did this even when he was as old as 96. People thought he could not sleep. He said that he would love to roll over but as soon as he wakes up he gets up. R' Shalom Shwadron asked him why he had to get up when he first wakes up. He said on tisha B'Av in the midbar every man from 20-60 would lie in their graves and go to sleep. The next morning some died. The ones who woke up, do you think they rolled over and went back to sleep - of course not. They were filled with the thrill of being alive. When I was in my twenties I had a life threatening illness. I was told that I was going to die. Every night I was filled with the dread that this was my last night. But miraculously I began to recover. Do you think when I wake up I can just go back to sleep. As soon as I wake up, I am so grateful to be alive that I jump up and go to learn.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 126*

❖ Rav Aharon Kotler once told a businessman who had a night learning session that it is important to have an early morning session when one's mind is freshest. "One hour in the morning is worth two at night," he said.

*Living In His Image Master Curriculum Archive*

❖ I recall days gone by when we spent the summer together in a bungalow colony and I paid careful attention to Reb Moshe Feinstein's ways. He arose early each morning to study Torah and to supervise a non-Jew's milking so that all of us would have milk to drink. Then, he sat and recited that day's Tehillim with a sweetness that tugged at one's heart, with sincerity and hishtapchus hanefesh (outpouring of emotion). After that, we would walk together to Shacharis. Reb Moshe would recite mishnayos by heart as he walked, and one could tell that as he recited them, he was reviewing in his mind the sugyos of Gemara on each Mishnah. At two o'clock every afternoon, Reb Moshe would open a cot and take a nap outdoors for forty-five minutes. One day, I noticed that the cot was open but Reb Moshe was sitting and learning. When I asked him why he was not resting he replied, "Your little boy (who was around three) came over to me and said that he would like to rest on my bed. So I got off the bed and put him on it." Then he added with a smile, "Your little boy has caused me to learn more Torah!" I went over to the bed and found my son enjoying a peaceful nap.

*Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Harav Ovadia Yosef's brother Na'im related that on one winter morning, Ovadia rose extremely early to go learn, and he couldn't find his shoes. Concerned that his search might awaken other members of the family, Ovadia slipped on several pairs of socks and walked out into the Yerushalayim morning chill.

*Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## I. IF THREE SIT AT A MEAL, THEY SHOULD EXCHANGE WORDS OF TORAH

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-29**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

When three individuals dine at a single table, they are obligated to share words of Torah during their meal. Concerning such a gathering, Scripture states: "And he said to me: This is the table that is before Hashem" (Yechezkel 41:22), for sharing Torah transforms the physical meal into an offering upon the altar of the Almighty.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ At the climax of the famous meal in the home of the widow of Rav Hamnuna Saba, after her young son (the Yenuka) had unveiled breathtaking mysteries of the Torah over the washing of hands and the breaking of bread, all the great Sages stood up and kissed the child on his head! Rabbi Elazar exclaimed: 'Even if the Prophet Yechezkel himself had spoken these words, the entire world would stand in awe!' Then the child called out: 'From here on, Companions, let us recite Birkas HaMazon (Grace After Meals)!' The Sages handed the Cup of Blessing (Kos Shel Brachah) to the young child, and he led Birkas HaMazon with such radiant holiness and joy that the Companions testified they had never experienced such heavenly gladness since the wedding day of Rabbi Elazar — blessing the child and his mother from the depths of their hearts!

*Zohar, Volume III (Bamidbar), Balak 191b–192a (6:91–98)*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Yechiel Benedikt, born in 1907 in Europe, emigrated to Eretz Yisroel in 1938. Among his choshuva children was his son in-law, Reb Meir Soloveichik, son of the Brisker Rav. He settled in the area of Tel Aviv and developed a close relationship with the Chazon Ish whom he considered his Rebbi. It was not easy raising a family in the new fledgling country of Israel so he went to his Rebbi, the Chazon Ish for pointers on what are the most important things he should focus on to insure his children grow in the proper spirit of Torah. The Chazon Ish recommended that he ask this question to the Belzer Rebbe, Reb Arele Belzer who arrived in Eretz Yisroel after the war. The Chazon Ish then asked Rav Yechiel to please get back to him on what the Belzer Rebbe would advise. The Belzer Rebbe told Reb Yechiel that the Shabbos table is a critical component in raising children. "If your Shabbos table is filled with joyous zemiros and pleasant Torah talk in a relaxed atmosphere you will have much hatzlacha in raising your children."

*Table Talk, Edition 403 (Parshas Eikev), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner (as told by Reb Yosef Tzvi Benedikt)*

❖ Rabbi Avraham Pam compares people conversing in Torah to the newly engaged young woman who shows off her engagement ring to others. The girl is so excited that she wants to share the tangible evidence of her joy with everybody. Likewise, one who appreciates the sparkling beauty of the Torah's wisdom wants everybody else to share in his joy. God remembers these moments of passion and repays man for them.

*The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## J. TO STUDY TORAH OUT LOUD

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38–33**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Scripture states concerning the eternal covenant: "Set in order with all things, and secured" (Shmuel II 23:5). Our Sages derived from this verse that a person must articulate all of his Torah study aloud, engaging all two hundred and forty-eight limbs in the exertion of learning; the words must be clearly vocalized with vitality rather than

studied silently, for vocal articulation secures the Torah firmly in one's memory.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ Bruriah once found a certain student who was reviewing his Torah study in a quiet whisper. She rebuked him and said: 'Is it not written (II Samuel 23:5): "Ordered in all things and secure"? If your Torah is ordered in all two hundred and forty-eight limbs of your body by speaking it aloud, it will be preserved in your memory; if not, it will not be preserved!' Similarly, a Tanna taught: Rabbi Eliezer had a certain disciple who studied in a whisper, and after three years he forgot his learning. Shmuel said to Rav Yehudah: 'Sharp one (Shinena)! Open your mouth and read Scripture aloud; open your mouth and repeat Mishnah aloud, so that your learning will endure in you and prolong your life, as it is written (Proverbs 4:22): "For they are life to those who find them (lemotz'eihem)"—do not read lemotz'eihem (to those who find them), but rather lemotzi'eihem bapeh (to those who articulate them aloud with the mouth)!' Rabbi Perida had a student to whom he had to repeat every lesson four hundred times before the student grasped it. One day, Rabbi Perida was called away after the lesson for a communal mitzvah matter. He taught the student four hundred times as usual, yet the student still did not grasp it. Rabbi Perida asked gently: 'My son, what is different today?' The student answered: 'From the moment they told Master that there is a mitzvah matter waiting, my mind became distracted, and every moment I kept thinking: "Now the Master will get up to leave, now the Master will get up to leave!"' Rabbi Perida said to him: 'Set your mind at ease, and I will teach you again!' And he sat down and taught him the lesson another four hundred times.

*Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 53b–54b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ When Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman was 12, he began studying in Yeshivas Toras Chesed in his hometown of Brisk. Many fine students from Brisk and the surrounding area came to learn there, including the older sons of the Brisker Rav, who also attended the shiur of the Imrei Moshe. R' Zev Eidelman, a close childhood friend of R' Aharon Leib, told R' Aharon Leib's children that some bachurim in the yeshivah, most of whom were at least 15 years old, resented that Aharon Leib, who was three years younger, was entering Toras Chesed. As a prank, they placed a long, shallow bowl in his dormitory bed, filled it with water, and waited for him to lie down in his bed at night -- and get drenched. They waited and waited and waited. When Aharon Leib didn't show up, they went to the beis midrash, where they found him with his head down on the shtender, dozing. This scenario was repeated for several nights until the boys realized that Aharon Leib didn't use his dormitory bed but catnapped in the beis midrash. Seeing his diligence in learning, the older bachurim began respecting the young talmid and didn't bother him again. Many years later, his grandson, R' Gedaliah Honigsberg, asked R' Aharon Leib if he remembered sleeping in the beis midrash most nights. R' Aharon Leib was evasive and replied that he didn't remember where he slept; he just remembered the joy in learning Maseches Yevamos.

*Table Talk, Edition 270 (Parshas Mishpatim), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

## K. TO STUDY TORAH WITH A TUNE

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38–34**

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

▪ What is he expressing if he doesn't do this?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Rabbi Yochanan taught: Whoever reads from the Written Torah without a melodious tune, or studies the Mishnah without a chanting song, of him Scripture declares: "And I also gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances whereby they should not live" (Yechezkel 20:25), for the sweetness of musical chant enlivens and honors the words of Torah.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rabbi Dovid Trenk derived great pleasure from the albums produced by his friend and fellow talmid of the Mirrer Yeshivah, Reb Shmuel Kunda. R' Kunda was the multitalented Illustrator, Author, Songwriter, Singer, and Voice Actor behind the dozens of albums and children's tapes that include, When Zaidy Was Young Part 1 and 2, Boruch Learns His Brochos, The Magic Yarmulke, A Ton of Mon, Boruch Learns About Shabbos, The Longest Pesach, There's Zaidy, Zaidy's Great Idea, Where's Zaidy, The Talking Coins, The Royal Rescue, and The Miraculous Menorah. R' Shmuel Kunda was born in Shanghai, China, and later came over to the United States. He lived most of his life in Boro Park, Brooklyn, and later resided in Lakewood, NJ, and Cleveland at the end of his relatively short life. Rabbi Trenk felt that R' Kunda's albums mixed timeless chinuch with content that was entertaining and fun. He would always encourage Reb Shmuel. However, because Rabbi Trenk himself wasn't that musical, he never learned the songs from the album. However after Reb Shmuel suffered a stroke, that changed. Reb Dovid would go to the hospital to visit his friend. Before going to the hospital he made sure to prepare himself. He set aside time to "learn" all the songs on the Kunda albums. He didn't just master the tunes, but he mastered all the words. He was going to be mevaker choleh, and he would bring joy to the patient. Mastering the songs would bring the patient joy. So on Rabbi Kunda's most difficult days, Reb Dovid would be sitting near him hoarsely singing, "Kippah kippah, I wish you could talk and not leave me in doubt," or, "Jump on the trolley, you'll feel so jolly, riding the trolley, from Henry Street to East Broadway...," As Rav Trenk would sing, Reb Shmuel would nod along, smiling. He brought joy to the patient.

*From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## L. TO MAKE SURE THAT ONE DOES NOT FORGET THE TORAH HE HAS STUDIED

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-10**

*As it says, "Guard yourself, and guard your soul very much, so that you do not forget the things that your eyes have seen, and so that you do not turn away... Don't forget the day that you stood before Hashem your G-d at Chorev" (Devarim 4:9, Parshas Va'eschanan)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- What if he accidentally forgot?
- How does one allow himself to forget?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Included within this is the biblical prohibition against forgetting any portion of the Torah one has learned. Our Sages noted that one might think a person violates this prohibition even if he forgot unintentionally due to the natural limitations of memory; therefore Scripture states: "Lest they depart from your heart" (Devarim 4:9). This

> teaches that one does not transgress unless he willfully removes the words from his heart by neglecting consistent review, squandering time away from study, and failing to reflect upon them constantly.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ Once, when Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Chiya were engaged in a spirited debate, Rabbi Chanina said to Rabbi Chiya: 'Do you debate with me? Heaven forbid, if the Torah were ever forgotten from Israel, I could restore it through the sharpness of my analytical reasoning (pilpuli)!' Rabbi Chiya answered him: 'Do you debate with me? I have taken practical action to ensure that the Torah will never be forgotten from Israel in the first place! What do I do? I go out and sow flax, weave nets from the flax, trap deer, feed their meat to orphans, prepare parchment scrolls from their hides, and write out the Five Books of the Torah. Then I go up to a town that has no teachers, teach five young children the Five Books of the Chumash—each child a different Book—and teach six other children the Six Orders of the Mishnah—each child a different Order. Then I say to them: "Until I return and come back to you, teach your Books of Chumash to one another and teach your Orders of Mishnah to one another!" In this way, I have ensured that the Torah will never be forgotten from Israel!' That is why Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (Rebbi) exclaimed: 'How great are the deeds of Chiya!' Rabbi Yishmael ben Rabbi Yose asked him: 'Even greater than yours, Master?' Rebbi replied: 'Yes!' 'Even greater than my father's?' Rebbi replied: 'Heaven forbid—let such a thing not be said in Israel!'

*Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 85b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ There is a well-known story about R' Shmuel Berenbaum that transpired not long after World War II. The Mirrer Yeshiva, after six years in exile in Shanghai, China, had finally boarded the ship to sail across the Pacific Ocean toward America. As the ship neared the port of San Francisco, California, the famed Golden Gate Bridge, one of the most enduring symbols of California, came into view. The Golden Gate Bridge is a giant suspension bridge spanning the Golden Gate, the one-mile-wide strait connecting San Francisco and the Pacific Ocean. At the time of its opening in 1937, it was both the longest and the tallest suspension bridge in the world. Of course, for the Mirrer talmidim, who grew up in poverty-stricken Poland and Lithuania, it was a sight the likes of which they had never seen. As the bridge came into view, everyone went out on the deck to gaze at this marvel of invention and engineering ingenuity that symbolized American greatness and innovation. One talmid, however, stayed below, engrossed in his Gemara, learning with great diligence. That talmid was the young Shmuel Berenbaum. "Shmuel," one of his chaveirim exhorted, "come look at that bridge! It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. When are you ever going to have the chance to see such a sight again in your life?" R' Shmuel countered with a profound answer. "I will only have this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn a Tosafos when I could have been looking at the Golden Gate Bridge!" "My father-in-law told this story to his talmidim during Covid," R' Isser Zalman Olshin said. "He explained that they should view this tekufah, this Covid situation, as an opportunity for growth. 'After all,' he exclaimed, 'when will we be able to apply ourselves and learn with iyun and hasmadah when we are not in our regular surroundings, ensconced in our respective yeshivos!' He always sought to elevate bnei Torah and teach them how to access the greatness existing within them, showing them that they were performing the most important task in the entire creation."

*From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Rebbeim in TA in Baltimore had a meeting how to keep a relationship with their students after they leave their class. Rav Yitzchak Pollack, a soft spoken rebbe said he had a suggestion. He once called a former student the wrong name, and resolved to never make the mistake again. He kept the class picture and every month reviews all of the names. Just like we have to review Torah, and can't forget it, children learning Torah are Sifri Torah, carrying the future of all Torah and we

can't forget them.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 46*

❖ The Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yoel Teitelbaum) would often say in the name of his father, "Really, chazarah is the main learning, But you need to learn first so that you have something to review.

*The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 445*

❖ Reb Shlomo Zalman often told the story of two wagon drivers from Shklov, a storied Lithuanian town that was home to several of the Vilna Gaon's talmidim. They began to speak in learning, and when one of them proposed a novel Torah insight, his friend cited a mishnah in Taharos that flatly contradicted his premise. The first wagon driver was stunned: Had he forgotten an explicit mishnah? He sold his wagon and horse and returned full-time to the beis medrash, spending the next two years reviewing his learning—until he was confident that the mortifying experience of forgetting a mishnah wouldn't soon recur. That, Reb Shlomo Zalman would say, is how once upon a time a "simple" Jewish wagon driver in a town like Shklov felt about not knowing something in Torah.

*From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press*

❖ When Rav Gifter's son, Yisrael was getting married, he drove with his wife, the Chasan, and his grandson Tzvi. They came to the hall from the hotel and as they got out, Yisrael realized he forgot the ring at the hotel. They drove back. Yisrael and Rav Gifter's wife got out. As they left Rav Gifter began to cry uncontrollably. Tzvi asked what's wrong. Rav Gifter said the truth is that if you forget a wedding ring at the wedding it is not big deal. You can still have the wedding and get married giving a pruta. The ring can be replaced. But I just tried to recall a tosafos - Tzvi Gevalt, ich hab fargessen di tosafos. You can never replace a tosafos. However as soon as his wife came back to the car he composed himself. Despite his personal anguish he would never let his personal pain spoil a simchah for others.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 134*

## M. NOT TO INTERRUPT TORAH STUDIES FOR TRIVIAL THINGS

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-5**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to interrupt words of Torah to engage in worldly matters, as Scripture states: "Those who pluck mallow upon speech, and the root of broom-bushes is their food" (Iyov 30:4). Chazal explained that "mallow" (maluach) refers to the Torah that was inscribed upon the Tablets (luchos); whoever cuts short words of Torah for idle conversation will be recompensed with coals of broom-wood.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Terumah, the Midrash illustrates the giving of the Torah with a striking parable: a king had an only daughter whom he gave in marriage to a foreign prince. The Sfas Emes reveals that when Hashem bestowed the Torah upon Israel, He did not give a separate creation that exists apart from Himself. The Torah is the very expression of His divine will and wisdom; consequently, wherever the words of Torah are spoken, the Creator Himself is intimately present. In every earthly commercial transaction, the merchant walks away after receiving payment, leaving the customer alone with the purchased goods. We are never alone when we open a sacred text;

the Almighty Himself is sitting opposite us, delighting in every syllable. Protecting our study time from trivial intrusions is the greatest demonstration of our love and courtesy toward our heavenly Father (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Terumah 5647).

• In Parshas Yisro, Scripture describes Moshe Rabbeinu sitting to judge the people from morning until evening. The Talmud in Maseches Shabbos asks: is it possible that Moshe sat in judgment the entire day without eating or teaching Torah? The Sfas Emes examines the danger of bending divine values to appease secular approval. The Sfas Emes explains that while Yisro offered sensible administrative advice, the foundation of Jewish justice is completely different from gentile political governance. Secular judicial systems exist for social utility, economic convenience, and worldly peace. Jewish justice, by contrast, is an act of bearing witness to the divine presence; it clarifies the absolute sovereignty of the Creator in the physical world. We do not need to apologize for Torah values or reshape our heritage to conform to modern secular trends. By maintaining uncompromising pride in our sacred tradition, we earn genuine respect and sanctify Hashem's holy name (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Yisro 5632).

• The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos delivers an unnerving warning: one who is walking along the road reviewing his Torah studies and interrupts his learning to exclaim, 'How beautiful is this tree!' Why should appreciating the breathtaking beauty of the natural world while engaged in Torah review carry the penalty of spiritual death? The Sfas Emes explains that the Torah is not an external textbook of legal formulas; it is the living garment of divine oneness through which the Creator breathes life into reality. Every single Hebrew letter of the Torah possesses an inner spiritual vitality linked to the infinite source of all existence. When a person studies Torah with sincere devotion, his soul merges with this divine unity. We are holding onto the lifeline of divine reality. Guarding against trivial interruptions trains the mind to see through the superficial surface of nature and perceive the continuous life-force animating every corner of our world (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5654).

• King Solomon declares in the Book of Proverbs, 'She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and those who support her are fortunate.' In the opening of Sefer Devarim, the Midrash contrasts this living tree with the tongue that speaks deceit, declaring that Torah heals the human tongue and restores vitality to creation. The Sfas Emes explains that a tree is an organic, interdependent system consisting of roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit. As long as a branch remains firmly attached to the main trunk, the sap flows silently from the roots into every leaf, sustaining its greenness and vitality. The moment the branch is snapped off or detached, the flow of life stops instantly, and the branch rapidly withers into kindling. Resisting the urge to pause our learning for casual socializing is not mere rigid stoicism; it is self-preservation. By keeping our minds rooted in the sacred text, we remain vital, fruitful branches nourished directly by Hashem's eternal life-force (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5634).

• In Parshas Bo, the Torah commands that the remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt shall be 'as a sign upon your hand and a remembrance between your eyes, so that the Torah of Hashem shall be in your mouth.' Our Sages establish from this verse that the words of Torah must never depart from human speech. The Sfas Emes examines the phrase 'and I have placed My words in your mouth' and notes that Scripture uses the present tense, reflecting an ongoing divine transmission parallel to the Targum's rendering of Sinai: a great voice that never ceased. The Sfas Emes explains that Mount Sinai was not a singular historical event that concluded thousands of years ago; it was the opening of a permanent, continuous pipeline of divine speech into the world. Every minute

> spent reviewing a line of Gemara or Chumash is our personal participation in the ongoing revelation at Mount Sinai. By guarding our study from trivial worldly distractions, we honor the divine voice and allow its eternal clarity to purify our thoughts and speech throughout the day (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5635).

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Hashem's ways are, indeed, hidden from us. No one could have predicted that the Six Day War would forever alter the fate of our (then) estranged brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union. But it did. Though the Communist propaganda machine was working overtime to malign the "Israeli aggressors" and downplay their amazing triumph, the truth could not be hidden from Soviet Jewry. The Six Day War awakened within many of them a pride in their Jewishness. In some, it inspired the first yearnings to discover the rich heritage and traditions which the Communists had tried their best to eradicate from their midst. One of those who experienced a spiritual awakening at that time was a mathematics professor named Ilya Essas. Through tremendous determination and self-sacrifice, he mastered the Hebrew language, and in a short period of time amassed an astounding amount of Torah knowledge. Less than three months after beginning the study of Chumash, Ilya Essas was teaching Chumash to others. Today, Rabbi Eliyahu Essas is a respected talmid chacham who heads the Russian division of Yeshivah Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem. He is considered the "rebbi" of the ba'al teshuvah movement which arose in Russia following the Six Day War. The members of this movement studied Torah in secret under the Communists. Though well aware that their Torah study and other religious practices might lead to their arrest and imprisonment, this small, dedicated group illuminated the darkness of Communist Russia with a brilliant light. Once, a young couple, students of R' Essas, applied for visas to emigrate to the United States. The wife was granted a visa, but not the husband. The couple decided that it was wisest for the wife to take the opportunity while it was available and leave the country. Husband and wife parted tearfully, not knowing if and when they would see each other again. The wife wrote letters to her husband regularly, but the Communists intercepted them and would not allow the letters to reach their destination. Then, the wife heard that a certain rav was being sent as an emissary by Agudath Israel of America to spend some time in Russia teaching Torah in secret to the ba'alei teshuvah. The wife wrote a letter to her husband and asked the Rav to deliver it. He promised to try his best. After arriving in Russia, the rav located the husband and rang his doorbell. When the husband came to the door, the Rav handed him the letter and told him that it was from his wife. Tears welled up in the young man's eyes and he thanked the Rav profusely. Then, he took the still sealed letter and placed it in his pocket. "Aren't you going to open it?" the rav asked. "Yes, but not now," came the reply. "I am in the middle of studying Torah with my chavrusa. When we conclude our study session, then I will open the letter."

*Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One afternoon, a number of years ago, Reb Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg hurried into our home and asked my husband, Reb Moshe, to please come out to the porch to discuss something of importance with him. I was quite surprised, as Reb Chaim, who is very close to both of us, had never asked to speak privately with Reb Moshe before. They went out to the porch, and after quite a while they returned to our dining room. Reb Chaim then said good-bye to both of us, and left. Of course, I was very curious as to what was discussed that was so private that I could not be there! "What was that about? What was so secret that I couldn't listen to it?" I asked Reb Moshe. My husband told me. "Reb Chaim will be leaving shortly for his yearly fund-raising trip to the States. Since he won't be able to spend all his time with his Torah studies as he does here in Jerusalem, he asked if I would do him a great chessed and learn half an hour a day during the time he will be away, which is for about seven weeks, and that half hour of Torah study would be credited to him, Above." I looked at Reb Moshe in astonishment. "Did you agree?" Reb Moshe nodded. "Let me explain a bit more, Ruchoma. Reb Chaim suggested I split up the daily half hour and learn it in three ten-minute periods when I normally wouldn't be engaged in my own Torah study. Now, after our three meals, we usually talk for about ten minutes or so, so I agreed to study for him then. It meant so much to him, and of course Reb Chaim was very appreciative when I agreed." For the entire seven weeks that Reb Chaim

was in the States, Reb Moshe scrupulously kept the time and learned Torah ten minutes after breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as he had agreed, so that Reb Chaim would receive the complete credit for Reb Moshe's learning. Several years later, Reb Moshe passed away. When the seven-day mourning period was over and I got up from sitting shiva, I hurried up to Reb Chaim's house and said to him in a trembling voice, "Reb Chaim, you owe Reb Moshe a great debt. I am sure you recall that you came to our house several years ago and asked Reb Moshe to learn Torah half an hour a day for you when you were leaving for a fund-raising trip to the States, and you would earn the complete credit for his Torah learning. As you know, he carefully kept up the learning the entire time you were away. Now it is only one week to Rosh Hashanah, when Reb Moshe's shloshim ends, and I am asking you to learn Torah for half an hour a day for only this week, and your learning should be credited to Reb Moshe's holy neshamah." Reb Chaim stared at me in total shock, and his face turned pale. After a few moments, he said to me, "Ruchoma, it is impossible for me to do that." My sister, who had been listening to our conversation, took my side, and said, "Reb Chaim, it would only be fair for you to learn Torah for Reb Moshe, as he did for you." However, Reb Chaim continued to insist that he could not give half an hour a day for the entire week. Finally, after a long round of bargaining, he agreed to learn Torah five minutes a day for the seven days, which would total thirty-five minutes, and the credit would go to Reb Moshe. When I saw I could not budge him any further, I finally gave up. As I was leaving, Reb Chaim called me back. "Ruchoma," he said, "if someone walked into my house right now and offered me one million dollars for thirty-five minutes of my learning, I would not have accepted the money." I hurried down to my apartment and took out my pocket calculator, and divided thirty-five minutes into a million dollars and the amount came out to $28,571.43 per minute. I then wrote letters to each of my married children, who live in the States, telling them about my experience with Uncle Reb Chaim, and reporting the amount that one can get for each minute of learning Torah. At a later time, when I had asked Reb Chaim to give me permission to tell this experience to a group I was going to speak to, he added that there is really no amount of money in the world to measure the great worthiness of each minute of studying Torah.

*All for the Boss, By Ruchoma Shain, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ One story that spread rapidly through the yeshivah highlighted Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel's devotion to each seder at the end of the $400 for zman. Ephraim, who was extremely close to the Rush Yeshivah, was booked on a flight that required him to miss one Seder to leave for the airport midday on the last day of the zman. Since he was in Rav Asher Arielli's shiur, this meant missing second seder and one shim — but no more than that, Rav Asher specifically asked his talmidim to stay until the end of the zman, which left Ephraim in a quandary: Should he pay the $400 to have his ticket changed, or should he miss that one seder and shim? Ephraim discussed it with his father, who advised him to ask The Rosh Yeshivah what to do, "H the Rosh Yeshivah tells you to stay," his father said, "I'll pay the change fee on the ticket." When Ephraim went to Rav Nosson Tzvi to discuss the matter, the Rosh Yeshivah thought about it for a few minutes and then said, "I think you should slay." Ephraim accepted the Rosh Yeshivah's answer and turned to leave. As he was walking out the door, however, Rav Nosson Tzvi called him back. "I know that $400 is quite a sum," he said. "Since I'm the one who wants you to stay, it's my business, not yours." The Rush Yeshivah then reached into his pocket, counted out $400, and handed the money to Ephraim. "I can't lake this money," Ephraim stammered, trying to return it to the Rosh Yeshivah The Rosh Yeshivah would not hear of taking back the money, however. He wanted to make a point about the importance of every minute of learning and the value of a single shiur but not at someone else's expense.

*Rav Nosson Tzvi, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Yerucham Barash was the town wine maker, but no one knew when he made the wine, for most of the time he was in the bais hamidrash with two fingers stuck in his ears so as not to be distracted from his studies. When the government declared a monopoly on all alcoholic beverages, he was arrested and convicted to a one-year prison sentence. In jail he went through Shas twice. After his release, he commented, "Every Jew must serve in jail once in his life. One year is

not enough — at least, two, preferably three..."

*The Torah Personality, By Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, Published by Mesorah Publications*

❖ Rav Gifter did not just learn Torah, it was his life force. It fed him and drove him and infused every fiber of his being. When people would interrupt his learning Rav Gifter would quip, "They think that they are not letting me learn. They don't realize that they are not letting me live!"

*Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Brisker Rav had great patience towards children's wild behavior. They could be "bouncing off the walls" in the next room even while he was giving a shiur and he would ignore the ruckus, not letting on that he was aware of what they were doing. "When I was a young boy," my father took me to The Brisker Rav's house for prayers every Shabbos. "Once, another boy and I got on The Brisker Rav's bed, which was behind the chair where he was sitting and learning. We began jumping and dancing on the bed, laughing and carrying on as children do. "We were making quite a racket, with the bedsprings joining in as well. Suddenly, my father entered the room and was horrified by what he saw. He scolded us loudly: how dare we disturb The Brisker Rav in the middle of his learning? Not only this, but we were jumping on the bed in which he slept! But The Brisker Rav just looked up at my father. 'Why are you yelling at the children? They're not bothering me at all!

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 172*

❖ Yes, of course one can, and often must, go to a friend's wedding. The Chosson needs friends, needs ohavim to be mesameach him, and talmidim recall how the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Kotler, concerned himself with that too. However, Talmud Torah is a serious issue. And before deciding who should go and how early to go to a Chasuna, one should remember the Rosh Yeshivah's comment that "All the combined Mitzvos of Simchas Choson V'Kallah (gladdening the bride and groom) from Adam and Chava till this very day don't come to even one Mitzvah of Talmud Torah!"

*The Legacy of Rav Aharon Kotler, By Rabbi Yitzchok Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ "One evening," Nechama Vallis recalls, "I visited Rochel at home and was surprised to find her eating alone. She was having a tomato salad and I offered to add some cucumber to it. She said to me, 'Do you think I don't know how to make a salad? When Reb Shmuel Auerbach finishes learning in the next room, we're going to eat together, and I'm just having something small now to tide me over until then. But if I eat crunchy vegetables, the sounds might disturb my husband's concentration. It would be a chaval!'

*From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press*

❖ They were pioneers in a new neighborhood. As housing became increasingly expensive in chareidi areas, Gerrer chassidim followed the model of the Gerrer Rebbe, the Lev Simcha, and moved into new, less expensive areas that had previously not been chareidi strongholds. Reb Avrohom Mordechai, one of those pioneering chassidim, was among the first to move into a new neighborhood. Everything was going well except for the fact that no local grocery carried the products with a mehadrin hechsher that chareidim need. The only large grocery in the area was owned by a non-religious Jew, who saw no need to carry an entire new line of products for such a small community. Reb Avrohom Mordechai came to the Pnei Menachem to discuss the problem. The Pnei Menachem said, "This is what I think you should do. I want you to open a small makolet (local grocery) that will carry all the products the community needs. However, I am stipulating one condition. The hours of operation should be from 6 a.m. until 9 a.m. At 9 o'clock, I want you to close the makolet and go to learn in kollel for the day. The grocery cannot in any way infringe on your kollel schedule. If you do this, you will be successful." Reb Avrohom Mordechai followed the Rebbe's advice and opened a small makolet. When the owner of the large grocery in the area heard about this, he was furious. He threatened Reb Avrohom Mordechai, saying that if he didn't close immediately, he would call the Israeli Tax Authority and tell them that the new store was operating illegally and hiding taxes. Reb Avrohom Mordechai was terrified. He understood that once the tax authority gets involved, they examine everything with a

microscope, and even the most upstanding citizen could find himself in trouble. He ran to the Rebbe, who waved away his concern. "Whatever a bad person tries to do to others, he does to himself," the Rebbe remarked. Indeed, the non-religious store owner called the Tax Authority, who practically salivated over such an opportunity. They sent down a number of inspectors—but the inspectors arrived at 11 a.m., when Reb Avrohom Mordechai's store was long closed. Assuming they had been given the wrong address, they looked for a grocery in the area. They found the only other grocery—the one belonging to the moser (informant). All of his protests were to no avail. They opened his books and discovered that he had been hiding income and failing to pay his taxes in accordance with the law. He was fined an enormous amount.

*From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## N. NOT TO WASTE TIME THAT CAN BE USED FOR TORAH STUDY WITH UNPRODUCTIVE LITERATURE

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-10**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What are examples of unproductive literature?

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

One must not squander time that could be dedicated to Torah study by reading frivolous poetry, secular tales, or romantic novels, as Scripture praises the righteous: "Nor does he sit in the seat of the scornful" (Tehillim 1:1).

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Tzav, the Torah issues an absolute commandment concerning the Temple service: 'A perpetual fire shall burn upon the altar; it shall never go out.' Rashi, citing the Talmud in Maseches Yoma, comments that the word tamid, meaning continuous, applies to two sacred items in the sanctuary: the perpetual fire on the outer altar and the daily study of Torah, of which it is written, 'You shall meditate on it day and night.' Why did the halachah forge this unbreakable link between the physical flame burning on the copper altar and the intellectual labor of Torah study? The Sfas Emes explains that the human mind is a spiritual altar upon which an inner flame of holy desire burns continuously. When a person provides his mind with the dry, fragrant cedarwood of Torah wisdom—Gemara, halachah, Midrash, and Chassidus—the fire burns clear, bright, and pure, illuminating the entire personality with holy warmth. Our minds are holy altars dedicated to Hashem. By feeding our intellects with the holy words of Torah, we keep the eternal flame burning brightly, driving away darkness and filling our lives with spiritual warmth (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tzav 5634).

• In Parshas Va'eschanan, Moshe Rabbeinu instructs the Jewish nation to observe the statutes and judgments of the Torah, declaring, 'For this is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and say: Surely a wise and understanding people is this great nation!' At first glance, Moshe's phrasing seems counter-intuitive. The Sfas Emes explains that in all secular societies and gentile philosophies, intellect comes first, and action is merely its downstream byproduct. A secular scholar uses his mortal brain to analyze the world, formulate ethical systems, and then decide how to behave. Because human intellect is inherently finite and clouded by personal bias, secular literature inevitably contains errors, blind spots, and

moral confusion. By immersing our minds in the sacred texts of our Sages, we tap directly into the source of all understanding, elevating our consciousness above the fleeting trends of the secular world (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5653).

• In Parshas Shoftim, the Torah warns the Jewish people against emulating the surrounding nations: 'When you come into the land — You shall not learn to do like the abominations of those nations.' Why did the ancient world invest so much intellectual energy into soothsaying and astrology, and why does the Torah dismiss these pursuits as spiritually corrupt? The Sfas Emes explains that the physical universe was created through the Ten Utterances recorded in Genesis. These utterances established the fixed laws of nature, physics, astronomy, and biology. The secular scholars and ancient soothsayers possessed authentic knowledge of these natural patterns; they understood how physical causes lead to physical effects within the enclosed matrix of time and space. However, the Jewish nation was chosen to transcend this natural ceiling through the Ten Commandments spoken at Mount Sinai. While secular education explores the gears of the physical machine, Torah connects us to the Engineer who built and operates the machine. Choosing Torah study over secular literature preserves our supernatural freedom as children of the Almighty (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5647).

• The Midrash on Parshas Bo quotes the verse from Proverbs, 'A heavy stone and a weighty load of sand, but the provocation of a fool is heavier than both.' The Midrash interprets the 'provocation of a fool' as referring to those who anger the Almighty through trivial words and wasted time. The Sfas Emes explains that every single moment of time was deliberately spoken into existence by the Almighty to serve as an arena for revealing godliness. Time is not empty duration that we must 'kill' or pass; it is a sacred container brimming with spiritual potential. A Jew's soul was brought into this world to serve as a witness testifying that Hashem is the sole Creator and Sovereign of reality. Time is the most valuable currency we possess, and once spent, it can never be refunded. By choosing the living words of Torah over frivolous reading materials, we sanctify our time and fulfill the glorious purpose for which we were created (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5632).

• In the liturgy of Chanukah, we give thanks for the miraculous salvation from the Syrian-Greek kingdom, which 'rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will.' Our Sages in the Midrash state that ancient Greece brought darkness into the world, comparing their dominion to the original darkness over the face of the deep. The Sfas Emes explains that the darkness of Greece was uniquely dangerous precisely because it was intellectually brilliant and aesthetically attractive. Other empires conquered nations with brute physical force, but Greece sought to conquer the Jewish mind through sophisticated philosophy and secular literature. Their goal was not to burn the Torah scrolls, but to reduce the Torah to an ordinary human cultural artifact—a book of interesting legal philosophy alongside Aristotle and Plato. We are constantly surrounded by secular media, entertainment, and books that celebrate human intellect while ignoring the Creator. By choosing to spend our time learning Torah rather than absorbing secular culture, we rekindle the holy menorah and protect the purity of our souls (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5641).

**MORAL DILEMMAS:**

An American yeshivah student flew to Israel for the start of the yeshivah semester. Upon landing, he discovered that he had left his tefillin at the American airport train station. The lost-and-found confirmed they held his tefillin, but refused to mail them or release them to any third party, declaring they would discard unclaimed items after one week.

Must the student fly back to America immediately at exorbitant financial cost and miss the crucial opening days of the yeshivah semester to rescue his tefillin from disposal, or should he remain in yeshivah and purchase a new pair?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if the tefillin left at the airport/station will otherwise be discarded or lost, so that the student would have to spend a similar sum to buy a new pair of kosher tefillin anyway, he should pay the travel/retrieval cost to rescue his original tefillin, thereby both fulfilling the mitzvah and preventing his sacred tefillin from coming to disgrace.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 77*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Dovid Trenk would often recall how once, the Adelphia Yeshivah had the zechus to host Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky. Reb Yaakov was on the way back from Lakewood to Monsey, and he had stopped in Adelphia to take a refreshing break. The talmidim lined up outside the home of the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Yerucham Shain, and waited for Reb Yaakov. They sang as he stepped out of the car, and then each bachur approached to say shalom aleichem. Reb Yaakov smiled, and then said, "Back to yeshivah, it's already bitul Torah." (A waste of time from Torah.) One of the assembled bachurim told Rav Yaakov that they were in the middle of secular studies, so it wasn't bitul Torah. Without hesitation Reb Yaakov replied "That is also bittul Torah!," he said emphatically.

*From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Harav Zelig Reuven Bengis was known for his supreme diligence in Torah study, even by the high standards of the Holy City of Jerusalem. Every few months, he invited a group of friends and associates to celebrate a Siyum HaShas, the completion of study of the entire Talmud. These repasts were modest in nature, both in their arrangement and menu. Generally, only bread, herring and some whiskey to make a "l'chaim" were served. The Rav would say the hadran, followed by Kaddish, and offer a brief Torah insight. After about five or six months, the same routine would be repeated. One time, about a month after the previous Siyum HaShas, the Rav again invited his customary attendees to celebrate the completion of the entire Shas. The invitation surprised everyone, as it would have been impossible even for Rav Zelig Reuven to accomplish such a feat in such a short time. What was even more surprising was the relative elegance of the table settings and diversified menu prepared for the affair. Everyone washed and sat down to the meal, eagerly waiting for some clue as to the meaning of it all. To be sure, the explanation was not long in coming. "Let me explain the nature of this siyum," the Rav said with obvious emotion. "From the time that I assumed the post of Rav" of Yerushalayim, I made a firm decision that I would make every effort to arrive on time to all social affairs, so as not to cause undue inconvenience to anyone in attendance. I adopted the practice of arriving several minutes before the scheduled affair was to take place. "From the very first simchah I attended, I made it a habit to use the few minutes before the affair for an extracurricular master-review of the entire Talmud, in addition to my routine review of Shas. Today, after years of attending hundreds, perhaps thousands of affairs, the extra minutes have accumulated into untold hours, and have translated into thousands of pages of Gemara. This is the reason I have gone to the expense and effort to create a truly special atmosphere for this celebration. To finally complete the entire Shas, a few precious moments at a time, is a major highlight of my life."

*Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Shach once asked a Rosh Yeshivah a few weeks before the z'man what he was giving his shiur on. "Pesachim," the Rosh Yeshivah replied. Rabbi Shach asked if he started preparing the shiurim. "Not yet the Rosh Yeshivah said, to which Rabbi Shach reacted in utter shock. "Not started yet?" he exclaimed. "Before I give shiur in Pesachim, I eat Pesachim I drink Pesachim, I sleep Pesachim! PESACHIM! PESACHIM! PESACHIM!" Witnesses testify that only a short while after Rabbi

Shach would retire for sleep and turn off the lights for the night, he would turn them back on and jump out of bed to look into a sefer. This went on throughout the night. His wife had once removed the fuses, to insure that he sleep properly. Rabbi Shach was later found studying by the small red light of the water heater.

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ About two years before her petirah, when she was already weakened by illness, Rebbetzin Shayna Chaya was heading to the kitchen in the middle of the night when she tripped and fell. She lay outside the kitchen, bleeding from her head and unable to get up. Unwilling to disrupt her husband's few hours of sleep, which would make him start the day tired and disturb his learning, she decided to stay where she was until he awoke. Only when she heard Rav Elyashiv's footsteps after he got out of bed did she call for help. After he helped her to her feet, she told him that she had fallen more than an hour before, but didn't want to interrupt his sleep, as it would cause bittul Torah.

*Rav Elyashiv, By Yehuda and Malky Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 101*

❖ Rebbetzin Miriam Freida, The Chafetz Chaim's wife, once asked her husband if they should install a new floor in their home in Radin. The Chafetz Chaim replied that although they had enough money to install one, they still should not do so. Other students, who perhaps couldn't afford to install a new floor, might, unnecessarily, also install one. As they would then have to find a way to pay for it, they would be distracted from their Torah studies. "If a Torah student purchases a floor and cannot afford one, it is equivalent to bitul Torah," the Chafetz Chaim told his wife. "The student could have spent his time learning rather than trying to figure out how to somehow come up with the money to pay for the unneeded luxury."

*From Rav Aharon Leib, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A young man, the son of a wealthy merchant, decided that the time had come for him to enter the business world as well. His father gave him a generous sum of money, and he traveled to the big city, lodging in an inn that was located in the center of town. He then made his way to the home of a relative who resided in the city. The young man explained how he had journeyed there in order to purchase merchandise with hopes of reselling it. He therefore asked his relative to assist him, as he was completely unfamiliar with the city. The relative hastened to inform the many merchants that he knew that a rich young man had arrived in the city and wished to purchase merchandise. The merchants wasted little time; they made their way to the inn and knocked on the young man's door. When he opened the door, he was presented with a grand display of goods from which he bought whatever he could. When the young man realized that he had only enough money remaining to cover his traveling expenses, he decided that it was time to return home. He therefore went to bid his relative farewell. "Did you have a pleasant stay in the city?" asked the relative. "Truthfully," answered the young man, "I did not have so much as a free second to enjoy myself. From the day that I arrived here until now, I have been engaged in business with the merchants and peddlers. I did not have any time to see the city." "You should know, my dear relative," he replied, "that it was I who caused you to be as busy as you were. I did so, however, because of my concern for you and your money. I know you quite well," continued the relative, "and I am well aware that had you begun to stroll about the city streets, it would not be long before you had spent all your money on meaningless items and souvenirs. I therefore made sure that the merchants would not allow you to rest for even a moment. This way, you were able to conduct business, which was your intention in the first place." Hashem, said the Dubno Maggid, sent man to this world in order for him to learn Torah and perform mitzvos. The yetzer hara, however, tries day after day to lead him astray and distract him. It attempts to entice man into wasting his time with deceitful vanities and trivialities. This is the reason why Hashem gave man such an abundance of mitzvos; before he has completed the performance of one mitzvah, it is already time to perform another. This is as Chazal

have stated in Makkos (3:16), "R' Chananiah ben Akashia says: The Holy One, Blessed is He, wished to confer merit upon Israel; therefore He gave them Torah and mitzvos in abundance, as it is said (Yeshayahu 42:21): 'Hashem desired, for the sake of Israel's righteousness, that the Torah be made great and glorious!'"

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ In Rav Pam's hesped (eulogy) of Rav Shisgal, Rav Pam said that there are two types of masmidim (diligent students). The first is the standard masmid, one who never leaves his Gemara except when absolutely necessary. Of the second type it can be said that the Gemara never takes leave of him, for Wherever he is at any given time, his mind is totally engrossed in the sugyah which he is presently studying. "This was Rav Shisgal," said Rev Pam. "The Gemara never left him.

*Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A veteran pupil recalls that once he was amazed to overhear Reb Elchonon Wasserman conversing on worldly matters at great length. This incident occurred in the middle of the winter of 1927/28. Reb Elchonon had returned to Baranovich by train late at night. With him was Mr. Eliyahu Shmuel Zackheim, the Baranovich shtadlan (one who has access to government circles and intercedes on behalf of the Jewish community), who had endeavored to obtain a residence permit for Reb Elchonon at a time when he was still considered a Russian refugee and plots were afoot to deport him from Poland. The student stood on the platform waiting to greet his Rebbe. As soon as the two men stepped down from the train he hurried to meet them. The three climbed into a horse-drawn cab and were driven into the city. The student anxiously began telling his Rebbe about the first shiur Rabbi David Rappoport had delivered as a rosh yeshivah in Baranovich. He assumed that Reb Elchonon would be only too eager to hear a full report. To his surprise and disappointment, Reb Elchonon refused to listen, preferring to continue his mundane conversation with Mr. Zackheim. He asked Mr. Zackheim what food he liked best, whether his living quarters were comfortable, on what floor they were located and how many rooms he had, whether they were sufficiently warm in winter, and so forth. He was too sensitive to discuss Torah topics in the presence of someone who would not understand. Only after the cab had discharged Mr. Zackheim at his quarters and resumed its journey did Reb Elchonon turn apologetically to the student and say, "Now you can repeat Reb David's shiur..."

*Reb Elchonon, By Rabbi Aharon Sorasky, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The dayanim of the city were discussing the wondrous personality of the rav of Lodz, Rav Eliyahu Chaim Meizel. One of those present mentioned his compassion and generosity. He would take upon himself debts of tens of thousands of rubles in order to help others. One of those present expressed his wonder at this was Rav Eliyahu Chaim not concerned about the bittul Torah that he was causing himself? Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk was incensed at hearing this. "If a rav doesn't know how to close his Gemara in order to help a needy Jew, then even when his Gemara is open it is really closed. Likewise, when someone closes his Gemara in order to help someone, his Gemara remains open." The source of this line, which Reb Chaim would repeat often, was actually Rav Eliyahu Chaim himself. Reb Chaim heard him say it at one of the rabbinic conferences that they attended together. He took great pleasure in this dictum, and he repeated it to his wife afterward.

*From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim*

❖ Rav Shlomo Freifeld would encourage balance whenever he had the chance. A talmid chacham from the neighborhood came to speak with Reb Shlomo. He was having some difficulties with his young daughter and was seeking guidance. "Do you tell her stories?" asked Reb Shlomo. "Of course, I do," replied the fellow. "What kind of stories?" "Oh, I tell her about the Berditchover, the Chofetz Chaim and other tzaddikim!" Reb Shlomo looked at him. "She's a little girl. She can't be like them yet, so you are just making her feel like she can't measure up. Don't do that. Tell her stories about Jesse James and Little Red Riding Hood and make her normal!"

*Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ Rabbi Epstein accompanied by his son went to see the Rosh Yeshivah Rav Aharon Kotler. The Rebbetzin told them that the Rosh Yeshivah will be coming in late from out of town but if they wish they could wait. They sat down in the living room and waited late at night and after the rabbi's wife had to go to sleep the Rosh Yeshivah came home. He did not notice them, made a beeline straight to his Gemara, and sat down to learn—no relaxation after a hard day's work, no drink, no food, just straight to the Talmud. Rabbi Epstein tried to make the Rosh Yeshivah aware that he had visitors; he moved and coughed, but it didn't help. The Rosh Yeshivah didn't notice a thing. Only after much effort did they finally succeed in getting his attention.

*The Living Mishnas Reb Aharon, By Rabbi Yitzchak Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim*

❖ One public figure once asked the Steipler Gaon's (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky's) son when would be a good time to discuss an important matter with his illustrious father. The son suggested that the best time might be around two or three in the morning. When the man arrived at that hour, he found the Steipler thoroughly engrossed in his learning. The visitor did not want to disturb his intense concentration, and he waited respectfully for a long time, hoping for some opportunity to make his presence known. In vain! He watched for over two hours without seeing the Steipler's attention stray from the Gemara. In desperation, the visitor finally moved his head close to the Steipler's, hoping to bring his long wait to an end. The Steipler started suddenly and tried to push the visitor's head away, thinking it was a fly. He had been completely unaware than anyone else was in the room, so total had been his concentration on his learning.

*The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 201*

❖ R. Aryeh Leib Hakohen told of a time when he arrived at Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk's home in the summertime, but couldn't find R. Chaim in any of the rooms. After a long search, he discovered R. Chaim's head and shoulders protruding from the inside of the brick oven that was used to heat the house in the winter. R. Chaim emerged, covered with soot, apologizing that he needed to concentrate on an involved sugyah, but could not find any appropriate place where he could focus his thoughts on the delicate ideas of the sugyah without any distractions. The close quarters of the oven, he decided, gave him the best solution to his dilemma." His student, R. Yechezkel Abramsky, testified that once, during World War I, he saw his rebbe in the beis midrash in Brisk standing for six hours straight, his hands behind his back, deep in thought. During that time hundreds of people came in and out of the beis ha-midrash, but R. Chaim was totally oblivious to them. It was as if he were in other world.

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 42*

❖ Later on in life, when Harav Ovadia Yosef was Rishon LeZion and had a chauffeur-driven car, he and Hacham Benzion both attended an event outside Yerushalayim. When it ended, Hacham Ovadia offered Hacham Benzion a ride home. "I need to stay here for a while," Hacham Benzion demurred. No sooner had Hacham Ovadia's car pulled away than Hacham Benzion sought a different ride leaving to Yerushalayim immediately. "Why did you tell Hacham Ovadia that you're not ready to leave?" someone asked Hacham Benzion. "I knew that if I would accept the ride," Hacham Benzion explained, "he wouldn't suffice with taking me back to Yerushalayim; he would drive me all the way home. I didn't want to take him out of the way." "It's not much of a bother in a car," the questioner persisted. "How long does it take? Five minutes?" "You don't realize how much five minutes of Hacham Ovadia's life is worth," Hacham Benzion answered pointedly. "You can't fathom how much he accomplishes in five minutes!"

*Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When the Yeshivah was in Canarsie, Reb Leizer Geltzhaler was in the middle of delivering shiur when the terrible sounds of screeching brakes and shattered glass filled the room. Reb Leizer looked out the window For a moment and then excused himself leaving the room for a long period of time. The talmidim looked out and saw that it was a relatively minor fender bender involving a Jew and a non-Jew, and they wondered why Reb Leizer felt it necessary to remain outside, waiting for the police to arrive and chatting with both parties. Forty-five minutes later, he came back into the room, and a

talmid asked him about the bitul Torah. Reb Leizer looked around at the boys and delivered a memorable shiur: "If ever you see a Yid standing alone in an unfamiliar neighborhood, there is nothing more important than going to stand by him, making sure that he has a friendly face next to him. It wasn't the accident that was serious - it was the thought of leaving a Yid by himself."

*Reb Laizer, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ My first week in an Israeli yeshivah a colleague defined what is a "good yeshivah." He said: "If you walk into the beis midrash and no one looks up, that's a good yeshivah." This definition has always stayed with me, and I have had occasion to test it in numerous places throughout the world.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 143*

❖ A person would regularly shop in a certain bakery. One day, the storeowner glanced out the door and noticed his friend and regular customer emerging from an adjacent hardware store. The individual would not necessarily be hard-pressed to explain his actions. He could simply say that he entered the second store in search of merchandise that he could not obtain in the store where he usually shopped. But if the first store carried precisely the same merchandise, the same pastries, how could the customer defend his actions? "On the contrary," the storekeeper would claim, "tell me exactly which product you were shopping for that you would have been unable to find in my store!" You must have left because you want to avoid me. The same applies to the Torah, explained the Dubno Maggid. Everything is contained within the holy Torah, as Chazal state, "Delve in it [the Torah] and delve in it [the Torah] again, for everything is in it" (Avos 5:26)! Someone who wastes his time will therefore face the following claim: "Why was it necessary for you to graze in foreign pastures? What could you possibly have been searching for elsewhere which is not found in our holy Torah?"

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When the Mir yeshivah escaped from Vilna, they had to travel across all of Russia. When they finally arrived in Vladivostok, a hardly sea — worthy Japanese fishing schooner was appointed to take them across the Straits of Japan. It was typhoon season and the sea was a witch's brew of gale-storm, tempestuous waters. The passengers were exhausted, depressed and extremely disoriented-they had started off in Eastern Europe, traversed the Russian tundra and had just landed amid monsoon rains in the Orient. Everything was so different and unfamiliar. They had crossed cities, states and regions they had never heard of before, and encountered people the likes of which they had never seen. They were bewildered, befuddled and more than a little scared. They needed, at least, a little orientation and turned to Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz and inquired, "Where are we?" Without a second's hesitation, Reb Chaim responded, "Shmai'tsa gimmel.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 46*

❖ One day, on the eve of a departure overseas, the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, was in a poor state but he was scheduled to deliver a shiur at the Ramat Shlomo branch of the Mir The trip to Ramat Shlomo itself was very demanding of him, and he stumbled several times just on the way to the car parked directly outside his door. Because of the haste surrounding the upcoming trip, somebody goofed and Ramat Shlomo was not informed that the Rosh Yeshivah was coming. Thus, when the Rosh Yeshivah entered the beis midrash there were only shtenders to greet him; all the students were attending their regular shiurim elsewhere' It was proposed that the boys be gathered quickly to hear the Rosh Yeshivah, but Reb Nosson Zvi would not hear of it. "It would cause bitul Torah," he declared. "If, because of me, one student misses a single sentence that his teacher says, then my visit was [doubly] not worthwhile."

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 194*

❖ People have a strong natural desire to know about the latest news in the world. The desire to read newspapers was born of this desire. In truth, Hashem implanted this desire in us to help us discover chiddushim while learning Torah. Jewish men are supposed to use this powerful desire to find more and more "news" in the realm of Torah, but too often, the yetzer

hara persuades them to pervert this craving and direct it towards chadashot, newspapers and matters that are truly mundane. They search for novelty regarding all types of foolishness and vanity.

*Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim*

❖ Rav Tendler overheard two bachurim talking and one said, "Let's kill some time." "If you kill time, you are killing life," Rav Tendler rebuked him. "That is murder!"

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 279*

❖ The tactics of the yetzer hara, noted R' Yechezkel of Kozhmir, resemble those of a certain Polish thief... Poland of yesteryear was a country that was severely poverty-stricken. The difficult conditions, however, bred sharp and sophisticated minds... One day, a storeowner was sitting in his store. Beneath the counter top in front of him was a drawer containing the money earned by selling his merchandise. Outside the store, a thief was pacing back and forth, devising countless strategies for how he would steal the money from the drawer and empty it into his pocket. There was one problem, however — the storeowner. As long as he remained sitting in his chair by the counter, there was no way for the thief to get to the drawer... So what did he do? He approached a young boy in the street and offered him two perutos if he would agree to enter the store and swipe a sugar cube from the countertop. The young lad willingly agreed. The boy entered the store, grabbed the piece of sugar and ran for his lite. Seeing what happened, the storeowner leaped from his seat and set out after him. At that point, the thief furtively entered the store and emptied the drawer full of coins into his pocket... So it is with the yetzer hara, concluded the Rebbe. It distracts man with pettiness, and once having grabbed his attention, seeks to make him stumble in a matter of enormity.

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ In Kelm, every moment of the day was governed by a detailed schedule. Adherence to that schedule was expected and lateness punished. A number of special short periods for mussar were scheduled into the day to teach the students to value every minute. Before Minchah, for instance, there was a five-minute period during which the talmidim were expected to think deeply on one particular subject that they had chosen in advance.

*Rav Dessler, By Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 42*

❖ After people would come to Rav Chaim Kanievsky for a berachah he would advise them to ask for a berachah from the Rebbetzin as well. R' Chaim would explain that she gives berachos from the depths of her heart, and there isn't any bitul Torah involved in her berachos. Also "The Rebbetzin's berachos are greater than mine, since the cheshbon of bitul Torah can enter into my berachos, whereas hers are pure and don't have any cheshbon of bitul Torah." They are also greater because the Rebbetzin does more chessed than I do, and she does her chessed to more people every day."

*Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## O. NOT TO SPEAK NEEDLESS TALK

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 12-27, 47-20**

*As it says "you shall speak about it (Devarim 6:7, Parshas Va'eschanan)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Why is this mitzvah related to learning Torah?

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages teach that whoever speaks idle or wasted speech violates an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh), as Scripture commands: "And you shall speak of them" (Devarim 6:7) — which Chazal expounded to mean: speak of words of Torah, and not of frivolous and idle matters.

Scripture further warns: "All words are wearisome; a man cannot utter them" (Koheles 1:8). The Midrash derives from here a strict negative prohibition against speaking idle words, for Hashem declared: "I created the entire universe and did not grow weary, yet I am wearied by your futile words," as Scripture states: "You have wearied Hashem with your words" (Malachi 2:17).

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 2)

The primary tool of the yetzer hara is the exact strategy used by Pharaoh: "Tichbad ha'avodah" — "Make the work heavier upon them so they cannot contemplate." The yetzer hara keeps a person constantly hurried and occupied so that he has no time to reflect on his direction. Hashem yearns to help us improve; all we need to do is pause for a brief moment and think about our lives. If a person stops even for one quiet minute of reflection, he gains the clarity to overcome the yetzer hara and break free from it entirely.

### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 5)

A person must establish dedicated quiet time for himself each day for personal soul-accounting (cheshbon hanefesh), the study of mussar, and deep Torah learning.

### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 5)

Zehirus (watchfulness) means to reflect honestly on one's conduct and strive to improve. Mockery (leitzanus) is the exact antithesis: it tells a person never to take improvement seriously. In ancient times, warriors would coat their shields with grease so that incoming arrows would glance off without penetrating. Leitzanus acts as that same slick coating, deflecting the most powerful rebuke (tochachah) and inspiration. A single flippant joke can neutralize the impact of a hundred ethical teachings. Much of idle chatter is saturated with subtle or overt mockery.

### SFAS EMES

• The Midrash on Parshas Bo cites the teaching of our Sages regarding the severity of idle speech: 'The heavy stone and the weight of sand — But the anger of a fool is heavier than them—this refers to one who provokes the Almighty with needless words.' This statement shocks the thoughtful reader. The Sfas Emes explains that speech is not a cheap social convenience; it is the primary instrument through which Hashem created heaven and earth. The universe was brought into being through the Ten Utterances of Genesis. When Hashem formed the first man, Scripture states that He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, which the Targum renders as a 'speaking spirit.' Human speech is a direct, miniature reflection of divine creative power. Our words have weight;

they build spiritual worlds or tear them down. By exercising self-mastery and refraining from needless chatter, we preserve the purity of our speaking spirit and allow our words to shine with holiness (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5631).

• In Parshas Noach, the Torah records the bizarre rebellion of the Generation of the Dispersion: 'And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech — And they said: Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top may reach to heaven, and let us make ourselves a name.' The Generation of the Flood was destroyed for theft and immorality, but what was the specific sin of the Tower of Babel? The Sfas Emes explains that speech is the supreme gift distinguishing man from beast; it was bestowed upon humanity to build a sanctuary for the Creator on earth. The Generation of the Dispersion recognized the immense spiritual power latent in human language. However, instead of using their unified speech to praise Hashem and seek divine closeness, they weaponized their common language for human arrogance and self-aggrandizement. Communication is not meant to project an inflated ego or pass the time in hollow chatter. By speaking with humble purpose and avoiding idle banter, we use the gift of language to bring honor to Hashem rather than to ourselves (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Noach 5634).

• In Parshas Bo, the Sfas Emes returns to the Midrashic condemnation of idle chatter, offering a second, complementary insight into the purpose of Jewish speech. The Jewish people are designated in Scripture as 'My legions, My people the children of Israel.' The Sfas Emes asks: what is the military weapon of these legions of Hashem? The Sfas Emes reveals that our primary inner spiritual mission in this world is birur malchus shamayim —to clarify and reveal Hashem's sovereign kingship in every realm of reality. In a world where godliness is hidden behind the veil of nature, the human mouth is tasked with returning everything to its rightful Owner through blessings, prayers, and words of Torah. When a Jew speaks words of holiness, he drives away the darkness of concealment and plants the banner of the King. We are royal soldiers on duty; our words are our ammunition for spreading goodness, comfort, and truth. By guarding our speech from triviality, we keep our weapons sharp and our hearts aligned with the divine Commander (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5638).

• In Parshas Noach, after the catastrophic waters of the Flood receded, Hashem commanded the righteous patriarch: 'Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives with you.' The Midrash applies to this moment the verse from Psalms, 'Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks to Your name.' The Sfas Emes makes a fascinating observation regarding the historical flow of the biblical narrative: from the opening of Genesis until the emergence of Noach, Scripture never records the phrase 'and Hashem spoke,' using instead only the term 'and Hashem said.' Why was the formal faculty of dibbur—articulate, direct speech—concealed during the early generations of human history? The Sfas Emes explains that dibbur represents the highest, most intimate revelation of divine communication. We do not have to allow our minds to be flooded by the noisy, vulgar culture around us. By maintaining clean, purposeful, and restrained speech, we dwell in the safe haven of holiness and bring peace to our surroundings (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Noach 5635).

• The Midrash on the verse "For this commandment" (ki ha-mitzvah ha-zos) (Nitzavim) teaches that the one who opens and seals in Torah blesses before and after. Why should opening and sealing matter so much? The Sfas Emes expounds the remez: the Torah is a locked garden (gan na'ul), and the nation's power is in the mouth, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it (be-ficha u-vi-levavecha la'asoso). The bracha is not a formality of study

> sessions but the mark of the two powers entrusted to Israel: to open and to seal. The reason for the prohibition is architectural — the mouth that is open to emptiness cannot be open to Torah, and guarding it is what keeps the opening open (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Nitzavim 5641).

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ An old man who had been a disciple of Reb Zvi of Zhidachov once called on the tzaddik's cousin, Reb Yitzchak Aizik, during the time that the latter succeeded him as rebbe in the same town. Reb Yitzchak Aizik received him with a heavy heart. "You were privileged to know a tzaddik of the stature of our late rebbe," he said plaintively, "and now you come to me?" The old man then shared his distress with the rebbe: one of his grandchildren had contracted a fearful disease, and he had come to ask the rebbe to pray on his behalf. The tzaddik held his peace, and said not a word in reply. This was on Friday, the eve of Shabbos. On the next day, after the Shabbos prayers, the tzaddik told the elderly chassid to worry no more, for his grandson's condition was (thank God) already improving. He went on to apologize for not having answered at all on Friday, and explained that every Shabbos heaven granted him a certain number of words for the ensuing week. By the time of the visit he had already used up the allotment of words that had been apportioned him - but now, with the arrival of Shabbos, he made use of his new harvest of words to bless the grateful old man.

*A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 192*

❖ With Reb Menachem Mendel of Vorki, silence was a way of divine service. He spoke very little indeed, and on one occasion sat with his chassidim throughout a long night without a solitary word being spoken - and they sat there in humble awe. Among those at his table one day was Reb Beirish of Biala. The tish - the Yiddish word for "table," used by chassidim to signify an inspirational gathering at the rebbe's table; lasted for some hours. No one breathed a word, neither rebbe nor chassidim. You could have heard I a fly. After the Grace after Meals the guest from Biala exclaimed: "That was some tish we had today! He taught me a lesson in Torah, and with his questions tore me apart sinew by sinew. But I didn't take it sitting down: I answered him every single thing he asked me!

*A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 193*

## P. TO THINK BEFORE ONE SPEAKS

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-9**

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

▪ What is a result of observing this mitzvah?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

A person should deliberate carefully over every word before uttering it from his mouth. This vigilance applies both in tefillah and in every conversation directed to one's fellow man. Exercising such discipline shields a person from sin, as Scripture states: "The heart of the righteous meditates before answering, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things" (Mishlei 15:28).

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ On the verse (Proverbs 18:21), 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue,' the Midrash relates that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel once said to his wise servant Tavi: 'Go out and buy me the very best food in the marketplace!' Tavi went out and bought for him a tongue. Afterward, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said to him: 'Now go out and buy me the very worst,

cheapest food in the marketplace!' Tavi went out and again bought a tongue! Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel asked him: 'What is this? When I asked you for the best food, you brought me a tongue, and when I asked you for the worst food, you also brought me a tongue!' Tavi answered him: 'Master, from the tongue comes the greatest good, and from the tongue comes the worst harm: when the tongue is good, there is nothing better in the world, and when the tongue is bad, there is nothing worse in the world!'

*Vayikra Rabbah 33:1*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Reb Itzelle Blazer, otherwise known as Reb Itzelle Peterberg as he was the Rav in Peterburg, Russia, was a talmid of Rav Yisroel Slanter. He became Rov at the young age of 25 years. Among his many special traits, he was extremely careful and very limited with his words. He said little and every word he did say was carefully weighed before saying it. There was a meeting of many great rabbonim to discuss some matter at hand. One of the Rabbis attending was the Beis Haleivi, Reb Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, father of Reb Chaim and was greatly revered. The Beis Haleivi saw that the young Rov of Peterburg was in attendance. He heard much about Reb Itzelle and was looking forward to hearing words of wisdom from him. While the Rabbonim were waiting for the others to arrive, a difficulty in a talmudic passage was raised. All the Rabbonim who had already arrived were involved in the discussion. This started a volley of questions and answers and further questions. The Beis Haleivi offered two answers to the original question. All this time Reb Itzelle added nothing. He simply listened. The Beis Haleivi was confounded. While everyone in attendance participated with a question or an answer, Reb Itzelle had nothing to say. He was certainly not ignorant of the Gemara being discussed, why did he not contribute? When the Beis Haleivi arrived home from this meeting he went to his bookcase to take the sefer Pri Yitzchok, which Reb Itzelle had authored. He opened it up and discovered that this very question that was discussed at the meeting was discussed by Reb Itzelle in his sefer. To the Beis HaLevi's astonishment, the answers that the Pri Yitzchok offered in explaining the difficult passage were the very two answers that the Beis Haleivi offered! To Reb Itzelle, silence was more valuable than anything he could have said.

*As told by Rabbi Noach Isaac Oelbaum on TorahAnytime*

❖ In one shmuess, Rav Pam added a new word to the list of those that should not pass our lips: "whatchamicalit." He said, "Velech'e sort vort is dos?" ("What kind of word is this?") Later, a talmid asked, "What's wrong with 'whatchamicallit'?" Rav Pam replied, "Don't you understand? How can you speak without thinking? If you don't know what you want to say, then think. But what kind of a word is 'watchamicalit'?"

*Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## Q. NOT TO WASTE TIME LISTENING TO IDLE CHATTER

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 46-1**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Our Sages warned that a person must never permit his ears to listen to idle chatter or profane speech, for if one soils his hearing, the ears are the first among all bodily limbs to be scorched in Gehinnom.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One Friday evening between kabbalas Shabbos and maariv, at the neighborhood shul, while some of the talmidei chachamim were still gathered around Rabbi Eliyahu Romm, enjoying their usual Torah discussion, an elderly Jew from Russia came up to Rav Shach and began giving him a lengthy account of recent events in Eretz Yisrael and around the world. Very patiently, Rav Shach nodded his head in the manner of one listening carefully to every word. This was quite surprising to the onlookers, since Rav Shach was known as a man who lived and breathed only to learn Gemara. Surprise turned to perplexity as the weeks went by and they noticed that the scene was repeating itself every Shabbos evening. Finally, one of the congregants asked Rav Shach why he was putting up with this nuisance. Why didn't he simply let the man know he wasn't interested in all the useless information he was pouring into his ears every Shabbos? "This Jew," Rav Shach replied, "lives all week for these few moments of pleasure, when he can come and find someone here to listen to his weekly report. Am I going to take all his zest for life away from him?"

*Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 476*

## R. TO TEACH TORAH FULLY AND COMPREHENSIVELY, WITH ITS RATIONALE

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-32**

*As the Torah says, "These are the laws that you should place before them" (Shemos 21:1, Parshas Mishpatim).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What is meant by teaching Torah comprehensively?

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Torah commands: "And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them" (Shemos 21:1). Our Sages derived from this verse that it is not sufficient for a teacher merely to recite a halachah three or four times for his students without explanation. Rather, he is obligated to exert himself to explain the reasons and underlying logic of the laws, until the subject is thoroughly illuminated and organized before them like a fully set table.

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Elisha ben Avuyah recounted to his disciple Rabbi Meir: 'My father Avuyah was one of the great men of Jerusalem. On the day he came to circumcise me, he invited all the notables of Jerusalem and seated them in one hall, and seated Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua in another room. After the guests ate and drank, they began clapping and dancing. Rabbi Eliezer said to Rabbi Yehoshua: "While they are occupied with their celebration, let us occupy ourselves with our Torah!" They sat and linked words of Torah to the Prophets, and from the Prophets to the Writings (Ketuvim). Suddenly fire descended from heaven and encircled them! Alarmed, Avuyah ran in and cried: "My Masters, have you come to burn my house down upon me?!" They replied: "Heaven forbid! Rather, we were sitting and reviewing words of Torah—from the Torah to the Prophets, and from the Prophets to the Writings—and the words were rejoicing just as on the day they were given at Mount Sinai, where the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven!" Avuyah exclaimed: "My Masters, if such is the power of Torah, if this son of mine survives, I will dedicate him to Torah!" Yet because his initial intention was for prestige rather than purely for the sake of Heaven, it did not endure in that man.' Years later, when Elisha's daughters came

before Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (Rebbi) to ask for charity, they pleaded: 'Master, do not look at his deeds—look at his Torah!' At that moment Rebbi wept, decreed that they be supported, and declared: 'If one who toiled in Torah not for the sake of Heaven merited such righteous descendants, how much more so one who toils in Torah purely for the sake of Heaven!'

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagigah 2:1 (77b)*

❖ Antigonos Ish Socho taught "Do not be like servants who serve their master in order to receive a reward, but be like servants who serve their master not in order to receive a reward; and the fear of Heaven should be on you (Avos 1:3). Two of his disciples, Tzadok and Baisos, misinterpreted his teaching to mean that there is no reward and punishment, and took it as a denial to afterlife (techiyas hamesim). They founded the sects of Tzidokim (Sadducees) and Baisusim (Boethusians), who denied the existence of an afterlife.

*Avos D'Rabbi Nassan 5:2*

❖ R' Shmuel bar Shilas was so dedicated to his teaching that he did not take a single vacation in thirteen years. Once Rav found him walking in the garden, and he asked him if he had forsaken his calling. R' Shmuel bar Shilas responded: "It has been thirteen years since I have seen this garden, and even now I am preoccupied with thoughts of my pupils." Rav applied to him the verse in Daniel (12:3): ". and they that turn many to righteousness shall be like the stars, forever and ever" (Bava Basra 8b). The Talmud cites R' Shmuel bar Shilas among the descendants of Haman, who were scholars and taught Torah to children.

*Talmud Bavli, Bava Basra 8b*

❖ Rav Tarfon used the method of instructive dialogue in his teaching. When the students asked to be taught, he would say, "You answer" and he would teach by asking questions and encouraging discussion. He would sometimes ask his pupils for permission to pose a question, saying, "Shall I ask?"

*Talmud Bavli, Berachos 4:16*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rabbi Trenk would drive around Lakewood each morning, picking up various talmidim of Moreshes Yehoshua. Sometimes, the morning rounds involved not just pulling up in front of the house, but parking, going in, and waking the talmid; There was one particular talmid who had a hard time getting out of bed, and Rabbi Trenk would try for a few minutes, then leave, pick up a few more talmidim and return to try again. Sometimes, he was unsuccessful the second time too, so he would gather together the rest of the talmidim and then go back a third time, making it his last stop and leaving once the talmid was up and ready. One morning, the mother of this talmid looked on in embarrassment as Rabbi Trenk came to her house repeatedly. “Why do you do this, Rabbi Trenk?” she asked. “We both know he isn’t going to wake up until he’s ready, why do you come again and again?” He heard the pain in her voice. “Oh, you don’t understand,” he said warmly. “It you knew how your son davens, how much we enjoy his Pesukei D’Zimrah, you would never ask the question. I will do whatever it takes to get him there, because it’s so geshmak to daven with him.”

*From Just Love Them: The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, by Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Every talmid knows how the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, sacrificed everything to deliver his shiur. Virtually nothing could stop him. He would come straight from the hospital to say the shiur. He would come in a wheelchair to say the shiur. He would go so far as to pinch his neck so that he could get a sound out of his mouth to say the shiur. He was the epitome of "adam ki yamus ba'ohel," a person who almost literally "killed himself" to say the shiur and transmit Torah to his talmidim. And yet, despite his profound dedication to give the shiur, despite his unending love for Torah, there was a love that exceeded all. Shimon was facing a serious difficulty. It was so serious that he felt he had no choice but to speak with the Rosh Yeshivah immediately, even though it was during the time before he said his shiur, a time

when he was usually totally immersed in shiur preparation and could not "come down" to speak about other things. In this case, however, the Rosh Yeshivah saw how important it was and made an exception. Shimon poured out his heart to the Rosh Yeshivah, becoming so emotional that when he finished speaking, he broke down crying. The Rosh Yeshivah tried calming him. The conversation wound down, but the Rosh Yeshivah wasn't done. "Shimon, I cannot let you leave the office now because everyone will see that you have been crying. Please go wash your face." The Rosh Yeshivah directed him to the sink so that he could wash up and regain his composure. Shimon did as instructed, but when he came out, the Rosh Yeshivah was still not satisfied. "I cannot let you leave until your complexion returns to normal. If I won't be able to say the shiur as a result, I won't. The main thing is that you should not be embarrassed in any way due to the fact that people will see that you are going through an emotional upheaval! This was the same Rosh Yeshivah who delivered his shiur at all costs, with his last bit of strength. This was the same Rosh Yeshivah who delivered his shiur despite his body being ravaged by cancer. This very same Rosh Yeshivah was willing to forgo delivering his shiur so that a talmid, a bachur, should not, G-d forbid, be pained or embarrassed!

*From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ R' Yosef was thrilled, the thought that his lifelong dream was finally coming true filled him with joy. He had always wanted to be a maggid shiur. He loved to learn, and he appreciated the value of a chiddush. He wanted nothing more than to share his love of Torah with talmidim. He had tried to get a position as a maggid shiur, but even then, more than twenty years ago, it wasn't easy. After all, Lakewood was a city of talmidei chachamim. Getting a position as a beis midrash maggid shiur was very, very difficult. R' Yosef had not been deterred. After countless tefillos coupled with immense hishtadlus, he had been hired as a maggid shiur for the first-year beis midrash in a local yeshivah. Elul began. R' Yosef engaged in much preparation as he began his first zeman as a maggid shiur. Unfortunately, he was not connecting with the talmidim in the way that the Rosh Yeshivah had envisioned. Toward the end of Elul, the Rosh Yeshivah decided to ask R' Yosef not to come back for the winter zeman. R' Yosef's good friend was very close to the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon. Unable to bear his friend's pain, he felt that the Rosh Yeshivah had not given R' Yosef a fair chance to prove himself, and he approached Rav Mattisyahu. At that time, Rav Mattisyahu was at the height of his hashpaah. The entire world was turning to him for guidance. His shmuessen and vaadim in Lakewood were packed. He was traveling all over the world to be mechazek Yidden. Still, Rav Mattisyahu, who didn't have a second in his day and had never even met R' Yosef, felt the need to do something. He felt that the Rosh Yeshivah had made a hasty decision and that the maggid shiur should be given more time to connect with the talmidim and become comfortable in his new post. He called the Rosh Yeshivah and begged him to reconsider. But the Rosh Yeshivah refused. What did the Mashgiach do? He offered to come to the yeshivah once a week to deliver a shmuess in the yeshivah on condition that the Rosh Yeshivah give R' Yosef a second chance. He was willing to do anything, even giving up his own (nonexistent) time to lend his prestige to the yeshivah, all so that a young, aspiring maggid shiur should not be embarrassed.

*From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Dovid Trenk was a mechanech, a teacher who was able to connect with his talmidim, especially teenagers, on their level and understood their challenges and needs. His talmidim understood that their rebbi -- the rebbi with the hoarse voice and exuberant nature and total dedication to learning Torah -- was also their friend. It was a time when this wasn't taken for granted, and they reveled in it. And somehow, without compromising his own lofty levels, he let them know that he got their reality. One morning he came into the classroom and wrote two words on the blackboard: POT and LSD. The boys were shocked into silence at their rebbi's reference to the drugs, so popular on the streets of New York at the time. They knew precisely what the substances were, but how did he? And what did he mean by writing those letters on the board? He waited for a bit, then innocently remarked, "Boys, you know what this means, of course you know. P.O.T stands for 'Put On Tefillin,' the way we start our day with such a rush of kedushah, being connected to the Ribbono shel Olam Himself. But sometimes people waste time, they push off davening, so we have L.S.D, which stands for 'Let's Start Davening.'

Don't delay. Use every minute of tefillah to really talk to Hashem." The message, recalls a talmid, was clear. "Rebbi was telling us that he knew where we were coming from, he got the challenges we faced out there, but our place was inside; there was enough in the beis medrash to keep us from feeling lost."

*From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Reb Shlomo Freifeld was a master at building people. Eli arrived in the Yeshivah after a long and difficult yeshivah career. Early on, he had been diagnosed with severe learning disabilities, and even as a teenager, he was unable to read English or Hebrew. The whole yeshivah experience had been a nightmare for him, and he arrived in Shor Yoshuv with very low expectations. From the outset, Reb Shlomo treated him differently than he had ever been treated before. He spent hours with him, listening to his attempts to read and understand. One day, Reb Shlomo turned to him with a smile. "Eli, I don't think that you realize this, but even though you have difficulties reading, you are a tremendous lamdan with a razor — sharp head. We are going to make you into a talmid chacham." Reb Shlomo found suitable chavrusos for Eli, and they would learn with him each day, working on his understanding of the sugyah not the actual reading. As he began to understand the sugyas, he would memorize the words by heart so that it seemed as if he could read. It was a difficult road for Eli. There were times when he grew completely despondent as he realized that people who did much less work than him were progressing much faster. He would exert himself three times as much as his friends would with little to show for it; they were completing whole masechtos and he was finishing lines. Every time he felt like he couldn't go on, he would speak to his rebbi. Reb Shlomo invested him with an appreciation for his unique challenge and a confidence that he would ultimately triumph. After years of hard work, he had mastered the first seven blatt in masechta Chullin, word for word, Reb Shlomo had tested him on each and every line and knew that he knew it perfectly. And then Reb Shlomo decided that it was time that Eli taste the sweet fruits of his labors. It was at the engagement party for one of the bachurim, a "Shor Yoshuv vort." The celebrations were traditionally held in Reb Shlomo's dining room and he was the host; it was always his show, as he would lead the speeches and spirited singing, enlivening everyone with his contagious joy. The room was jammed with people: talmidim, guests and mechutanim. There were several distinguished rabanim in attendance and they were speaking with Reb Shlomo about the Yeshivah. Reb Shlomo's eyes gleamed. "We have bachurim here who are literally geonim, true geniuses," he said. The illustrious guests looked on with interest as Reb Shlomo searched the room with his eyes. His gaze rested on Eli. "Eli, come here," he instructed. Eli stood near Reb Shlomo, and Reb Shlomo studied him. "Eli, start to say a Gemara. Let's see, how about mesachta chullin!" Eli closed his eyes and began to recite the wards that had become his through blood, sweat and tears. Hakol shochtim vshchitaso kesheira, he started, gathering confidence as he continued, rattling off line after line, kushyos and terutzim. The room grew completely silent as the chasan, the rabanim and all the guests watched the spectacle before them. Daf beis became daf gimmel, and still he was going strong. Minutes passed and Eli was showing no signs of faltering, saying each word clearly and lovingly. The rabbanim were visibly astonished by this American boy who could recite Gemara as fluently as an old Polish gaon, and they were respectfully silent. A full fifteen minutes passed with Eli gathering steam, until he suddenly approached the end of daf ches, the extent of his knowledge. Just as he said the last Word that he knew, Reb Shlomo held up his hand. "Genug, enough — you showed them what we have here." As Eli recalled, Those fifteen minutes erased fifteen years of humiliation and suffering."

*Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ Rav Dovid Trenk of the Adelphia Yeshivah mastered the art of loving discipline and was able to stand firm and enforce rules without having to resort to frustrated threats and accusations. One morning, he came in to say shiur and the classroom was a mess, papers and used tissues strewn all over the room. "Boys, we can't learn Torah this way, it's not kavod. I'm going to leave and come back in five minutes. Please make sure that the room is spotless." The rebbi left and returned precisely five minutes later. The boys had gone through the motions of cleaning up, picking up a few papers and kicking some of the litter to the side, but the room wasn't much neater. He looked around the room, but didn't react. Instead, he bent over and began to pick up pieces of trash. Several boys ran over to help him, but he held up a hand. "No boys, I'm

sorry, you had your chance." Now, I will have the zechus of cleaning the room so that it's a suitable place to learn Torah, and you," Rebbi looked around, his voice rising a notch, "you will remain in your seats and not move." For several quiet, uncomfortable minutes, the talmidim watched their rebbi crawl and bend and reach, tidying the room, while they were powerless to help. They learned several lessons that day.

*From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ These fundraising trips on behalf of the yeshivah produced a plethora of stories. The majority of these stories revolved around wealthy men refusing to make a donation. The yeshivah's fundraisers would not always hold their tongues when they met with rich men whose stinginess was often in direct proportion to their great wealth. Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk once gave a sharp rejoinder to a wealthy man who refused to donate, arguing that, from his perspective, there was no need for Yeshivas Volozhin to continue to exist. The man, known to be a "liberal" thinker, expressed resentment that Reb Chaim would even think to ask him for a donation. "The rabbi knows that even though I am Jewish, the philosophy of the institution to which you are asking me to donate is very far from my outlook on life. I have no use for a yeshivah," the man challenged him. "Therefore, how can you ask me to support a place like this?" Reb Chaim's answer, in which he "responded to the fool according to his foolishness," contains a profound message regarding the place of yeshivos in the Jewish world. "It is a mistake to think," he told the rich man, "that a man who lives a life estranged from Torah has no need for an institution like the Yeshivah of Volozhin. Such a man, if he is interested in his children remaining even non-observant Jews, needs Volozhin for this, along with its holy talmidim." "Let us take, for example," said Reb Chaim, "an army made up of soldiers of various ranks—from the field marshal down to the simple private. If we reform the army's system by lowering everyone's rank, the marshal becomes a general, the general becomes a colonel, and so on. Such a change cannot be called a qualitative one, since each man is still in the same position relative to those above and below him. Only when we reach the private is the change a real one, for if the second-to-lowest-ranked soldier becomes a private, what is left for the one who was a private until now? He must leave the army completely. His change in status is not expressed with a simple lowering of rank as with the others." "The same applies to Hashem's army. In the highest ranks are those who devote their entire lives to the service of Hashem. Beneath these are many levels, going down to the lowest level of soldier in the camp of Judaism. In this system, too, each one is attached to the next links in the chain, and the continued existence of the simple man, whose connection to Judaism is weak, depends on those who dedicate their lives completely to Torah. When these falter and surrender their holy lives of abstinence, the ultimate result is that the simple soldiers, the ones on the low end, leave Judaism altogether." "Thus," concluded Reb Chaim, "since you are a person who doesn't want to give up Judaism completely and assimilate, I am justified in asking you to contribute to the welfare of those holy bachurim who toil in Torah!"

*From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim*

❖ R' Michoel Antebi was deep in conversation with the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin. The music and joy of the wedding swirled around them as R' Elya Meir immersed himself completely in his talmid's question. Suddenly, a tzedakah collector passed by asking for a donation. Without missing a beat, the Rosh Yeshivah gave him a $5 bill. A few minutes passed. The discussion continued, only to be interrupted when that same person returned, again asking for a donation, and the Rosh Yeshivah pulled out another $5 bill. Their conversation resumed. Ten minutes later and the same collector was back... again! R' Michoel assumed that R' Elya Meir must have been so deeply involved in their conversation and thinking of a solution that he simply did not realize that it was the same person coming for the third time, trying to cash in on his lack of focus. "Rebbi," R' Michoel felt compelled to tell the Rosh Yeshivah, "this is the same person for the third time!" "Michoel," he replied, "don't we come to Hashem and ask Him repeatedly for the same things not once, not twice, but three times a day? When we need something, we come to Hashem today and tomorrow and the next day, and we ask and ask and ask again. Why should I treat him any differently than I would want Hashem to treat me?"

*From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When Mrs. Landers needed to meet a prominent Newark real-estate attorney named Jonathan Maclay Borman, she felt overwhelmed by the complex legal English and asked Rabbi Shain, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas HaTalmud in Adelphia, New Jersey, to accompany her. Seeing the warmth Rabbi Shain had always shown her sons in yeshivah, she knew he would gladly help. In the attorney's lavish office, Rabbi Shain sensed that Mr. Borman was Jewish and gently asked him. "Yes, I am," the lawyer replied, holding up his hand, "but before you get any ideas, Rabbi, I am a convinced atheist. I went to Hebrew School as a child, found it boring and uninspiring, weighed both sides, and made an informed choice." Rabbi Shain smiled warmly and asked if he had children. When the attorney replied that he had two daughters, ages eleven and eight, Rabbi Shain asked whether he sent them to Hebrew School. "Of course not—I'm an atheist!" Borman laughed. "Think about what you just said," Rabbi Shain urged gently. "You say you became an atheist by choice after seeing both sides. By denying your daughters a Jewish education, you are denying them the fair chance to choose for themselves!" Struck by the logic, the attorney promised to think seriously about it, and throughout the legal meeting that followed he marveled at how Rabbi Shain's Gemara training enabled him to analyze intricate legal questions with razor-sharp clarity. Ten years later, when Mrs. Landers returned to Mr. Borman's office accompanied by a friend whose son learned in Rabbi Shain's yeshivah, the attorney eagerly asked the woman to deliver a personal message to Rabbi Shain: "Tell him that on the very afternoon he spoke to me, I turned on my car radio and heard a Torah lecture. Seeing the hand of Divine Providence, I enrolled my daughters in a Jewish school so they could make an informed choice. They chose to become observant Jews—and through their inspiration, I now attend a weekly Torah class and my entire life has been transformed!"

*Visions of Greatness, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers*

❖ The Chasam Sofer was Rav of the city of Pressburg and head of the famous Pressburg Yeshivah. Under his leadership, the yeshivah became known world-wide as a glorious center of Torah. It became the pride and joy of every father and mother to be able to say that their son studied in the Chasam Sofer's yeshivah. One of the yeshivah's outstanding students was a boy from a very poor home. The boy lived far from Pressburg and would pay for his day-to-day needs with the little money which his parents sent him. During his fourth year in the yeshivah, the boy's parents were not able to send him even that small amount. The boy had no money for cleaning his clothes, buying some food, or for anything else. In his desperation, the boy thought of an original way of earning money. He approached a student who came from a very wealthy home and said, "I have a proposition to make: Our Rebbi [the Chasam Sofer] is now teaching us a topic in Gemara which I have studied once before. The next shiur (lecture) he is to deliver is one which I heard him say three years ago, my first year in the yeshivah. I remember it very well; the questions, answers, proofs and comparisons. In fact, I even remember the Rebbi's gestures and facial expressions as he proceeded from point to point. "For a modest sum of money, I will say the shiur for you and others, and perfectly imitate the manner in which the Rebbe delivered it." The wealthy student readily agreed to the deal and the boy delivered the shiur, much to the delight of all those present. Somehow, the Chasam Sofer caught wind of what had transpired. He called for an assembly of all his students, to be held the following day. The impoverished student and those who had attended his shiur were quite apprehensive about what the Chasam Sofer might say. It seemed obvious that they had demonstrated a certain lack of respect by participating in a lecture which was intended as an imitation of their Rebbi. Would the Chasam Sofer ask them to leave the yeshivah because of this? The next day, the students rose in respect as the Chasam Sofer entered the room to speak. His face looked grim; he was obviously upset. He began, "My dear talmidim: it is impossible for me to hide my distress; I'm sure it is apparent for all of you to see. Undoubtedly, you think that what happened yesterday is the cause of my distress. You are mistaken. It is not what happened yesterday: rather, it is what caused yesterday to happen. "A talmid of mine was desperately in need of money, so desperate that he went to extreme lengths to earn something for himself. "But I am his Rebbi, his teacher, his father! Why

did I not concern myself with his needs so that he should not reach such a point of desperation? Why was I unaware of how badly he needed help in caring for his needs? The Chasam Sofer was now weeping unabashedly, as he turned to his beloved talmid. "Please," the tzaddik begged, "please forgive me.

*Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Avraham Niznik would always recall his despair at not being allowed entry to Eretz Yisrael in the aftermath of World War II. The frustration of being stranded in France when the center of Torah learning was in Eretz Yisrael. He spent some time in France saying shiurim to recently arrived bachurim from the Displaced Persons camps, but after a few months, decided that it was time to reattempt entry to Eretz Yisrael. When the great Telshe gaon. Rav Mottel Pogramansky, who was in France at the time, asked him how he could abandon his talmidim. He answered that he was overcome with longing to learn Kodashim from the Brisker Rav. Rav Mottel eyed him critically. "Then you are a baal taavah!" To the young adherent of Rav Chatzkel Levensteins mussar, this was quite an insult. Rav Mottel explained. "You want to learn Kodashim. What does He have from that if these boys will be forsaken here in France with no one to teach them Torah?" The words found their mark, For the rest of his life the Rav taught and taught, with joy and enthusiasm and boundless patience, Like his Rebbe, Reb Elchonon, who wanted only to be a melamed, rejecting prestigious offers of rabbinical positions. The Rav would never turn down an offer to deliver a shiur.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ It was two days after Yom Kippur, and Reb Shmuel Auerbach and several talmidim were spending Shabbos in the home of his niece, Rebbetzin Nechama Vallis. On Shabbos afternoon, when a talmid visited along with his six-year-old son, the Rosh Yeshivah smiled warmly and inquired, “Which cheder do you attend?" "Nesivos Chochmah." "Beautiful... And what did the rebbi teach about in the Chumash this week?" No response. Gently stroking the boy's cheek, Reb Shmuel tried again gently, "Do you remember something the rebbi said?" But the little one, a sensitive soul, did what little ones will sometimes do when feeling awkward: He burst into tears. Hearing the child's wails, Rebbetzin Vallis came running in from the kitchen, treat in hand, to mollify him. But it was to no avail, and Reb Shmuel's distress knew no end. "It's two days after Yom Kippur and I've hurt this little boy's feelings," he said with genuine pain in his voice. But Reb Shmuel knew just what he needed to do. He asked his niece for a board game, but they'd all been stored away with muktzah items. Then his eyes lit up, as he spied a soccer ball out on the apartment's balcony. Picking it up deftly, he approached the boy. “Would you play with me?" After a few moments' pause, he nodded, and out the pair went onto the balcony—the first-grader together with the gaon of the generation and leader of multitudes to play ball. Removing his Shabbos shtreimel and chalat, Reb Shmuel threw himself into a spirited game of throwing, catching, and kicking the ball to and fro, much to the youngster's glee. Finally, after twenty minutes, Reb Shmuel had tired and his partner had, too. Turning to the father, the Rosh Yeshivah asked tentatively, "You know your child. Does it seem like I've appeased him?" The father nodded approvingly. But Reb Shmuel persisted, "Would you say he'll remember our little game more than the earlier incident?" "Certainly," said the yungerman. At that, Reb Shmuel's countenance lit up, and with one last warm smile for his new friend, he returned to his beloved Gemara.

*From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press*

❖ Rav Tendler's daughter, Elisheva Hauptman, once felt overwhelmed by her many responsibilities as a teacher at Bais Yaakov of Baltimore. She notified her principal, Rabbi Zweig, that she could no longer continue teaching. Rabbi Zweig wisely counseled Elisheva to ask a rav for advice before making her decision. " She asked her father, Rav Tendler, what to do. "Do you and your children have clothing?" he asked her. "Is there enough food? Are your children happy? If so, although you feel overwhelmed, it is okay to suffer a little for Klal Yisrael." "Then at what point could I ever give up teaching?" she asked. He replied, "The moment you feel yourself stop growing in ruchniyus, you should stop teaching! Educators must

continue to work on their personal service of Hashem. A rebbi is like of cup of soda. To bubble over, there must be soda in the cup. "The Brisker Rav explains that if someone is not concerned for his own learning, it is impossible to say that he is concerned for the learning of someone else."

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 116*

❖ A few years after R. Avrohom Wolff, zt"l had established the Bais Yaakov in Bnei Brak, he was approached by a small group of parents whose daughters had just graduated from elementary school in Rechovot. The parents were hopeful that they would be accepted into the Bais Yaakov in Bnei Brak. This presented a problem, however, since both of the existing classes were already full, and R. Wolff was committed to keeping classes small. The fact that the girls came from Rechovot added a further difficulty because the Bnei Brak municipality would not allow an additional class to be created for non-residents. The parents were at a loss as to what to do. If there had been more girls, the problem could have been solved by creating a Bais Yaakov in Rechovot, but the small number of girls discouraged the parents from this option. As the two sides could not find a solution, it was agreed to go to Jerusalem and ask The Brisker Rav's advice. R. Wolff went on behalf of the seminary along with the parents' representatives. The Brisker Rav opposed expanding the existing classes in Bnei Brak, advising instead that a Bais Yaakov be set up in Rechovot after all. He followed the principle: "Quality does not come from quantity; but quantity does grow out of quality." And indeed, with R. Wolff's assistance, the parents established a school in Rechovot with only a few students. Over the years, it grew in size, and as a result thousands of girls received a proper Torah education in their hometown."

*The Brisker Rav Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 165*

❖ A bachur was suspended from yeshivah and told to go home. Rather than put him on a bus, Rabbi Trenk drove him home. Throughout the trip, the boy kept muttering, “My father is going to kill me, he’s going to be so angry. I’ll never survive this.” They reached Brooklyn, then turned onto the boy’s block. “My father’s going to kill me,” the boy said miserably as they pulled up. “Go, sit down on the steps, you have to go home,” said Rabbi Trenk as the car slowed down in front of the house. The boy shuffled out of the car and sat down on the steps as Rebbi had instructed him. "Rabbi Trenk pulled away, then reversed the car after a few moments and stopped the car in front of the house. “Get back in. You went home. The suspension is over,” he said, and headed back to yeshivah.

*From Just Love Them: The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, by Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A principal wrote to Rabbi Manis Mandel: I shall never forget a remark of yours to a group of visiting principals representing other yeshivos. You let us visit and see how a real mosad hachinuch is run in the way of Torah. One of the visiting principals asked you (in envy), “What does your board (of directors) say about the unbending approaches and practices in your school? We could never get away with this beautiful system in our school!” We were overwhelmed with great pleasure by your reply, You stroked the full length of your aristocratic beard and said, "This is the only board (Yiddish for ’beard’) that I must answer to!”

*From Rabbi Manis Mandel: A Legendary Mechanech and Tzaddik, by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ There are people who have influence on others, and can help bring them to Torah, but I believe that this can be a mitzvah that comes through a transgression. It is easier to make an impression on people who look up to us than to improve ourselves. Chazal tell us that one who is able to learn and chooses not to is shaming Hashem's Words. It is easy to influence people who do not know much, and to think that one is accomplishing a tremendous amount. A true Kiddush Hashem is done only by example, not by teaching? Rabbi Yisroel Salanter writes that one who teaches others but is not sanctifying Hashem by his actions, is merely seeking to aggrandize himself.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 121*

❖ One not overly qualified boy sought to be admitted to the Mirrer Yeshivah. The boy's family concluded that the Mir would not be the right place for their son, and they shared their sentiments with Reb Kalman Epstein, the Rosh Yeshivah of Shaar HaTorah in Queens, New York. Rabbi Epstein called Israel with this information and asked that, when the boy arrived, the Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, should propose that he learn in one of two other yeshivos that the family preferred. Word came back that Reb Nosson Zvi acquiesced, but when the boy arrived, he was accepted to the Mir! A few days after this, Reb Kalman Epstein called up a baal simchah in Jerusalem to wish him mazel tov. At that very moment, Reb Nosson Zvi was present, extending his congratulatory wishes to the baal simchah. When Reb Nosson Zvi learned who was on the line, he asked if he could speak to Rabbi Epstein for a moment. And this is what he said: "I know that I owe you an apology, but allow me to explain. After I spoke with the boy, he became like one of my children. I just couldn't say no."

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 219*

❖ One summer day, Rav Binyamin Kamenetsky, founder of Yeshivah of South Shore, Yeshivas Toras Chaim, and Torah pioneer of the Five Towns in New York, encountered a Jewish father and his young son at a local post office. The fellow had just moved to the neighborhood, and Rav Binyamin asked the man where his son went to school. "Well, he hasn't started school yet, but next year I'll be enrolling him in public school," said the man. "Public school?" asked Rav Binyamin. "Why don't you send him to our yeshivah? This way, he will receive a quality Jewish education." The man responded that he wasn't religious and was not interested in having his child receive a religious education. Rav Binyamin described how much the young boy would benefit from attending Yeshivah of South Shore, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Seeing that he was getting nowhere, Rav Binyamin asked the man for his address and then wished him a good day. Years later, the man met Rav Binyamin. He had become shomer Shabbos, primarily because of his son, whom he had indeed enrolled in a local day school. Rav Binyamin had lost touch with him, but the fellow embraced him and thanked him for being the reason that he had decided to send his son to a Jewish day school. At the shivah for Rav Binyamin, he told the family the secret: "Not long after my encounter with Rabbi Kamenetsky at the post office, a publication called Olomeinu began arriving at our home each month. I looked through it and was impressed by the ethics and morals conveyed on each page, beautiful Jewish ideals being taught to Jewish children. I realized that these were principles that I wanted my son to learn, and the only way he'd learn them is if he attended a yeshivah. Your father did not give up on us! He bought our family a subscription to this great magazine, and today, my entire family is shomer Shabbos." Rav Binyamin had seemingly been unsuccessful in his overtures at the post office, but he cared too much to just let it go. The least he could do was get the man's address, so that he could pay for a subscription to Olomeinu, hoping it would expose the family to Torah values. It was that gesture that ultimately succeeded in influencing the family to provide their children with the Jewish education they deserved. And today, decades later, their grandchildren are proud talmidim of Yeshivah of South Shore.

*From Powerful Moments by Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ At times, Reb Shmuel Auerbach's disparate treatment of talmidim could be inscrutable, based as it was on his penetrating insight into each boy's individual reality and the future he foresaw for him. Moshe was a talmid who'd arrived in Maalos at an older age, after years in the kibbutz of Ponovezh; he was a masmid and a spiritual striver. When he became a chassan, Reb Shmuel happily agreed to perform siddur kiddushin, but as the date of the chasunah drew near, the Rosh Yeshivah was beset by extreme weakness. With just days to go, he apologetically asked the chassan to arrange for his previous Rosh Yeshivah to be mesader kiddushin in his stead. As it happens, another boy in Maalos HaTorah—not one of the yeshiva's outstanding talmidim, to say the least—also got married that same night. With great mesirus nefesh, given his physical condition, Reb Shmuel not only came but danced with the chassan for a long time. Moshe was uncomprehending of what Reb Shmuel had done, and he approached him for an explanation. "To attend any chasunah that night," the Rosh Yeshivah said, "I needed to summon great inner strength, and so I had to weigh the alternatives. You're someone with great spiritual potential, and your future is bright; my participation was needed only to enhance the occasion. "The other boy—

his connection to the kedushas haTorah is tenuous, and I thought to myself, 'The day will come when his own sons will stand at a crossroads, and he'll be weighing whether to send them to a yeshiva ketana or some more modern high school. At that moment, his decision will be based on his feelings toward his own yeshiva experience, and the fact that I joined so exuberantly in his chasunah and danced vigorously in his honor, are what will permanently etch positive associations with the yeshiva world in his mind..."

*From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press*

❖ Dear Rabbi Mandel: I want to share with Rabbi Mandel an incident that I experienced this morning which I 'm sure will be a source of nachas to him, as it was to me. This morning, as I was getting off the city bus, the driver said to me, "Lady, I'm not saying this because you're Jewish, but you people must be doing something right. I see lots of kids on my bus, and the only kids who ever say 'Thank you' are the yeshivah kids! The first time one of them said 'Have a good day,' I couldn't believe my ears! I asked one of those girls who get off on Ocean Parkway (the stop nearest Yeshiva of Brooklyn) how come they are all so polite. She told me that their rabbi teaches them to act this way. I wish my kids would be like that. Even if we drivers don't respond to these yeshivah kids, we appreciate it. We talk about it at the depot."

*From Rabbi Manis Mandel: A Legendary Mechanech and Tzaddik, by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ R' Meir of Premishlan had a son Dov who went off the derech. He would always speak about his good middos and positive aspects. One day a Talmid was walking with R' Meir and the topic of Dov arose. R' Meir spoke glowingly of his good qualities, and ended with a sigh. The talmid asked how come he is able to be so upbeat about his wayward son. R' Meir said, I daven every day that Dov should come back to the fold, and it is painful to see him away from the derech. But I also daven and hope that just as I am able to love my child and see his good qualities, no matter how deficient he is, so will Hashem look at us, who are all Hashem's wayward children, and love us and focus on our good qualities.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 228*

❖ Levi Kadinson was a baal habos in Monsey. He seemed like an average person but he davened with incredible passion. A guest, R' Avraham Wolf noticed his davening and asked Levi what inspired him to daven with such passion. He shyly said it is all from my mother. We lived in an immaculate home. My mother always kept everything very neat. One day when I was seven my mother sweetly called me into the living room. There was a pitcher of water on the table. She told me to push the table. I was afraid to push it too hard to not make a mess. She said, "harder", so I pushed harder. A bit came out. "harder!" Finally I gave a sharp shove and the pitcher fell over and spilled all over the tablecloth, chairs, and carpet. I was so startled and afraid of what happened that I began to cry. My mother lovingly held me and said, "This pitcher is like Hashem. He is filled with rachamim and love. He just wants us to give a good shake, and his rachamim will spill all over.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 52*

❖ A yungerman learning in a certain yeshivah in Yerushalayim wanted to bolster the level of learning in his yeshivah, so he made a deal that anyone who would finish Bava Kamma, the masechta the yeshivah was learning at the time, would receive 700 shekel. He assumed that only a handful of bachurim would accept the challenge, and before embarking on his campaign he convinced a wealthy businessman to cover the costs. To the pleasant surprise of this yungerman, over thirty bachurim finished the masechta! He called his sponsor, and feeling somewhat uncomfortable, he shared the news that he would need a lot more money than he anticipated. The sponsor replied that he simply couldn't cover the costs of such a large sum. The yungerman was in a panic. He owed some 21,000 shekel, and he had no way of obtaining the funds. When he shared his predicament with a friend, the friend suggested, "Why don't you go to Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel?" How can I go to Rav Nosson Tzvi?" The yungerman wondered? "I never learned in the Mir, and he doesn't know me at all." "Just go," his friend insisted. The yungerman came to Rav Nosson Tzvi and told him about his problem. "Tell them to come to me this Friday,"

the Rosh Yeshivah said. "I'll test them, and if they know Bava Kamma well, I'll give them the money." "But I can't take the Yeshiva's money!" the yungerman exclaimed. "What do you care?" Rav Nosson Tzvi responded. "We're talking about Torah here! Torah is Torah" The bachurim came and took the bechina, and Rav Nosson Tzvi gave each one 700 shekel.

*Rav Nosson Tzvi, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ An illustrative story is told about R. Shlomo Heiman, one of Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz's greatest disciples. One of R. Shlomo's talmidim, R. Moshe Samuels, recalls that when R. Shlomo would give a shiur, it was always with great emotion. He explained every detail of the Gemara with tremendous excitement. As he explained his chiddushim, his voice rose, his face glowed and the words poured from his heart. During a heavy snowstorm in New York City, cars and buses got stuck in the streets. As a result, only four bachurim managed to make it to the yeshivah for the shiur, and they were certain that the shiur would be canceled. But when R. Shlomo arrived, not only did he deliver the shiur, he gave it with the same excitement and emotional fervor as always! As the four sat and listened with rapt attention, they felt as if they were in a huge beis midrash packed wall to wall with bachurim! In the middle of the shiur, R. Shlomo paused for a moment to rest. One of the bachurim took the opportunity to ask him, "Rebbi, aren't we just four bachurim here?" R. Shlomo answered, "Do you think that I am giving this shiur just to you? You are mistaken! I am giving this shiur to you, to your talmidim, and to all of the talmidim of your talmidim!"

*Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim*

❖ It is for good reason that Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk's sefarim have spread among battei midrash all over the world, and talmidei chachamim consider each word of his a treasure. There have been many other brilliant talmidei chachamim, but their sefarim have not achieved equal fame. R. Chaim was once asked about this and answered, "The difference between me and others who give shiurim is that I prepare twenty-three hours for a one-hour shiur, and thus the shiur comes out clear and precise; whereas others give a twenty-three-hour shiur for which they spend one hour preparing.

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 49*

❖ Rav Shach devoted himself to both the spiritual and material welfare of his students in the holy yeshivah of Novaradok, keeping in mind the dictum of our Sages, "Be careful of the sons of the poor, for from them Torah shall go forth." Often, when a bachur would approach him to discuss a Torah topic, the first thing Rav Shach would ask the student was, "What have you eaten today?" Upon hearing the answer he would usually say, "No, that isn't enough. Take this money and go buy yourself something more." Like a merciful father, he was concerned not only for their learning but for all their needs.

*Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 462*

❖ There are two things that no head of a yeshivah will ever give up willingly: a good student and a major financial supporter. Yet Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz did both — and not just once but many times over the course of twenty years. At a time when there were barely fifty advanced talmidim in all of America, Reb Shraga Feivel provided many of his best bachurim to help start Telshe and Lakewood, and helped the yeshivos raise money as if they were his own. In the annals of the yeshivos from Volozhin to the present, there is almost no comparable example.' The largest concentration of Jews in New York City in the 30's and 40's, after the Lower East Side, was in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. Yet Brownsville's 300,000 Jews lacked a single high school-level Mesivta yeshivah, until 1936. That year Reb Shraga Feivel decided that Yeshivas Chaim Berlin, which then continued only until eighth grade, should develop its own mesivta, although a large percentage of its graduates enrolled in Torah Vodaath. Reb Shraga Feivel's son-in-law, Rabbi Sender Linchner, was then a rabbi in the largest shul in East New York, the neighborhood adjacent to Brownsville, and among his congregants was the president of Yeshivas Chaim Berlin, Mr. Moshe Meltzer. Reb Shraga Feivel told his son-in-law that he should prevail upon Meltzer to expand the yeshivah. Meltzer's initial response was that the money could never be raised for such an expansion, especially in the depths of the Depression. From the first day that he mentioned the idea to Mr. Meltzer, however, Rabbi Linchner gave him no peace until he finally agreed to undertake the project. By the time Mesivta Chaim Berlin opened its

doors, the school year had already begun, and any of it elementary school graduates interested in attending a Mesivta were already enrolled in Torah Vodaath. Reb Shraga Feivel solved the problem by sending every Brownsville boy in Torah Vodaath to Chaim Berlin. Later he established a rule that any boy who lived closer to Chaim Berlin than to Torah Vodaath would not be accepted in the Mesivta. That he was thereby diminishing his own enrollment made no difference to him. Soon after Rabbi Aharon Kotler's arrival in America in 1941, he expressed to Reb Shraga Feivel the desire to open in America a yeshivah like the one he had left behind in Kletsk. Without hesitating, Reb Shraga Feivel chose some of the Mesivta's best — including Rabbi Elya Svei, Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, Rabbi Tzvi Genauer, Rabbi Yisrael Kanarek, and Rabbi Yaakov Weisberg — and sent them to Reb Aharon. He knew that only the very best talmidim could understand Reb Aharon's shiurim, and those were the talmidim he sent. The roshei yeshivah in the Mesivta were understandably upset to lose such prize pupils and complained to Reb Shraga Feivel. He told them unapologetically, "Our task is to cause Torah to flourish, and Reb Aharon cannot be rebbi for students of a lower caliber." There is only one large Yeshivah, - the yeshivah of the Ribono shel olam. All yeshivas are just branches of this one yeshivah. It was to such deeds that Reb Aharon referred when he said of Reb Shraga Feivel, "Who can compare to him? His every action is l'shem Shamayim.

*Reb Shraga Feivel, By Yonoson Rosenblum, Published by Mesorah Publications*

❖ The bachurim of the yeshivah once surprised Rav Shlomo Rothenberg with a trip to Eretz Yisrael, so that he could spend a Shabbos with his former talmidim learning there. It was a trip he would always remember; Rav Shlomo was on a high about it from the beginning of the trip to the end. When one of his friends, Mr. Mitch Kuflik, heard about Rav Shlomo's upcoming trip, he arranged for him to be upgraded to business class — an experience Rav Shlomo had never had before. As the trip drew to a close, his talmidim asked him, "How will Rebbi be able to go back to his simple trailer after flying with such extravagance in business class?" Rav Shlomo's reply was amazing. "It's not my trailer; it's my palace! My palace has five bedrooms, two kitchens, three ovens, and even two dishwashers! But talmidim, I want you to know that it's not the many rooms or accessories that make my home into the special place that it is. What makes my home into such a special place is Mom! [He'd refer to the Rebbetzin as 'Mom.] It is she who creates such a wonderful atmosphere there, and for that, I am so very appreciative."

*From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Reb Dovid Feinstein was sitting after the post-Shacharis Mishnayos shiur, enjoying conversation and refreshments with talmidim, not an unusual occurrence. On Reb Dovid's left side sat an East Side local, animatedly telling the Rosh Yeshivah about his major win at a Bingo game the night before. "I won twenty bucks," he said. Someone opened the door to the beis medrash, telling the Rosh Yeshivah that he had a phone call. Reb Dovid nodded but made no move to get up. Instead, Reb Dovid turned to face the man on his left. "Twenty dollars?" he repeated, "that's a lot of money. In one game, or two?" The gentleman happily explained the format of the game and how he managed to win such a significant sum. The talmid at the door again motioned that there was a phone call from another Rosh Yeshivah, and again, Reb Dovid nodded but did not stand up. "That sounds like fun," Reb Dovid said to the man next to him. "Can I join the game next week?" "Of course not," the man said, and laughed out loud. "You're a smart guy. If you come, I won't win as easily." The talmid watching saw the shift in the features of this lonely, quiet man as he spoke of his Bingo triumphs, the way his face lit up with color and pride as he spoke of his happiest moments of the week, and the talmid realized that the Rosh Yeshivah understood pikuach nefesh a lot better than he did.

*From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One year at the Torah Umesorah convention, there was a session on the topic, "How do you make your students feel loved?" When Rav Tendler returned from the convention, he said that he thought the time could have been better used for different topics. "Ta," Elisheva asked, "What is the way that you feel a teacher should make the students feel loved?" Rav

Tendler, puzzled that she had even asked the question, shrugged, and said, "Love them." It was that simple!

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 118*

❖ The Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yoel Teitelbaum) once expressed his approach to chinuch in the following words, "My responsibility to my talmidim is different from that of other yeshivas. In other yeshivas, once the children graduate, they go their separate ways, in various communities with various lifestyles. When I accept a three-year-old boy, I hold his hand until he's in his seventies — his whole life. I provide him with a community to live in when he grows up, and a beis medrash to daven and learn in. I build him into a functioning adult, who knows how to lead a Jewish life. I provide a network of schools to which he will send his children!"

*The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 381*

❖ At one such meeting the Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yoel Teitelbaum) said, "If a shochet is incompetent but slaughters anyway, he causes others to sin. If a scribe is incompetent and writes invalid tefillin, 'The does even more damage, because people will wear his invalid tefillin for their entire lives. But a melamed who is unfit for the job does the worst damage of all, because it lasts for generations." After these penetrating words, one melamed who questioned his own competence approached lithe Rebbe and asked whether he was allowed to continue his job; the Rebbe calmed him."

*The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 407*

❖ Even though the weekly salaries of educators were less than half of what one could hope to earn as a rabbi, only in a few special cases did Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz direct students toward careers in the rabbinate. "As a rabbi," he told his older students, "you'll be dealing with the balebatim. How much can you do with baalebatim? But if you work with children, you'll have spiritual satisfaction — and you'll be building Klal Yisrael. If American rabbis had used the time spent preparing derashos to educate the children in their shuls, he noted bitterly, they might have accomplished much more.

*Reb Shraga Feivel, By Yonoson Rosenblum, Published by Mesorah Publications*

❖ As rabbi of the town, Reb Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman saw to all matters that pertained to its citizens. In a brief time he significantly elevated the educational level of the cheder, finally making it a viable option for academically-minded parents. Registration burgeoned, to the great consternation of the principal of the government school which was now left with a minimal Jewish enrollment consisting of weak students. A vindictive man, the principal did not accept this situation passively. He warned Rav Kahaneman that if the children from affluent homes did not return to his school, he would inform the government about the opening of a non-accredited (hence illegal) school, which would surely result in the closing of both the cheder and the yeshivah as well. Reb Yosef Shlomo, was not intimidated and replied, "I have no doubt that you would inform on me, which would mean my banishment, to Siberia. You should just be aware of the fact that in Siberia I, will also open a yeshivah!" The principal concluded, that there was no purpose in challenging this fearless young upstart, and abandoned his campaign.

*Builders, By Rabbi Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Before I (Rabbi Yisrael Reisman) began teaching at the Yeshivah, I met with Rabbi Pam, and sought his guidance. At the end of one of our conversations, I presented something that troubled me: "Occasionally, we see Rebbe'im who are 'burnt out,' who no longer have the fire that is necessary for successful teaching. How do I make sure this doesn't happen to me?" His answer, typically, was brief but to the point. "Some Rebbe'im teach Gemora. They are in danger of losing their sipuk (sense of satisfaction). Don't teach Gemara. Teach talmidim. Focus on the person, not the subject."

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ After the war, the Satmar Rav learned with a ragtag group of survivors in America. He invited them to learn brachos with him. He would start at 7 o'clock and talk about their families, their work, and other personal but ostensibly mundane matters. At 8 he would look at his watch and say, oh vei iz duch shpeit, perhaps we will begin tomorrow. He would do this every day, for a year. The people in the class loved his conversations, and really gained from them, but they wondered why he put up the charade every day. Finally after a year the rebbe looked around and instead of seeing a ragtag group of broken survivors, he saw a group of confident young men whose lives were beginning to rebuild. He now began the class by saying, biz yetz huben mir gelernt daf alef up till now we learnt daf aleph. Itzter lumer lernen daf beis. Now let's begin to learn daf beis. Why does the Gemara start at daf beis, because the daf aleph is that one has to prepare to begin, one has to transform to become a confident, healthy and beloved person, before he can go to the next stage.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 267*

❖ When Rav Nachman Mandel lived In Los Angeles, he would buy day-old bread and would ask the cashier to let him know the difference in price between what he had purchased and the same amount of fresh bread. He would record the amount saved each day, and when the total was significant, he would write a check to tzedakah for that amount.

*From Rabbi Manis Mandel: A Legendary Mechanech and Tzaddik, by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A Torah educator informed the Chazon Ish that circumstances had forced him to seek another mean of livelihood. 'Which field do you propose to enter?" asked the Chazon Ish. "Diamond polishing." "But you are a diamond polisher!" he exclaimed. "What could be more precious than a Jewish child!"

*The Chazon Ish, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ In planning the building of his Yeshivah, Rav Leizer Yudel Finkel left out a basic component of every building in the world: a door. This oddity was a symbol of the policy that has existed in Mir Yerushalayim from the day it was established: the Mir is open to anyone who would like to enroll, regardless of his background or his level of scholarship as long as he is sincerely interested in studying Torah.

*Rav Nosson Tzvi, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A Talmid, himself an accomplished mechanech, recalls discussing with the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Schechter, different candidates for rebbeim. One criterion was non-negotiable - the Rosh Hayeshiva would always inquire if the prospective rebbi has a rebbi of his own. He firmly maintained that a rebbi who is not a talmid to his own rebbi cannot possibly be a rebbi himself.

*From Rav Aharon Schechter Tribute / Table Talk Anthology*

❖ A student asked Reb Mendel Kaplan to point out his shortcomings. In response, Reb Mendel told him a story about Reb Yeruchem Levovitz. "A boy in the Mirrer Yeshivah asked his rebbe for a letter of recommendation to another yeshivah. The rebbe could think of no particular quality to extol and mentioned his problem to Reb Yeruchem. Reb Yeruchem got very upset with the rebbe. 'How is it possible that you don't see any good qualities in a boy?' he asked. 'I could speak for hours about the good qualities of every boy in this yeshivah!' When he told this story, Reb Mendel added, "You learn from this story that you are supposed to study another person's strengths, not his weaknesses."

*Reb Mendel, By Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One chaburah in the Mir was composed of longtime Mirrer Talmidim who had proven themselves in learning over the course of many years. Each candidate for his advanced chaburah had to be approved by Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel rather himself. These yungeleit were assigned seats in one of the yeshiva's batei midrash, but — as often happens in the Mir — there weren't enough seats for all of them. The seats adjacent to this chaburah belonged to a group that one might consider the polar opposite of these yungeleit. Out of his deep love of every Jew and his desire to give every bachur a chance to learn,

Rav Nosson Tzvi had established a chaburah for boys who had not done well in any other yeshivah. Some of them were on the verge of leaving Yiddishkeit when they joined the Mir, and this chaburah was their last ditch effort to rejuvenate themselves. But as a result of their lackadaisical attitude toward Yiddishkeit, these boys would consistently come late. Some of the seat-less yungeleit in the advanced chaburah wanted to use the seats designated for the other group at least until they arrived but the mashgiach would not hear of it "If you're sitting in their seats when they walk in," he explained, "they'll leave without learning at all that day." "Baruch," the person in charge of the advanced chaburah, was close to Rav Nosson Tzvi, and some of the yungeleit urged him repeatedly to discuss the situation with the Rosh Yeshivah. After several weeks, Baruch worked up the courage to approach the Rosh Yeshivah. He explained, "We have yungeleit stationed in hallways and near the restrooms, while some seats in the beis midrash are vacant most of the morning" — hoping that the Rosh Yeshivah would allow the yungeleit to use those seats at least until the bachurim showed up. Rav Nosson Tzvi heard Baruch's request, and responded with a question of his own. "What will I do when a father of one of these boys comes to me and cries, 'My son was finally beginning to learn after failing everywhere else, and now he comes into yeshivah and sees someone sitting in his seat, so he doesn't learn that day!' What will I answer him?" "If that's the problem," Baruch replied, "then we can formulate a diplomatic answer for those fathers." Rav Nosson Tzvi fixed his gaze on Boruch. Pointing to himself he said, "But I am their father."

*Rav Nosson Tzvi, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A faculty member of the yeshivah advised Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel not to admit a particular talmid into the yeshivah. The Rosh Yeshivah did not concur with this advice and ruled otherwise. The cautioner then advised that if this boy was indeed to be admitted then ten conditions must be stipulated. Once again the Rosh Yeshivah nixed the advice and pegged only that the boy's admission be contingent upon him attending davening in yeshivah every day and wishing a "good morning" afterwards. Note the brilliance of this stipulation: Coming to davening on time meant not staying up too late at night. Saying "good morning" to the Rosh Yeshivah meant cultivating a relationship. The end result was a product that the Mir — indeed any yeshivah — would have been proud of.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 221*

❖ Once Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer was testing a group of children. As was his wont, When a child would ask a question or give an answer that was incorrect. He would interrupt gently, "You probably mean to say" or "What you are really saying is" and then furnish the correct answer. Once, a child said a wrong pshat in a Tosafos, and the Rosh Yeshivah began to explain what the child really intended. The child was obstinate, refusing to accept the revised pshat, "I meant what I said." The Rosh Yeshivah again began to explain the proper way to learn, without telling the child he was mistaken, "You probably mean to say that." "No," persisted the child, "I am learning differently." This continued for a full 10 minutes, as Rav Isser Zalman tried in vain to set the boy straight, with the young talmid refusing to listen. The Rebbe who had accompanied his class had already lost patience with the child, but the Rosh Yeshivah was unruffled, reiterating his words again and again. The child refused to budge. Suddenly, the Rosh Yeshivah rose and excused himself, saying that he would return momentarily. He walked into the hallway, and closed the door behind him, and this is what Reb Yankel Weisberg heard him say. "Kavod habriyos, Respect for all people — mit kinder oichet, with children too." He paced up and down, repeating the words. "Kavod habriyos, with children too." Then he reentered the room, a broad smile on his face, and began to explain the Tosafos once again.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Like her husband, Rebbetzin Pincus was a model of chessed and middos tovos par excellence who radiated love upon all. Fiercely committed to their growth in Torah and yiras Shamayim, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to her children, imbuing them with strength and courage to withstand any hardship and staunchly uphold their spiritual goals. All of her sons nostalgically recall the sweet moments when she escorted them to the bus stop on their way to yeshivah, especially on

the first day of a new zman when they left with suitcases packed with personal effects. Each step she took brimmed with the passion and love of a Jewish mother leading her son by the hand on the path to Torah. Though they didn't necessarily converse during the brief walk, they keenly felt her profound ahavas ha Torah with every breath of air that she took. But one year, one of the Pincus boys didn't benefit from those private moments with his mother as he set off for his first day of yeshivah. Instead of escorting him to the bus stop, Rebbetzin Pincus accompanied him only as far as the building lobby and then lingered in the stairwell, waving goodbye and sending him off with a stream of heartfelt berachos for hatzlachah in learning. "But why aren't you coming?" her son countered in surprise and disappointment. Rebbetzin Pincus didn't reply immediately, but a faint shadow of grief clouded her face. Only when the boy repeated his question, and she saw the deep disappointment in his eyes, did she surrender and confess the truth, "I heard that a certain orphaned bachur is also leaving today to yeshivah. He's probably taking the same bus as you, and if he sees us together, he'll probably feel a twinge of pain that he doesn't have a mother to escort him to the bus stop." The young bachur nodded in understanding, and bidding his mother goodbye, left the building confident that her eyes and tefillos were still upon him. Never in his life would he forget the powerful lesson that he absorbed on his first day in yeshivah.

*From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll*

❖ Like her husband, Rebbetzin Chaya Mindel Pincus (wife of Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus) was a model educator, a mechaneches who possessed wisdom, keen perception, and an uncanny understanding of her children. The ahavas ha Torah that blazed in her cart allowed her to play a significant role in transmitting Torah to er children. Often, her eyes saw the unseen, and her ears heard the unspoken. Every day, when her sons returned home from cheder or yeshivah, she'd greet them warmly and inquire how they'd learned that day. One day when she repeated the daily question, her son responded with a mischievous glint in his eye. "What do you think, Mommy? That I'd tell you if I didn't learn well today?" Without batting an eyelash, she replied, "I know your voice well enough to know when your 'yes' is a real yes! And you know," she added as an aside, “when your 'yes' isn't a real yes, I don't sleep at night."

*From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll*

❖ R’ Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky said that when a Rosh Yeshivah wanted to expel a bachur from his school, Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman asked, "What is the boy's mother's name?” If the Rosh Yeshivah answered that he didn't know, R’ Aharon Leib said that the rebbeim and roshei yeshivah must daven for their struggling student A Rosh Yeshivah who does not know a boy's full Hebrew name and his mother's full Hebrew name cannot contemplate expelling him because obviously he has not yet davened for him!

*From Rav Aharon Leib, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A bachur once came for an interview accompanied by his father. When the bachur exited the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Shlomo Rothenberg's office, he was quick to tell his father, who was waiting outside, "I'm definitely not going to be accepted I couldn't explain the Gemara at all!" Soon after, Rav Shlomo came out to tell them that the bachur had been accepted into the yeshivah. They were in shock! They were so sure that he wouldn't be accepted, and now he was. The father of the bachur said to Rav Shlomo, "I'm embarrassed to ask you this, but my son was so sure that you wouldn't want him because he couldn't explain the Gemara. Why, indeed, did you accept him?" Rav Shlomo's response was penetrating and refreshing. "Your son came to the interview dressed neatly. He speaks with respect and shows sincerity. For those reasons, he deserves to come to the yeshivah. As for his level in learning that you're concerned about-it's our job as rabbeim to show him the beauty of the Gemara, not his! That's exactly why we want your son in our yeshivah!"

*From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Jewish Observer recounted the following about that era. Rabbi Neuberger personally assessed the spiritual well-being of the Iranian community before the deposition of the Shah, and concluded that Torah life in Iran would disintegrate if there were not sufficient Iranian bnei Torah capable of positions in rabbanus and chinuch. He had initially planned to

bring promising students to Ner Yisrael, develop them, and send them back to Iran to fortify the community. With the Islamic revolution in 1979, however, the Iranian Jews were placed in physical as well as spiritual peril. Rabbi Neuberger immediately shifted gears to help Iranian Jewry escape to America and Eretz Yisrael. Rabbi Ruderman was insistent that the Iranians maintain the customs of their communities, and encouraged them to make a separate Shabbos minyan according to minhagei Paras (Iranian customs). Rabbi Neuberger had assigned Rabbi Yosef Tendler the responsibility to apply for visas for the young Iranian men and woman who wanted to leave their country. Halted in his tracks by bureaucracy and resistance to aiding immigration, Rav Tendler reported back to Rabbi Neuberger that he had been totally unsuccessful. Rabbi Neuberger instantly called a government contact in Washington, and explained the problem. The man lacked the power to assist him personally, but gave him the name and number of a colleague, a high-ranking bureaucrat who was in a position to expedite visas. The Rabbis quickly arranged an appointment to petition him in person, but to their chagrin, this pivotal official was indifferent, and could not be induced to involve himself in the plight of Iranian Jewry. The case seemed hopeless. There was a sudden, unexpected knock at the door of his office, and the official that Rabbi Neuberger had originally called walked in, hugged Rabbi Neuberger; and expressed his warm and genuine appreciation for him. Witnessing this, the second bureaucrat did a total about-face. From that moment until approximately four years later, he opened the floodgates of Iranian emigration, allowing thousands of Jewish youth to come to these shores. Curious about what had transpired, Rabbi Tendler inquired as to why the first contact, a non-Jew, had been so motivated to help Rabbi Neuberger that he orchestrated such a dramatic scene in order to influence his colleague to fulfill Rabbi Neuberger's request. It seems that some thirty years earlier, Rabbi Neuberger had struck up a conversation with this gentleman while attending a conference. In his typical caring manner; he discovered that the man was suffering with a severe medical condition. After ascertaining the details, Rabbi Neuberger did some research, referring him to an accomplished physician who ultimately cured him. Rabbi Neuberger's altruistic intervention made a lasting impression on his beneficiary, to the extent that when he ascended in the ranks of the government in Washington DC, he always put himself at Rabbi Neuberger's disposal to express his gratitude.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 155*

❖ Reb Leizer Geltzhaler once disciplined a bachur who had the bad habit of insulting and mocking other talmidim. "I need to send you home," the Rosh Yeshivah said, and explained. "A bachur who hits another boy and causes him pain has harmed another, but the victim goes home from yeshivah and lies down and feels better. But a bachur who teases another? Then the victim goes home and lies down and tosses and turns, unable to sleep because the words keep playing in his mind, hurting him again and again. Such a bachur is dangerous, and he has to leave the Yeshivah."

*Reb Laizer, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ A grandson of Rav Yosef Tendler once related: In eighth grade I learned Gemara with my grandfather. Many times, when I would ask a question, Zeidy would think about it and then tell me, "I have an answer which I can tell you, but it's not good enough, so keep this question in mind until you find an answer."

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 446*

❖ Twenty minutes before landing in France's Charles de Gaulle airport, pilot Rodney Owens made an announcement to the passengers. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. There is a heavy fog over Paris, so we'll be turning back to Heathrow airport in London. I have just recently been trained for flying this type of aircraft. Until now I've been flying a larger aircraft and each type of plane requires special training. We haven't yet covered landing in fog, and therefore I am not qualified to do so. I'm sorry for the inconvenience." Comment: That he didn't land the plane in spite of the rules doesn't impress me that much, because his job was on the line and he was responsible for the safety of the passengers. However, to be willing to tell a hundred and fifty or so people that he's not qualified is a rare and impressive display of frankness and

honesty. It happens all the time, though, in the shiur room or classroom. A rebbe or morah may have to face a room full of people and say, "That's a question I can't answer, because I don't know. " It's not easy, yet the message of honesty is often what sticks with the students the longest.

*Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ The Chazzon Ish said of Rabbi Shach, "Ha'emes ahuv etzlo, Truth is precious to him. The Chazon Ish first noted this great middah of Rabbi Shach when one of the talmidim in the yeshivah in Petach Tikva related to him that once Rabbi Shach regretted a nuance of his shiur and approached every single student with the correction.

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One day in shiur a student fell asleep and began to snore. His neighbor gave him a gentle nudge to wake him up, but Reb Mendel Kaplan stopped him: "Let him sleep. It says in halachah that you're supposed to wake someone up to say Shema, but nowhere does it say you have to disturb him to listen to my shiur." He then seized the opportunity to speak about the prohibition against disturbing people's sleep. The sleeping student must have sensed the change in Rebbe's voice because he began to emerge from his nap. Realizing that the sleeper would be very embarrassed if he were to awaken to find that everyone was looking at him and that Rebbe was talking about disturbing someone's sleep, Reb Mendel stopped abruptly in the middle of ea sentence and resumed his discussion of the Gemara "...And with this the Ramban's question is answered and we can go further in the Gemara."

*Reb Mendel, By Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Tendler, who had never stood before a classroom to teach, was told to prepare three days of shiurim for the twelfth grade. When he arrived in Baltimore, however, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg asked him to present his sample shiur to the tenth grade instead. Rav Tendler was taken aback by this, but didn't question Rabbi Weinberg. He delivered the shiur, yet no one from the administration had come to the classroom to observe him. He was perturbed because he had left his wife with two young children and traveled so far for a trial lesson that was seemingly ignored. He was also disturbed by having been given the tenth grade class to teach, although he was applying for the twelfth-grade position. Rav Tendler discussed the matter with Rabbi Gershon Weiss who was similarly puzzled. Rabbi Weiss spoke with Rabbi Weinberg, who reassured him that there was nothing to worry about. The next day was a repeat of the first. He was scheduled to meet after that shiur with Rabbi Weinberg. Before they spoke, Rabbi Weinberg took him to the tenth-grade room, and showed him a vent in the wall. Rabbi Weinberg explained, "That vent goes straight to the administrative offices. I knew that you had never been in front of a class before, and didn't want you to be self-conscious. To alleviate that pressure, we chose the tenth-grade room so that I could sit behind the wall and listen to every word.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 89*

❖ Yehoshua Leib Levine was in fourth grade. He was going to have a haschalas mishnayos assembly. His father was asked to be the guest speaker. Yehoshua Leib and his brother Moshe were extremely excited. 3 grades were going to be at the assembly. The day before the assembly Yehoshua Leib could not sleep because he was so excited. At the assembly Rabbi Kurtzman the principal introduced Rabbi Levine, who gave a beautiful speech. He noticed his son Moshe, but not Yehoshua Leib. After the assembly, he walked down the hall and saw Yehoshua Leib in the resource room, with someone helping him with reading. When the boy saw his father he realized what happened and began to cry uncontrollably. Apparently Yehoshua Leib had been called out of class and missed the assembly. Rabbi Levine brought the crying Yehoshua Leib to the office and called Mrs. Levine to try to calm him down, but he wouldn't. She came to school, but he kept crying. Mrs levine said to the principal, how could you do this to him? He said you are right. We will do it again. Do you mean call the class together? No, I mean call all three grades. We will do the whole assembly again. All were called again and Rabbi Kurtzman

said that the first thing to learn about mishnayos is the importance of chazarah. We are going to review what Rabbi Levine said. When Rabbi Levine spoke, he said there is also an important lesson from what rabbi kurtzman did. As precious as mishnayos is, it is worthwhile, to push off beginning mishnayos for the sake of one child's feelings.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 94*

❖ Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach once asked Rabbi Meir Schlesinger, who was Rosh Yeshivah at Yeshivas Sha'alvim, to consider accepting a particular Kol Torah student. The boy, it seemed, was not cut out for Kol Torah and Reb Shlomo Zalman had hoped that the environment at Sha'alvim might suit him and enable him to adjust better. Rabbi Schlesinger heeded his mentor's advice and gave the student an interview and an oral exam. However, it was patently obvious from the exam results that this boy was not cut out for Sha'alvim either, and he was not accepted. A little while later, a senior member of the Kol Torah faculty approached Rabbi Schlesinger demanding to know how he had the audacity to insult Reb Shlomo Zalman. "The Rosh Yeshivah asks you to accept a student, and you decide to go and test him?!" Rabbi Schlesinger felt he had indeed been remiss in ignoring his Rav's instructions and immediately went to apologize. "I have come to beg your forgiveness..." Rabbi Schlesinger began. "Forgiven," Reb Shlomo Zalman cut him off. "Now tell me what it's about." Rabbi Schlesinger related his story, to which the Gaon reacted by saying, "Now you must truly beg my forgiveness! To think that I would expect you to accept a student without testing him, just because I said so, means that your opinion of me is terribly low. And for that, you really do need to apologize!"

*From Jerusalem His Word, By Rabbi Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ The teenage son of a wealthy donor applied to the Yeshiva, and met with the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Schechter, as part of the admission process. After talking in learning for a bit, the Rosh Hayeshiva asked the boy why he wishes to attend Yeshivas Chaim Berlin specifically. The bochur responded, "To tell the truth, I'm learning well in my current yeshiva. But my father wants me to attend college and that's not an option where I am now." The Rosh Hayeshiva immediately closed his Gemara with a snap and declared the interview over: "You are not accepted. Go back to your current yeshiva and shteig." Although there were some boys in the Yeshiva attending college classes, the Rosh Hayeshiva would only accept someone who was coming to grow. If coming to Yeshivas Chaim Berlin was a step down for his circumstances, the Rosh Hayeshiva wouldn't hear of it. Years later, this young man - today a marbitz Torah - recounted, "My father was furious, and never gave another dime to the Yeshiva. Many well-meaning baalei batim implored the Rosh Hayeshiva to change his mind and accept me, but he wouldn't budge. And in doing so, he set me on my course for life. I owe everything to the Rosh Hayeshiva, from that one meeting."

*From Rav Aharon Schechter Tribute / Table Talk Anthology*

❖ Sixty-five years ago, a man whose son was studying for semichah (rabbinic ordination) at Tifereth Jerusalem loaned the yeshivah $20,000, thereby rescuing it from financial disaster. As the time of his son's ordination approached, the man sent out printed invitations to a gala affair celebrating the event. Meanwhile Reb Moshe Feinstein was told by someone that the man's son was not conducting himself as a student of Torah should. Reb Moshe investigated and found the allegations to be true. Fully aware of the consequences, Reb Moshe told the young man that he could not be awarded his semichah. The enraged father then demanded that his loan be repaid without delay. It was.

*Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Berel Lazerson was a school bus driver. He became frustrated because the boys were rowdy and it exhausted him. He told the principal that he was going to switch to become a delivery man instead. The principal, Rabbi Ben Shalom said ok, but would it be ok if we speak to Rabbi Bentzion Abba Shaul, a sefardi gadol before he makes the final decision. The driver met with Rav Abba Shaul. Rabbi Abba Shaul smiled and said you should realize that you are not a bus driver. You are

driving an aron kodesh. The boys are not boys they are Sifrei Torah; each child is the entire future of the Jewish people and its Torah. Every time you open the door you are getting the kibud of doing pesicha. He was inspired and agreed to continue. The next day he told the boys thank you for the zechus and kavod of being able to drive you every day.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 142*

❖ A well-respected man, a leader and an overseer of a large and thriving Jewish community once came to visit the holy Chofetz Chaim. Expecting to be welcomed with honor and respect befitting an important man, he was shocked when the Chofetz Chaim took one look at him turned away and had him escorted from his presence. Such a thing was rare especially for a community leader who was widely recognized and respected. More than being insulted, the man was frightened at the reaction of the Chofetz Chaim to his presence. What had he done to bring up such a reaction to incur the wrath of the great man? He searched his memory for any sort of incident but he came up empty handed. Trembling he decided that he could not leave Radin without finding out the source of the Chofetz Chaim's displeasure with him. With faltering steps, he knocked on the door and begged to be given one more chance to talk with the Chofetz Chaim. He finally managed to make his way inside and once again came face-to-face with the Chofetz Chaim. "Rebbe," he cried, "what have I done? What was my sin that you pushed me away and removed me from your home?" The Chofetz Chaim's eyes turned steely as he spoke to the man. "You should just know that it is all your fault! All your responsibility! The fact that more than three million of our Jewish brothers are suffocating under the oppression of the Communist regime — all the oppression, all the pain and suffering — it's all your fault! All your fault. All your fault!" The Chofetz Chaim's words hit him with the force of a locomotive train. The fate of millions of suffering Jews was on his shoulders. How could that be? What had he done? "But Rabbi," he began, as a stifled sob of protest came from his lips, but the Chofetz Chaim cut him off. "Now? Now you cry? Of course, now you lead a large congregation, you oversee the workings of your community, and surely you wouldn't want any harm to come to it — but what about then? What about all those years ago?" The man was unable to open his mouth. He truly had no idea what the Chofetz Chaim was talking about. "Surely you remember," continued the Chofetz Chaim, "many years ago when you worked as administrator of the local school. There was a young boy in your school who had just lost his father and lived with his struggling mother. With those unfortunate circumstances, it was no wonder that the boy tended to act out and make trouble. He was wild, with a sharp tongue, and difficult to control. In the end, you lost your patience with him and had him thrown out." The man thought long and hard. Then he asked cautiously, "What was the boy's name?" "Laibel," said the Chofetz Chaim, "his name was Laibel Bronshtein. Since the school wouldn't keep him, his mother had no choice but to put him in a non-Jewish school. But the boy was smart, brilliant perhaps. He may even have become a great Rosh Yeshivah given the proper guidance. Instead, his sharp mind absorbed secular knowledge and he grew to become a leader among the gentiles. This young Jewish boy, Laibel, also known as Leon Trotsky, became one of the founders of Communism and supreme commander of the Red Army during the Bolshevik Revolution — an ideology he espoused after being spurned from your school. How many countless souls have suffered due to this dangerous ideology? Now I ask you," said the Rabbi, "who is to blame? On whose shoulders is the enormous weight of history's unforgiving irony placed, if not yours?"

*Heroes of Spirit, 100 Rabbinic Tales of the Holocaust. By Rabbi Dovid Hoffman*

❖ The child of a talmid went to learn in Mesivta Chaim Berlin. He was homesick and overwhelmed, and decided that he would return home and learn in a local yeshivah. His father took him to speak to Rav Shlomo Freifeld, who greeted him warmly. "I have to tell you that I so enjoyed your bar mitzvah, Reb Shlomo told him. "It was a real Yiddish simchah, the way it's supposed to be." They spoke about the boy's fears and insecurities and Reb Shlomo suggested that he wait a Little longer before deciding to change yeshivos. On a Motzei Shabbos a few weeks later, after Maariv, Reb Shlomo asked the boy to come to his house and do him a favor. The Rebbetzin, brought a black raincoat into the room and handed it to him. "This belongs to the Rosh Yeshivah, R' Aharon Schechter. Can you bring it to him when you return to yeshivah tomorrow?" The boy happily agreed, and the next morning, he knocked at the door to the Rosh Yeshivah's office. The Rosh Yeshivah greeted

him warmly, asking him his name and several other questions. When he handed over the coat the Rosh Yeshivah seamed bewildered and said that he had never left a coat by Reb Shlomo. The boy took the coat and brought it back to Reb Shlomo. It was then that the boy realized that the coat had been Reb Shlomo's way of getting him introduced to the Rosh Yeshivah, knowing that it would ease his transition into the yeshivah. It did, and this boy remained in that yeshivah through Kollel.

*Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ Though Rav Shlomo Freifeld valued mechanchim, he made sure that they knew just how serious their job was. To a talmid who had just accepted his first position in chinuch, Reb Shlomo said this: "If you are not prepared to do whatever it takes for each individual bachur, to love every single talmid, don't become a rabbi. Become a shochet. It's better to slaughter chickens than bachurim!"

*Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

## S. ONE SHOULD MAKE HALACHIC DECISIONS IF HE IS QUALIFIED TO DO SO

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 12-20**

*As it says "And to decide for the children of Israel (Vayikra 10:11, Parshas Shemini).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the consequence if he does not want to give halachik opinions?
- What if he is not qualified?

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a mitzvah for a qualified Torah scholar to render halachic decisions when called upon, as Scripture states: "And to instruct the children of Israel" (Vayikra 10:11). Concerning a scholar who has attained the proficiency to rule yet withholds his decisions, Scripture laments: "And all her slain are a mighty throng" (Mishlei 7:26) — alluding to one who closes his lips and suppresses halachic guidance. Conversely, a student who has not yet reached the stature of rendering halachic decisions is strictly forbidden to do so; concerning such a person Scripture warns: "For she has cast down many corpses" (Mishlei 7:26).

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ R' Assi refused to accept a public position, but regretted it at the end of his life. Shortly before he died, his nephew came to him and found him crying. He asked, "Why are you crying? Is there any portion of Torah that you did not learn and teach? Behold, your pupils are sitting before you! Are there any acts of kindness that you did not perform? Despite all your virtues, you refrained from sitting in judgment and did not allow yourself to accept public positions." R' Assi replied, "My son, that is what I am crying about! Perhaps I will have to answer for having been able to officiate in judging Israel (and not having done so)."

*Shemos Rabbah, Mishpatim 2*

❖ Regarding Rabbi Eliezer's ruling that any woman who has missed three consecutive menstrual cycles only renders ritually impure objects she touches from the actual moment she sees blood (dayah sha'atah, rather than retroactively for twenty-four hours), it was taught in a Braisa: Rabbi Eliezer said to the Sages: 'There was an incident involving a young

woman in Haitalo whose cycle stopped for three intervals, and when the case came before the Sages, they ruled: Her ritual impurity begins only from the moment she sees blood!' The Sages replied to him: 'A time of pressing need is no proof for standard halachah.' The Gemara asks: What was the pressing need in that case? Some say those were years of famine (when discarding ritually impure food would cause severe hardship), and others say she had prepared a large quantity of ritually pure foodstuffs, and the Rabbis were concerned about the substantial loss of pure food. The Rabbis taught further in a Braisa: There was an incident in which Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi issued a practical ruling in accordance with Rabbi Eliezer's lenient view. After he reminded himself of the majority position, Rebbi declared: 'Rabbi Eliezer is worthy enough to be relied upon in a time of pressing need (kedai hu Rabbi Eliezer lismoch alav b'sha'as hadechak).'

*Talmud Bavli, Niddah 9b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ After Rav Mordechai Gifter's short stint in Baltimore as rabbi, he applied for a rabbinic position in Waterbury, Connecticut, a prestigious position in Waterbury at the time. His main competitor was Rav Abba Zalka Gewirtz, a young rabbi in Bradley Beach, New Jersey, who had learned in Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim in New York. Rabbi Gewirtz had already heard about Rav Gifter and been highly impressed by what he had heard. Rav Henoch Leibowitz, son of Rav David, the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim in New York, was sitting in his beis midrash when Rav Gifter, freshly back from Europe, entered to sit and learn. Word soon spread in the beis medrash that a true talmid chacham was among them. Soon many of the bachurim gathered around Reb Mordechai to fire questions at him. Reb Abba Zalka remembers hearing from his friends how the young Rav Gifter deflected the questions and quieted his challengers. As one witness described it, it was like a lion defending his terrain, The others came to contest, argue, and strive with Rav Gifter in learning, but with precision and passion, he silenced them all. They were learning Yevamos in the yeshivah and Rav Gifter was not, but it made no difference. At this point, he was completely comfortable in anything he had ever learned. He had mastered the tractates and now he was thirsty for more and more learning, Especially after spending so much time on the boat away from a bais midrash, Rav Gifter was hungry for the ris'cha deoraisa (fire of Torah) and pilpul chaveirim (interaction among colleagues) he had treasured in the yeshivah. The astonished group of bachurim had been exposed to greatness and they would never forget it. Reb Abba Zalka was very impressed upon hearing the story. When the Waterbury synagogue board voted, their choice was Reb Abba Zalka. When they informed him, he told them they had made the wrong choice. Rav Gifter, he explained, was destined for greatness. As he put it, "He's a better man than I" So the shul hired Rav Gifter, who would always remember Reb Abba Zalka's kindness and generosity. Eventually, when Rav Gifter finished his tenure in Waterbury, he was succeeded by the same Reb Abba Zalka, based on the recommendations of Rav Gifter. In fact, Rav Gifter picked him up at the station when he came to replace him, since he was eager to finally see Reb Abba Zalka in person, saying later, "I had to meet the man who praised his competition and gave away his job!" Rabbi Gewirtz remained the rabbi in Waterbury for the next 25 years, until he was invited by Rav Gifter to become the executive vice president of Telzer Yeshivah in 1968.

*Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Yosef Tendler related: When our son, Aharon, was born, the bris fell on Shabbos. I spoke with my shver, Rav Menachem Mendel Perr assuming that he would certainly not miss it. He said that he could not come because he could not leave his shul. At that time, the neighborhood had changed, and he no longer had a minyan on Shabbos. He usually had three Jews and one black fellow who wished to convert. I pleaded with him. "All you have is three Jews,' and they aren't even observant!" As long as I am there and they are sitting in shul listening to me davening out loud and hear me read the parshah from the Torah even without the berachos then for three hours they are not desecrating Shabbos. I cannot come!"

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 85*

❖ It was rare that Reb Aharon Kotler conferred semichah [rabbinical ordination] upon a talmid. Those of his talmidim who sought to be ordained were usually sent to Reb Moshe Feinstein, who would accord special honor to these young men, for they were Reb Aharon's talmidim. A talmid once came to Reb Moshe with a glowing letter of recommendation from Reb Aharon. Reb Moshe told the young man that since Reb Aharon thought so highly of him, he would be given semichah without a test; no test was necessary. The young man was taken aback, because he had mastered the semichah curriculum and would feel slighted to be ordained as a mere formality. Realizing that the young man was hurt, Reb Moshe suggested becoming study partners with the semichah candidate in the yeshivah for several weeks, and in that way the young man could prove his mettle. So it was.

*Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Yeshayah Horowitz, the author of Shelah, was Rabbi of Frankfurt. When his grandson, who bore the same name, vacated the position, he indicated that his place should be filled only by someone who could resolve three difficult Talmudic problems which his grandfather had left unanswered. The community appointed three of its leading Torah scholars as a search committee, to find someone who could meet these qualifications. The three traveled from city to city, but in their discussions with many' Torah scholars, did not find anyone who could resolve the three unanswered questions. - Upon arrival in Cracow, they were invited to participate in a celebration at which several people gave Torah discourses. One of these was a youngster, who, to their surprise, satisfactorily answered the three questions. Upon remarking on this young man's exceptional erudition, they were told that he was the student of a Talmud instructor, a humble man who was highly thought of in the community, but who was extremely modest and did not assume any position other than that of a tutor. The three met with the teacher, Rabbi Yosef Shmuel, and told him of their mission, and that they believed he was the proper person to assume the rabbinate of Frankfurt. The teacher told them this was absurd, and that he had no intention of doing anything other than continuing his function as a teacher. The following day Rabbi Yosef Shmuel took ill, and his condition deteriorated rapidly, to the point where the chevra kadisha (the burial society) was summoned, since it appeared that his end was imminent. At one point he sat up and said, "Master of the Universe! If it is your will that I assume the rabbinate of Frankfurt, I will do so. " He then recovered rapidly. This great Torah scholar had preferred to remain in the shadows, and only when he felt his illness was a message that he was remiss in fulfilling the Divine mission, did he consent to allow his spiritual achievements to become known. This story does not end here. Upon arrival in Frankfurt, he found the Jewish community to be in the throes of depression. It was before Pesach, and there was a blood libel against the Jews. A gentile child had been found murdered, and the local priest, a virulent anti-Semite, had indicted the Jewish community in the crime, citing the false allegation that the Jews needed blood for matzos. The priest gave the Jewish community three days in which to surrender the murderer, otherwise every Jew would be banished from the city with nothing but the clothes on his back, and could be considered lucky if his life was spared. Rabbi Yosef Shmuel sought to calm the community's anxiety, and said that he would clarify the matter to everyone's satisfaction. On the third day, the case came before the local tribunal, and after the priest delivered his scathing indictment and demanded that the killer be surrendered, Rabbi Yosef Shmuel stated that they did not know who the killer was. However, he was willing to submit to a trial by ordeal, which was generally accepted. He requested that the body of the child be brought, and that everyone in the community pass by and grasp the hand of the dead child. "I am certain that the killer will not be able to release his grasp. " When all the Jews successfully passed the ordeal, Rabbi Yosef Shmuel said, "The killer is not among the Jews. Let the others here pass the ordeal. " When it was the priest's turn to approach the body, he turned pale and began trembling. When he took the child's hand, he was unable to release his grasp and began screaming, "Let me go!" He then admitted that he had killed the child to incite the community to an uprising against the Jews.

*Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky*

❖ A certain young man came to R. Yechezkel Abramsky asking to be tested for semichah, which he hoped to use to find a rabbinic position. Surprisingly, R. Yechezkel did not probe the student's knowledge of Yoreh De'ah. "I am certain that you have learned the relevant Halachos, for how could you come to me for a test if you were not confident in your knowledge? Therefore, I will not ask you any questions on these subjects. "This, however, I will request of you," he continued. "You must prepare a piece from Chiddushei R. Chaim halevi'. If you can interpret it properly, I will grant you the letter of semichah you request." R. Yechezkel went on to explain why he was making this unusual request: In his experience as a posek, the majority of questions that are brought to a rav are not identical to the examples brought in the halachic texts. One must know how to compare and contrast cases and determine which sources apply to each situation. "A rav who is not able to understand a shtickel of R. Chaim," he concluded, "is not able to analyze cases that seem similar, and to make the necessary distinctions between a case brought to him and the cases mentioned in halachic sources, which may seem identical." The young man went home and spent several hours studying one of R. Chaim's chiddushim. He then returned to R. Abramsky and presented his understanding of the piece he had prepared. But R. Abramsky decided that he had not grasped the words of R. Chaim sufficiently and therefore refused to grant him semichah.

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 143*

❖ The Chofetz Chaim once advised one of his students to assume a rabbinic position. The students demurred, explaining that he feared the responsibility of ruling on questions of halachah. The Chofetz Chaim insisted: "Who should assume the position, someone who is not afraid of the responsibility? Similarly, one who despises holding positions of power is by definition most suited to such positions, it is he who will discharge his duties with the utmost caution. Thus the Mishnah teaches, despise positions of power — yet occupy them for the sake of Heaven.

*The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## T. TO TEACH A GENTILE ONLY THE TORAH THAT APPLIES TO HIM

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-37**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Which Torah can be taught to a non-Jew and which cannot?

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture states: "He declares His words unto Yaakov, His statutes and His ordinances unto Yisroel" (Tehillim 147:19). It is permitted to teach a non-Jew only the laws of the Torah that pertain to the Seven Universal Mitzvos given to the descendants of Noach (Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach). It is strictly forbidden to instruct a non-Jew in the rest of our Torah; our Sages taught that a non-Jew who immerses himself in our Torah is liable for death at the hands of Heaven, and an Israelite who teaches him violates the prohibition against placing a stumbling block before the blind (Vayikra 19:14).

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Our Sages taught that voluntary gift-offerings are accepted from non-Jews in the Temple, whereas obligatory sin or guilt-offerings are specific to the covenant of Israel, and offerings of the wicked are rejected, as Shlomo said, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination' (Mishlei 21:27). It once happened that a gentile asked Rabbi Yose ben Chalafta: 'Why do you say you do not accept every sacrifice from us? Is it not written in your Prophets: From the rising of the sun to its setting, My Name is great among the nations, and in every place incense and pure offerings are presented to My Name

(Malachi 1:11)?' Rabbi Yose replied to him: 'How is it that you read the verses you like and ignore the verses you do not like?! When Bilaam and Balak sought to offer sacrifices before the Holy One, blessed be He, with wicked intent to curse Israel, He did not accept them, as it is written, Nevertheless Hashem your God refused to listen to Bilaam (Devarim 23:6). And regarding the wicked—even if he is an Israelite and acts wickedly—God despises his hypocritical sacrifice!' The man persisted: 'Do not deflect me to the Prophets—show me directly from the Five Books of the Torah!' Rabbi Yose answered him: 'By your life, it is written explicitly in the Torah! When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the laws of the sacrifices in Vayikra, He commanded: When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born... it shall be accepted as a burnt-offering before Hashem (Vayikra 22:27), establishing the covenantal laws of the Altar specifically for those who accept His Torah.'

*Pesikta Rabbati, Supplement A 1:2*

## U. TO SEEK AND LISTEN TO WISE ADVICE ABOUT ALL WORLDLY MATTERS

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 37-4**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Shlomo HaMelech exhorted that concerning all worldly affairs, a person should seek and heed prudent advice, as Scripture states: "Listen to counsel and accept instruction, so that you may become wise in your latter end" (Mishlei 19:20).

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua were traveling together on a ship. Rabban Gamliel brought along only enough bread for a normal voyage, whereas Rabbi Yehoshua brought both bread and extra fine flour. Sure enough, the ship lost its way and the voyage dragged on until Rabban Gamliel's bread ran out and he had to rely on Rabbi Yehoshua's flour. Rabban Gamliel asked him in amazement: 'How did you know that we would be delayed so long at sea that you brought extra flour?' Rabbi Yehoshua replied: 'There is a certain star that rises once every seventy years and misleads the sailors in their navigation, and I calculated that it was due to appear on this voyage, so I brought extra provisions!' Rabban Gamliel exclaimed: 'You possess such vast wisdom, and yet you have to board ships to earn a meager living?!' Rabbi Yehoshua answered him: 'Rather than marveling at me, marvel at two disciples of yours on dry land—Rabbi Elazar Chisma and Rabbi Yochanan ben Gudgada—who know how to calculate how many drops of water are in the sea, yet have no bread to eat or cloak to wear!' As soon as Rabban Gamliel returned to land, he sent for the two humble scholars to appoint them to high positions of communal sustenance. Out of humility, they hesitated to sit at the head, and Rabban Gamliel famously told them: 'Do you think that I am giving you rulership? I am giving you servitude to the public!'

*Talmud Bavli, Horayos 10a-b*

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ There was a wealthy Polish Jew who told people that he became wealthy because he was unable to write. He explained that when he came to town many years earlier as a poor man, the Rov offered him the position of shamash of the shul. However, upon hearing that he cannot write, the offer was withdrawn. He asked the Rov for a suggestion as another source of income instead. The Rov told him to buy cheap in one town and sell high in the next town. He followed his wise advice and became a successful businessman. Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky told me that his life story resembles that very story. Reb Yaakov was rov in Tzitevian, a very small and very poor shtetl. The poverty in which he and his family lived led him to look for a position in the larger town which could afford to provide him a more comfortable salary. The position as successor to

Rav Leib Rubin in Volkimir opened up but for some reason that opportunity fell through. At the time, Reb Yaakov felt the pain of rejection. How much better it would have been had he gotten that position. With no alternative, he remained in Tzitevian until 1938. His poverty had reached such a low level that in 1938 he decided to make a trip to America and raise funds for a Lithuanian Yeshivah and he would receive a handsome commission in return. Upon his arrival to these shores Reb Yaakov followed the unfolding news from Europe. Although he followed the unfolding news while in Europe, nevertheless, as he was in America he was able to see the news from a new perspective. From his new perspective he realized that the Jews of Europe were doomed and there was no future anymore in Europe. He immediately sent his wife and family tickets and brought them to America. "If I would have gotten the Rabbinate in Volkimir, I would have ended the way that Rov ended. How fortunate I am that I was rejected."

*Told By R' Paysach Diskind*

❖ It happened that a pious Jewish resident of Baranovich came to seek Reb Elchonon Wasserman's advice about whether or not to enter into a certain business venture. Without hesitation he opened a Gemara and studied it for a few minutes, while the questioner waited silently and respectfully for him to answer. Finally Reb Elchonon closed the Gemara and gave his advice. After the person had left, Reb Elchonon noticed the surprise of a student who was present. He could not connect the purely commercial undertaking to the Gemara. Reb Elchonon told him, "The words of the Gemara force one to think straight and shed light. After I had studied a little, G-d helped me to give him sound advice."

*Reb Elchonon, By Rabbi Aharon Sorasky, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

# 2. To offer reproof, to direct others to the truth

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 72**

*As the Torah says, you shall surely rebuke your fellow (Vayikra 19:17, Parshas Kedoshim).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- How does one do this in a way that he doesn't seem sanctimonious and "holier than thou"?
- At what point should you give up?
- Is a subordinate supposed to reprove a superior?
- If people are silent while someone is doing something that is immoral, are they doing anything wrong?
- Are you allowed to reprove someone if this will embarrass them?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

One should offer reproof privately and gently, explaining to his fellow that he is bringing spiritual harm upon himself through his wrongful actions.

He should likewise convey to his fellow that he speaks solely for his well-being and benefit, out of sincere concern to bring him to eternal life in the World to Come (Olam HaBa).

One is obligated to persist in reprimanding him until he heeds the admonition, or until the transgressor rebuffs him violently — either by striking him or explicitly declaring, "I will not listen to you." Some early authorities (Rishonim) are lenient, ruling that one may cease his rebuke as soon as the other person offers an angry retort rejecting his efforts.

Nevertheless, even according to the stringent view, one is required to be persistent in his reproof only when his fellow violates an explicit Torah prohibition, and only when he assesses that his rebuke has a realistic prospect of proving effective for the future, preventing him from repeating the transgression.

Even an individual of modest spiritual stature is obligated to offer respectful rebuke to a person of far greater standing.

Whoever possesses the capacity to protest against someone doing evil and fails to do so is held spiritually accountable and bears responsibility for the sin as well.

Although it is a mitzvah to admonish a sinner, one must not humiliate or shame him publicly at first. However, our Sages noted (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 40a) that if an individual deliberately and brazenly violates even a rabbinic prohibition, it is permissible to publicly call him a transgressor.

It is a sacred religious obligation upon the recipient to accept rebuke with humility, and to love and cherish the person who offers him correction.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Performing acts of chesed is not limited to physical kindness alone. Teaching others the truth, and bringing them closer to Hashem are one of the greatest acts of kindness we can perform. In this mitzvah we emulate Hashem by bestowing them the spiritual kindness of bringing them closer to the Torah.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RALBAG (VAYIKRA 19:17)

This mitzvah is to bring others to the proper path.

#### IBN EZRA (VAYIKRA 19:17)

If you feel that someone mistreated you, if you tell them that, they may clarify to you that you are mistaken, and this will prevent you from suspecting them falsely.

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 239)

This mitzvah can help two arguing parties to reconcile. If the aggrieved person allows it to fester in his heart, one day he may take revenge.

#### SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes begins his study in 5643 by analyzing the doubled command: "Hochei'ach tochi'ach" — "You shall surely rebuke." Citing earlier commentators, he notes a challenging prerequisite: "Lihyos ha-mochi'ach bi-chlal ha-tochachah" — the person offering rebuke must include himself inside the correction! The Sfas Emes explains the secret: "U-mimayla yargish gam chaveiro v'yit'oreir bi-tshuvah." When your friend sees that you are not looking down on him, his defenses melt! He feels that you share his struggle. The encounter is no longer a harsh trial with a judge and a defendant. It is two brothers helping each other climb back to Hashem. The Sfas Emes

connects this with the famous commandment: "V'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha" — "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18). He writes: "U-chmo she-ha-adam meyagei'a atzmo l'hachnis ahavas Hashem b'libo, kein yachnis ahavas Hashem b'leiv chaveiro." Just as we toil to bring divine love into our own hearts, we must bring divine love into our friend's heart. When our goal is to awaken love rather than score a victory, our words heal the soul (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5643).

• In Parshas Yisro, the Sfas Emes examines a Midrash on King Solomon's words: "B'ni im aravta l'rei'echa" — "My son, if you have become a guarantor for your friend" (Mishlei 6:1). Why are the Jewish people called guarantors (areivim)? In 5642, the Sfas Emes explains that our ancestors at Sinai accepted collective responsibility for one another: "Bnei Yisrael na'asu areivim l'takein kol ha-olam b'choach ha-Torah." The Jewish people became guarantors to repair the world through the power of Torah! How does this spiritual guarantee work in our daily interactions? The Sfas Emes reveals a wonderful principle: "K'mo she-mesaknim atzmam, nimshachin kol ha-beriyos achareihem." As we repair ourselves, others are drawn after us! Our personal devotion speaks louder than words. When our own lives radiate patience and modesty, our gentle example becomes the most powerful rebuke in the world (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Yisro 5642).

• In Sefer Devarim, our ancestors made a tragic complaint in their tents: "B'sin'as Hashem osanu hotzi'anu mei'eretz Mitzrayim" — "Because Hashem hated us, He brought us out of the land of Egypt" (Devarim 1:27). The Sfas Emes explains in 5642 that interpreting Hashem's actions as hatred was their deepest mistake. Everything Hashem did for them was motivated by love! From this verse, the Sfas Emes draws a psychological rule for all human relationships. He writes: "K'she-yod'in she-ha-mochi'ach oheiv ne'eman hu, mekablin ha-tochachah." When people know that the one who corrects them is a faithful friend, they accept the rebuke! The Sfas Emes explains that receiving correction in this spirit cleanses our past mistakes: "Al yedei kabalas ha-tochachah yislabnu ha-chata'im." Through loving acceptance, our sins are washed clean! When we surround our words with genuine warmth, truth finds an open door (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5642).

• When Moshe Rabbeinu addresses the people in Sefer Devarim, he reviews their past mistakes with honesty. In 5649, the Sfas Emes explains that Hashem commanded Moshe to bless them precisely because they received his rebuke with humility: "Keivan she-kiblu tochachosecha, tzarich atah l'varchan." Since they accepted your correction, you must bless them! Why does accepting rebuke unlock new blessing? The Sfas Emes explains that corrective speech becomes true words (devarim) only when it makes an impression on the listener. He writes: "K'she-osin roshem v'nafshos Bnei Yisrael nimshachu achar ha-devarim, az nikra'u devarim." When words touch the heart and move souls to change, they become living realities! Moshe's wounds were faithful. Because the people trusted Moshe's love, his rebuke opened the floodgates of divine blessing (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5649).

• At the opening of Sefer Devarim, the verse announces: "Eileh ha-devarim asher diber Moshe" — "These are the words that Moshe spoke" (Devarim 1:1). The Midrash calls Moshe's final speeches words of rebuke (divrei tochachos). In 5631, the Sfas Emes uncovers the root meaning of the word: "U-feiresh tochachos, she-nichnas ha-davar b'soch ha-adam." Rebuke means that the holy word enters deep inside the human being! The Sfas Emes distinguishes between two Hebrew terms: a gentle statement (amirah) and direct speech (dibur). An amirah conveys general information without demanding action. But a dibur speaks directly face-to-face (l'nochach), carrying moral authority that demands change. Genuine rebuke does not wound. It plants seeds of holiness that blossom into lasting change (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5631).

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- Discuss the importance of being open to accept reproof.
- Discuss how one is exempt from the mitzvah of offering reproof if they cannot do it in a gentle way.
- Discuss the obstacles to accepting reproof.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ What is a living example of sincere, constructive rebuke for the sake of Heaven (tochachah lishmah) paired with true humility? Like the incident when Rav Huna and Chiya bar Rav were sitting together in study before the master Shmuel. Chiya bar Rav turned to Shmuel and complained: 'Look, Master, at how Rav Huna is harassing and pressing me in our study!' Rather than argue back or embarrass Chiya bar Rav in front of Shmuel, Rav Huna bowed his head and formally accepted upon himself never to trouble him again. Only after Chiya bar Rav stood up and left the room did Rav Huna quietly explain to Shmuel: 'Such-and-such improper thing he was doing, and that is why I corrected him.' Shmuel asked him in wonder: 'If he was in the wrong, why did you not say so to his face while he was sitting here?' Rav Huna answered: 'Heaven forbid that the seed of my great teacher Rav should ever be put to shame through me!'

*Arachin 32:9*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ One day, when the Chofetz Chaim was already in his nineties, he informed his family that he would be journeying by train to the town of Lida, where he had lived for a time in his younger years. Despite the protests of his children that his frail health did not permit such a trip, the Chofetz Chaim was insistent. He said that he would be going there to attend an important meeting at which his presence was absolutely necessary. He drew up a list of some thirty men from Lida who he wanted present at the meeting. On the day of the meeting, the Jews of Lida gathered at the town's train station to welcome the tzaddik of the generation. A horse-drawn carriage brought the Chofetz Chaim to the community building where the meeting was to take place. All those who had been invited were in attendance. The Chofetz Chaim wasted no time in explaining the purpose of his visit: "When a person prepares to visit a certain city, it is proper that he inform his friends and neighbors of this, to afford them the opportunity to send packages, messages, or merely regards to their acquaintances there. "Now, I will soon be going on a trip, and this concerns all of you. I am a very old man, and I will soon be heading the way of all men, to the World of Truth. "In my younger years, I lived in this very town, with your parents and grandparents. Surely, I will meet them in the World to Come, and they will expect me to bring regards from you." "Daniel," the Chofetz Chaim now said turning his attention to one particular man, "what shall I tell your father, who was so dear to me? Can I give him good regards and tell him that his children and grandchildren faithfully follow the path of Torah by which he lived? Tell me, my dear Daniel, what do you wish me to say?" Tears welled up in Daniel's eyes. He said nothing. In this way, the Chofetz Chaim addressed each man in the room, recalling his fondness for that person's ancestors, and asking what he could relate to those ancestors when he would reach the next world. By the time the Chofetz Chaim had finished, the face of every man was wet from weeping and his heart was filled with remorse. Each one firmly resolved to mend his ways and live a life that would bring his ancestors joy and pride in the World to Come.

*Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi D. principal of a day school in a Midwestern community, received a call from his beloved Rebbi, Rabbi Weinberg: "I'm going to be in your city tomorrow. Can you pick me up at the airport?" The next morning, Rabbi D. warmly welcomed his Rebbi, and as they got into the D.'s family van, Rabbi Weinberg told them, "Could I see the school where you work?" This was followed by various detailed questions regarding the school. "Where do you live? Can we pass your house?" After some personal questions, Rabbi Weinberg asked Rabbi D. "Do you ever lose your temper with the lay leaders of the school?"

"Yes," replied the principal. "Sometimes they are so far afield from understanding the school's goals, and how we are to achieve them, that I lose my patience with them." Rabbi Weinberg spent the next few minutes explaining how the baalei battim — the lay leadership — are his partners in his sacred mission, and they deserve his respect. If they fail to share his goals or understand his approach in chinuch, it is his task to educate them — with patience and with dignity. But never to lose his temper. Never. At that point, Rabbi Weinberg checked his watch and told his host that the time for his return flight was approaching. Could he drive him back to the airport?

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Once, Rabbi Shachne Weinberger and his young son accompanied Rav Pam on a Shabbos afternoon walk. When the child ripped a leaf off a branch, R' Weinberger said, "You're not allowed to do that on Shabbos. Rav Pam turned to his distinguished talmid and said, "Better to tell him, 'Tomorrow you will be able to do that.'."

*Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Already in 1968, when Rav Matisyahu Salomon was appointed Mashgiach under R' Moshe Schwab, he conducted himself in the manner that would later define him. When R' Moshe noticed that Zevi's conduct was not in keeping with what the yeshivah demanded, he asked Rav Mattisyahu to speak to Zevi and rebuke him. Two weeks later, R' Moshe approached Rav Mattisyahu and asked, "Have you had a chance to speak to Zevi?" "Actually, I haven't," was Rav Mattisyahu's answer. "Until now," he went on to explain, "I have not had a chance to compliment him and create a friendly relationship with him. It would not be beneficial to criticize him at this point. I must first make a deposit before I can make a withdrawal!" His rationale was clear. Only a friend can give a rebuke that would be absorbed and internalized. Otherwise, straight criticism would just feel like an attack.

*From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When Rav Tendler's son Shmuli was seven years old, he would occasionally notice his father walking with his arm over a boy's shoulder. "I want Totty to walk with me that way," he said to his mother. 'If Totty puts his arm around a boy's shoulder, " she told her son, "it means that he is in big trouble!"

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 137*

## A. NOT TO REFRAIN FROM PROTESTING AGAINST EVIL

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 24-43**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

One who fails to protest against those who lead people onto an evil path and entice others to sin will be punished for all the resulting transgressions. By remaining silent, he violates a negative prohibition, as Scripture warns: "You shall surely rebuke your fellow, and not bear a sin because of him" (Vayikra 19:17).

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It was chol hamo'ed succos, 5703 (1942). Word had arrived in Eretz Yisrael regarding the unopposed activities of the Jewish Agency in Tehran, and two of Agudas Yisrael's heads, R. Moshe Blau and R. Moshe Porush, came to the Brisker Rav's home to report that there was a large group of refugee children in a camp in Tehran being cared for by the Jewish Agency and that the education being provided there had no traditional Jewish content. "And what is being done about this?" Asked The Brisker Rav. His visitors, aware of the power of the Jewish Agency at that time, answered, "What is there to do?" The Brisker Rav then cried out from the depths of his heart, begging them to attempt to do something — not to stand by and

allow the situation to continue. R. Moshe Blau, concerned for the Brisker Rav's health, said, "Why is the Rav crying out so, when it could endanger your health, and, after all, your shouting alone will not accomplish anything?" To which The Brisker Rav responded: "Whether it helps or not, when it hurts, one cries out." Since it was his way to bring a Torah source for his actions, he told those present his wonderful explanation of the Gemara in Sotah (11a) regarding Iyov: R. Chiya bar Abba said in the name of R. Simai, "There were three people who gave advice [when Pharaoh said of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt, 'Let us deal wisely with them' — Rashi]: Bil'am, Iyov, and Yisro. Bil'am, who advised that the Jewish People be killed, was himself killed; Iyov, who was silent, was punished with suffering..." This requires an explanation, he said. We know Hashem punishes measure for measure. This is how he dealt with the Egyptians, as the Gemara says on the pasuk, "For by the very thing they plotted [against Yisrael] they were punished" — they ate what they had cooked. Why, therefore, was Iyov punished for his silence with suffering? We must say, said The Brisker Rav, that when the meeting to plan the destruction of Bnei Yisrael took place in Pharaoh's palace, Iyov thought there would be no point in objecting. No one had the power to convince Pharaoh not to carry out his plan. So Iyov kept silent — and for this he was punished. It is the nature of a person who is suffering to cry out in pain, in spite of the fact that his outcry does not help. This was the "measure for measure" in Iyov's being punished for his silence: Even though he knew his cries of protest would not help, nevertheless, he should have cried out. When it hurts, one cries out!

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 291*

## B. NOT TO GIVE REPROOF IF THEY WILL NOT LISTEN

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-2**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is there a distinction with regard to transgressions that were done to one personally, and transgressions that are between man and G-d?

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Rabbi Ile'a stated in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon: Just as it is a mitzvah to say something that will be heeded, as Scripture states, "You shall surely rebuke your fellow" (Vayikra 19:17), so too is it a mitzvah to refrain from saying something that will not be heeded, as Scripture warns: "Do not rebuke a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you" (Mishlei 9:8). This principle applies specifically when one has suffered personal injury at the hands of another: while it is normally a mitzvah to confront someone who harmed you to clarify the grievance rather than harbor unspoken resentment in your heart in the manner of the wicked, this verse teaches that one must remain silent if he knows the offender will obstinately refuse to listen, and should instead strive to forgive him in his heart. However, if one witnesses someone committing a religious transgression or pursuing a corrupt path, it remains an absolute obligation to admonish him repeatedly — even up to a hundred times — ceasing only if one is met with physical violence.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Before sharing words of mussar, one must make sure that the recipient is ready to listen. One of Reb Shlomo Freifeld's closest talmidim spoke to him in a way that he felt was disrespectful. Three years later, Reb Shlomo mentioned it. "What you said that day was out of place; we don't talk that way to a rebbi." The talmid was mortified. "Why couldn't Rebbi tell me right away so that could have apologized then?" "First I needed you to know how much I love you." Once, he was speaking with a close talmid in his office when another bachur entered the room. Suddenly, Reb Shlomo began to reprimand the

first bachur in the strongest terms, heatedly criticizing people who had no respect for Yeshivah property. The talmid was bewildered, wondering what he had done to receive such a harsh scolding. When the second bachur left the room, Reb Shlomo apologized profusely to the first bachur. "I am so sorry that you had to hear chat; it wasn't meant for you." Reb Shlomo had given the second bachur rebuke indirectly, the only way he could.

*Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

## C. TO BRING PEOPLE CLOSE TO TORAH BY LOVING THEM

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-19**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should strive to be among the disciples of Aharon HaKohen, who would love peace, pursue peace, love all human beings, and thereby — as the Sfas Emes illuminates — bring them close to the light of the Torah (Avos 1:12).

### MORAL DILEMMAS:

Rabbi Shiff, a Rebbe who taught in a Yeshivah, was riding on a bus in Eretz Yisrael, while studying from a Mishnah Berurah, a book of Jewish law. As he was studying, a young secular Jewish teenager sat next to him. The teenager turned to him and said, "Excuse me, may I bother you?" Rabbi Shiff responded, "Sure." The teen was taken by the layout of the Mishnah Berurah and asked Rabbi Shiff to tell him what this book discussed. Rabbi Shiff explained that it was a Mishnah Berurah and detailed what it was about and its background. The teen was very interested. Throughout the duration of the bus ride, they discussed the significance of the Shulchan Aruch and the Oral Torah. They even discussed Hashem and the idea of living a life based on Halachah and improving one's midos. The teen soaked it all up and was extremely interested and eager to learn more. After talking for a while, they finally arrived at their destination, the Tachana Merkazi (Central Bus Station). The two parted ways and Rabbi Shiff realized that it was time for Minchah and that sunset was imminent. He rushed to a nearby shul and began davening Shemoneh Esrei. In the middle of Shemoneh Esrei, Rabbi Shiff realized that the teen he spoke to had so much potential and was so interested that he likely could have continued teaching him or perhaps encouraged him to study in Yeshivah. He never got the teen's name or number. Rabbi Shiff also remembered a concept in halachah where, in instances where a girl was kidnapped and taken to a monastery, it is allowed to even break certain laws of Shabbos to save her. He wondered, would he be allowed to stop in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei to go after this interested young man? If he waited until the end of the davening, the boy would most likely be gone. Rabbi Shiff found himself grappling with the dilemma: Would he be allowed to stop in the middle of his Shemoneh Esrei to catch up with this young teen? On one hand, it might be akin to breaking Shabbos to save someone's soul, as with the case of someone being kidnapped. But on the other hand, it is not guaranteed that the teen would embrace a Torah life. What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about the young man who was interested in learning more about Judaism, Rav Zilberstein wrote that it would not be permitted to approach him in the middle of Shemonah Esrei, because it is not guaranteed that he will become Torah observant as a result.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive*

David was the CEO of a large technology company in Israel. One day the company was planning a company-wide summit celebrating its accomplishments over the last year. It would be a catered event. All of the attendees at the summit were Jewish but not religious. David got quotes from a few different kosher caterers for the affair. One caterer who had a hechsher and was perfectly kosher according to all opinions, but was not mehadrin, not the highest standard of kashrus, charged 30 shekels a plate. Another caterer, who had a mehadrin hechsher which had the highest kashrus standard available, charged 50 shekels a plate for the exact same food. David thought to himself, "No one at the event will be concerned about the kashrus. Should I spend the extra twenty shekels a head for the mehadrin hechsher? Maybe I should indeed provide all of these Jews with the best possible level of kashrus." But then he thought that maybe he could use the cheaper caterer and use the saved money to buy each of the employees at the event a nice siddur that would inspire them. What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about the office summit, Rav Zilberstein answered based on a similar psak from Rav Elyashiv, that if it is a one-time thing, then it would be better to get the cheaper hechsher and use the money for something that might have a deeper impact.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive*

Akiva, a young rabbi just out of rabbinical school, was starting a new job in Manhattan. It was a small synagogue, and as he began to meet the members of his community, he learned that two of the people in the synagogue would drive to shul every Shabbos. Akiva decided to speak to them. Larry was one of the men that drove to the shul. Akiva went to his house and told him about the importance of keeping Shabbos and how driving to shul on Shabbos was actually a mitzvah haba be'aveirah, committing a transgression by doing a mitzvah. Larry listened and said, "You know, I never missed a minyan in my entire life. Do you want me to stop coming to shul because I can't walk to shul? Do you want me to break my streak of never missing a minyan? And furthermore, I live in a neighborhood that's filled with non-Jews. If I stop coming to shul, I feel like my Judaism will just wither away. Do you want me to lose my Judaism?" That was the argument Larry made, and Akiva felt like he wasn't going to be convinced. Then Akiva went to the next man, David. Again, Akiva told David about the importance of Shabbos and how he shouldn't drive on Shabbos. David said it was the year of mourning for his father, and he committed to coming to every single minyan in honor of his father. Did the rabbi want him to miss the minyan that he committed to for his father? Akiva heard their arguments and realized he wasn't going to convince them. So, he had an idea. He realized that driving a car on Shabbos is likely a Torah prohibition, but riding a horse and buggy is only a rabbinical prohibition. In Manhattan, there are horses and buggies. Akiva remembered the famous story from Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, who convinced people working on Shabbos to use their left hand instead of their right hand, so that it would be a rabbinical prohibition instead of a Torah prohibition. So, Akiva surmised that here too he would have them do a rabbinical prohibition instead of a Torah prohibition. Akiva told David and Larry that he was going to arrange for a horse and buggy to pick them up on Shabbos. Lo and behold, that week, a horse and buggy stopped at each of their houses and took them to shul. The whole shul watched as these two men came to shul on Shabbos with the horse and buggy, and people thought it was fascinating. The next week, Akiva came to the shul and saw that there were four people who now took the buggy. He asked the two additional people why they went on the buggy instead of walking. They said, "Well, we realized that the buggy goes right in front of our house. Now that the rabbi allows these other two people to go on a buggy on Shabbos, we figured we should also be able to go." Akiva realized that he might have caused a bigger problem than he was trying to solve. So, he brought this two-part question to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein: 1 Did he do the right thing by having them ride a horse and buggy in order to minimize driving on Shabbos? And 2) Now that four people started to go in the buggy, what should he do? Should he cancel the entire thing, or should he let it go? What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about arranging for a horse and buggy to be used instead of driving, Rabbi Zilberstein asked this question to Rabbi Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman. Rav Shteinman answered that this cannot be compared to the case of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter because there, it was not done by the Rabbi of the community, and the violation of Shabbos wasn't public, and it wouldn't lead to others joining in. But in our case, the Rabbi of the community arranged it, and it's in public, and other people may join in. So even though riding a carriage would be a smaller prohibition, it would not be permitted. Rabbi Zilberstein further cites the Akeidas Yitzchak who says that when an individual commits a severe prohibition, that is his personal reckoning with Hashem. But if a prohibition is done with the condoning of the whole community, and the permission of the Rabbis of the community, then it becomes a communal violation that is much worse.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok, Vayikra, p. 253 (Table Talk Edition 375)*

Meir had four grown children. Several of them were married with young families of their own. Sadly one of his older children, a girl named Naomi, left the path of Torah and stopped being observant. In college she met a friendly non Jewish man and they eventually became engaged to get married. They planned the wedding in 6 months. Meir and his wife were of course very saddened by these developments. It is not permitted for a Jew to marry someone who is not Jewish. However Meir and his wife still maintained a warm relationship with Naomi. They did not want to break their ties. They believed that Naomi would eventually find her way back to the Torah path. They felt that if they would not show warmth and kindness to her, it would make it much less likely that she would return. A few months later, Meir was asked to participate in a Yeshiva raffle fundraiser. The grand prize was $100,000. Meir did not think he would win, but he bought a few tickets to support the Yeshiva. A month later Meir got a call that he could not believe. "We are excited to tell you that you are the winner of the Yeshiva Raffle", the caller excitedly announced. Sure enough, Meir received a check of $100,000 and deposited it in his bank. Meir had married children who could use the money. Meir and his wife decided that they would divide the money among their children. And then they thought about their dear Naomi. If they give her the $25,000 it would be supporting her non Torah lifestyle and it would also potentially help pay for her upcoming marriage to her non-Jewish fiancé. But on the other hand, if they would not give it to her, and give it to the other children, it would cause an enormous fight in the family and it might cause Naomi to pull herself much further away from the family and from the prospect of returning. Meir wanted to give Naomi the money but felt unsure about it. The question was brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Should Naomi be given the money like the rest of the children in order to maintain warm and friendly ties to the family? Or should she not be given it, because it would support her upcoming marriage that is not permitted by the Torah?

**Answer:** Citing Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg zt"l, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if giving the estranged daughter an equal share of the lottery gift alongside her siblings will foster family warmth and draw her closer to her parents and Torah observance, the father should give her the share (provided it will not be used directly to fund sin). Otherwise, the father may deposit her share in a trust account set aside for her when she returns or for her children's education.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 332 (Table Talk Edition 157)*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ It once happened that Hillel the Elder was standing at the city gate of Jerusalem early in the morning as the townspeople walked out to their daily labor in the fields and workshops. Hillel greeted them warmly and asked them: 'My friends, for how much wages are you going out to work today?' One worker answered him: 'For one silver dinar a day,' and another worker answered: 'For two dinars a day.' Hillel asked them: 'And what will you do with those coins at the end of the day?' They replied: 'We will buy bread to sustain ourselves for this temporary life (chayei sha'ah).' Hillel smiled and said to

them: 'Why do you not also come and set aside time each day to inherit the Torah with me, so that you will merit both the life of this world and the eternal life of the World to Come (chayei ha-olam ha-ba)?' And so Hillel the Elder continued to do all the days of his life, standing at the gates with patience and warmth until he brought them under the wings of Heaven.

*Avos DeRabbi Nosson, Recension B 26:7*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ The famed Reichmann brothers had scheduled an appointment with Rav Shach to ask for guidance regarding which tzedakos were to be given priority. Rav Shach considered this to be very important, as there were large sums of money involved. There was a man who came at the same time as the Reichmann brothers, requesting that Rav Shach see him for a brief moment to give his son a berachah. Rav Shach allowed the man to enter his room for just a moment, but he remained with them for one and a half hours while the Reichmanns patiently waited outside. By the time the father and son left, Rav Shach was too tired to meet with the Reichmanns. His children were surprised by Rav Shach's decision to keep the boy so long. "Couldn't the Rosh Yeshivah have asked the father to wait for a half-hour?" they asked. "The father only requested that I give the son a berachah to have a desire, which he currently did not have, to learn Torah. I learned with him for an hour and a half until I saw that he was enjoying it, and I saw the simchah in his eyes. '"Are you enjoying the learning?' I asked him. '"Yes,' he responded". "Now I will give you a berachah!"' Rav Shach had devoted an hour and a half of his limited physical strength so that a young boy could find enjoyment in learning Torah. This is what was more important than meeting with the Reichmann brothers. Rav Tendler added, "It is seemingly difficult to comprehend why Rav Shach made important people, who are baalei chesed and strengthen Torah, wait while he brought a young boy geshmak in learning. I thought that the explanation is as follows: The Shelah HaKadosh says that the obligation to be mikarev rechokim is derived by a kal vachomer from the prohibition of standing by while your friend's blood is spilled. If one must save someone's body, he certainly must save his soul. The body is only for Olam Hazeh, whereas the soul is eternal! Someone who does not enjoy learning will waste his life, as words of Torah are our lives. Rav Shach therefore felt that speaking with the boy took priority.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 284*

❖ A Torah-observant widow from the Bronx once came to the Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yoel Teitelbaum), bemoaning the fate of her grown son. His newfound knitting business was booming. But as his business had grown, he slowly cast off his Torah observance. First he stopped davening. Then he stopped donning his tefillin daily. And the day even came when he went to work on Shabbos. "Business first" was his policy, much to his mother's dismay. Her son's financial success was her greatest heartache. Tearfully, the woman begged the Rebbe for help. "But how can I possibly help you? " the Rebbe asked. All the woman asked was that the Rebbe talk to her son, just talk to him." Perhaps that would help. When the widow got home, she told her son that the Satmar Rebbe wanted to see him. "Why should I go see this Satmar Rebbe? Who is he, anyway?" wondered the young man. For weeks, his mother begged, pleaded, and cajoled. "just go talk to him! Please!" Finally, several weeks after, his mother's initial visit, the young factory owner dressed to visit. The man explained the reason of his visit to the gabbai. 'My mother was here several weeks ago, and she said the Rebbe wanted to talk to me." But the gabbai had no recollection of the woman from the Bronx, nor did the Rebbe. About what did the Rebbe want to speak to him'? The man didn't know; his mother hadn't mentioned. Nonetheless, the widow's son was admitted to the Rebbe's inner sanctum. As soon the young man caught a glimpse of the Rebbe's countenance, he was struck by the Rebbe's holiness. The thought entered his head: perhaps he should daven and put on tefillin every day. The Rebbe inquired about the 'man's' background and occupation. The mention of the successful knitting factory sparked the Rebbe's memory — the widow's tearful visit and her son's painful success. So the Rebbe probed further, not about his mitzvah observance, but about his business: how he started out, what generates the most revenue, possible areas of growth. The Rebbe even ventured to share trade secrets he knew from other knitting factory owners, and insights into penetrating the wholesale market. The young factory owner was

amazed at the Rebbe's business acumen and knowledge of the knitting business without stepping a foot into a knitting factory! Perhaps he should better observe Shabbos, thought the man. Now that he had armed his petitioner with new business strategies, the Rebbe asked the man for a favor: "My chassidim have a hard time finding jobs. They all have families, whom they struggle to feed. There is no greater mitzvah than to provide a Jew with parnasah. It's true Jewish workers are more expensive, but they are honest and dedicated and are always looking for ways to help grow the business. In the long run, it's beneficial for both parties. Hashem has helped you be successful. Now it's your turn to help others. Open up four positions for me in your factory and I will send you suitable employees, men who have a feel for the industry." The young factory owner agreed. Your business should be blessed with continued success!" wished the Rebbe. To the astonishment of his mother, her son returned home happy and content. There were no threats or harsh words of dissent. The next morning, his mother saw him don tefillin. On Shabbos, her son stayed home. Over time, the factory owners strong friendship with his new employees, a friendship that encouraged the growth of a beautiful, flourishing, chassidishe family, a nachas to the widowed grandmother. How did the Rebbe effect this change in the factory owner? With heartfelt Ahavas Yisroel. He truly cared about the man, and the success of his business. The concern that emanate from the heart moved the factory owner to change. But: the Rebbe's advice did not only ease one man's burden and pave the way for one man's success. The widow was gladdened too, and four Jewish families enjoyed newfound parnasah, a win-win situation all around.

*The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 206*

❖ In Radin the kedushah of Shabbos was palpable. All the Jews kept Shabbos. But after WW1 the Chofetz Chaim went to Warsaw and for the first time in his life he saw a large segment of Jews being mechallel Shabbos publicly, and living secular lives. Seeing Jews so far from Hashem, he began to cry very deeply. The next week the students expected him to cry, but this time he cried much harder and much longer. The students asked why he cried harder. The Chofetz Chaim said the first time I saw it, I felt so bad that I cried. But the second time I saw it, I was a bit indifferent. It didn't affect me as much, because I saw it already. That sense of indifference made me cry even worse. How could I feel indifferent?

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 261*

❖ Mr. and Mrs. Gold were involved in an organization that was having a weekend retreat out of town. They wanted their son to join them and, by doing so, miss school on Friday and on Sunday. Mrs. Gold called Rabbi Segal to request permission, assuming that it was just a formality. "I am sorry, Mrs. Gold, but I cannot allow this," Rabbi Segal stated. "Oh, I understand why you're saying no," Mrs. Gold responded, after recovering from her initial shock, "You're worried that there will be gender mingling. You have nothing to worry about. My son has no interest in these things." "No interest?" Rabbi Segal asked. "None at all," Mrs. Gold replied confidently. "In that case, I suggest you take him to a doctor immediately. If this is true, he is going to have a big problem later on in life."

*From Rabbi Chaim Segal: Building Bnei Torah in America, by Devorah Gliksman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Dovid Trenk, the Menahel of the Yeshivah of Adelphia, is highly respected and beloved by his students. He is sensitive to their needs and brings out the best qualities in each and every one of them. Each morning after Shacharis begins, Rabbi Trenk walks through the yeshivah dormitory to make sure that all the boys have left their rooms to go to the Beis Hamedrash for davening. Wearing his tallis and tefillin, Rabbi Trenk is a striking presence as he chants the beginning of the prayers in his loud and powerful voice. He knocks on each door, waits a moment, and then walks in to check for any boys who might still be lingering. Over twenty years ago, as Rabbi Trenk was making his routine morning rounds through the dormitory to check for stragglers, he discovered a bachur still getting dressed in his room. Rabbi Trenk prodded him along, rushing him to proceed to the Beis Hamedrash. Out of the corner of his eye, Rabbi Trenk noticed something suspicious lying in an open dresser drawer. Without a word. He picked up a pack of cigarettes, put it in his pocket, and walked out of the room. The bachur knew that his roommate, Brian, the owner of the forbidden cigarettes, was in deep trouble. The yeshivah had a well-known rule against possession of cigarettes. The bachur feared for Brian's future as a

student in the Yeshivah of Adelphia and decided to warn him that Rabbi Trenk would most likely be looking for him. As he passed Brian on his way into the Beis Hamedrash, he whispered to his roommate. 'Boy, are you in trouble. Rabbi Trenk just found your cigarettes in your drawer." Brian's face blanched. He knew that his fate was sealed. Smoking was not tolerated in yeshivah. Brian knew it was only a matter of time before Rabbi Trenk would call him into his office and read him the riot act. Brian managed to get through the davening without seeing Rabbi Trenk. Breakfast was over, and he was still safe — Rabbi Trenk was nowhere to be seen. Then the inevitable happened, as Brian was sitting in his classroom, a young man knocked on door and informed Brian's Rebbi that Rabbi Trenk wanted to see Brian in his office. Brian walked to the office slowly with his head down. He tried to imagine what his parents would do to him once they found out he was expelled. What would become of him? Where would he go to yeshivah? Thoughts racing, Brian found himself suddenly face-to face with Rabbi Trenk. He hoped Rabbi Trenk would just expel him without a long speech. Rabbi Trenk looked Brian straight in his eye and said, "I found a pack of cigarettes in your drawer this morning. Please tell the boy who put his cigarettes in your drawer — and I don't want to know who he is — that smoking is unhealthy." Brian was stunned and didn't know how to respond. He said sheepishly, "Is that all? Is there anything else you want to tell me?" "No," said Rabbi Trenk. "Just go back to class and make sure you pass along my message." Today Brian Tanen and his wife are an integral part of the Baltimore community who volunteer countless hours for their shul and local charity organizations. Brian is the first to admit that had Rabbi Trenk dealt with him differently that day in yeshivah twenty years ago. He most likely would have turned out very differently. Because Rabbi Trenk really cared about Brian and believed in his potential. He found a way to deal with a serious problem and still keep Brian close to him and to the yeshivah. Rabbi Trenk has been quoted as saying that he believes that a true educator is someone who genuinely loves his students and will do everything in his power to help a child remain in school rather than to expel him. It is amazing how the entire future of a boy may have been affected by one decision of a wise principal!

*For Goodness' Sake, By Rabbi Boruch Brull, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz would single out and stress the positive traits that distinguished each bachur. He would speak to the bachur as if he were his own son, praising him for his positive qualities and encouraging him to develop and perfect them. When he would write a letter of recommendation for a bachur, his praises would always be glowing. In truth, he was not exaggerating, for he perceived greatness in all who were dedicated to learning and fulfilling the Torah. Once a man came to the yeshivah to look into two potential candidates for marriage to his daughter.' Both bachurim had been described to him as "exceptional," and the father asked Reb Baruch Ber which bachur was more "chashuv." Reb Baruch Ber told him that he was unable to answer, for it was as if the father had asked him to compare two pages of Gemara and say which one was more important! Once Reb Baruch Ber was asked to write a letter of recommendation for a talmid of his who was a candidate to become rav.

*Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim*

❖ An at-risk teenager from a family close to the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, had gone through drug rehab and was now slowly climbing back into society. After many years of avoiding a meeting with Reb Nosson Zvi, which his family had been anxious to set up, he finally consented. It happened to be on a day when the Rosh Yeshivah arrived in New York, a long, grueling day for him. He was exhausted. He was sick — indeed, he would pass away three months later. Nevertheless, he agreed to see the boy, who then asked if he could bring along some friends from the rehab. Reb Nosson Zvi welcomed them all. When they met, he asked the teenager what he was doing. The boy answered that he had just landed a job. "How is the pay?" "So-so," replied the boy. Reb Nosson Zvi looked at him and said softly, "I sure hope they know how much you are worth!" The boy's eyes lit up, and he was infused with a new sense of personal worth, which became, part of his permanent sense of self.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 221*

❖ A talmid spent a Shabbos at Rav Freifeld's bungalow It was the Shabbos preceding the Woodstock rock-music festival of the late 1960's. One of the greatest gatherings of counterculture in recent history. All Shabbos they watched throngs of hippies making their way along the Catskill roads, bound for Woodstock, and on Motzaei Shabbos this talmid excused himself and headed there as well. When he returned after the event, the Rosh Yeshivah greeted him pleasantly, asking him questions about what he had seen. "He never condemned or criticized, for he knew exactly where I was holding. He accepted, confident that his plans for my future would effectively heal my troubled soul." Rav Freifeld was tolerant and nonjudgmental, but it wasn't a tolerance borne out of naivete, in fact, says a talmid, "He hated non-Jewish culture with a passion." Rather, he had endless confidence in the power of Torah to sell itself, and ultimately win over any competing influence. He once discussed an attempt to forbid a certain pursuit. "If the only way that we can sell Torah is by rendering everything else forbidden, then we are bankrupt!" He knew that the light of Torah, "if taught correctly," would accomplish the job by itself.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Right after the war the Klausenberger Rebbe encouraged a young Jewish teenager to join him in the DP camp. The boy resisted because he was sure the Rebbe would not let him go to movies. The Rebbe, however, promised the boy that when life returned to normal and a movie theater was opened for the survivors he would give him money to see a show. With this assurance in hand, the teenager joined the Rebbe. Not too long after that a movie theater was opened, and the Rebbe kept his promise. Eventually, this young boy did teshuvah and returned to Torah observance.

*The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press*

❖ Rabbi Dovid Katzenstein recalls Rav Tendler driving for hours to numerous camps in order to learn with Mechina bachurim whom he felt needed strengthening over the summer.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 251*

❖ Shimon, who learned in kollel, was trying to help Yoram, an irreligious Israeli, tackle his questions about Judaism. After many months, Yoram was convinced intellectually that Judaism was the true religion but was still reluctant to make the commitment to become fully observant. Finally, he asked “Are religious Jews really happy?” Thinking how best to respond, Shimon’s eye fell on a picture he had in drawer. He took it out and asked the man, “How old do you think the man in the picture is?” Yoram looked at the picture and guessed that the man was about 55. “And what if I told you he was close to 90?” Shimon said. Yoram couldn’t believe it. Shimon explained to him that the happiness of the man in the picture kept him fresh and young looking. “Who is that?” Yoram asked. “Rabbi Avigdor Miller.” This incident made a deep impression on Yoram, and he decided to become observant —— and even sent his children to yeshivah.

*From Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and Revolution, by Yaakov Y. Hamburger, published by Judaica Press*

❖ Born in Brooklyn, Danny fled urban life as a young man to seek solitude and meaning in the mountains of Montana, living off the land as a wilderness hunter and spending years on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Seeking spiritual wisdom, he traveled across the prairies to consult an elderly Sioux wise woman. After two weeks of speaking with him, she told him, "You are a child of Holy White Rock Man (Moshe Rabbeinu)—you must go seek the truth of your own heritage!" Stunned, Danny visited Missoula's university library, where he discovered an untouched English Soncino Talmud set and devoured most of Shas on his own. Driving his beat-up truck back to New York to experience living Judaism, he met with several rabbis, but when the first rabbi heard that Danny hunted for a living and gasped in horror, Danny felt he could never fit into the Torah world. On a rainy night, as he packed to return to Montana, a friend convinced him to make one final call—to Rav Shlomo Freifeld, Rosh Yeshivah of Shor Yoshuv in Far Rockaway. Rav Freifeld welcomed Danny into his study with overflowing warmth and refreshments. "Where do you live, Danny, and what do you do?" he asked gently. Bracing for rejection, Danny replied quietly, "I live in Montana, and I hunt." To his amazement, Reb Shlomo's eyes lit up with childlike wonder: "What do you hunt? How do you track a deer? How can you tell if the tracks are fresh?" For nearly an hour, Reb

Shlomo listened with genuine fascination as Danny explained wilderness tracking. Finally, Reb Shlomo smiled: "Anyone who can hunt elk in Montana will never have to worry about making a living! Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock, come join us." The next morning, while serving as sandek at a crowded bris in the beis midrash, Reb Shlomo spotted Danny at the back, called him to the front to stand beside him in honor, and enrolled him in the yeshivah. Over the months that followed, the two spoke for hours about Torah, nature, and Native American culture. More than a year later, when Reb Shlomo stepped out of his office during a meeting, Danny glanced beneath the Rosh Yeshivah's desk and froze: stacked on the floor were public library books all about Native American culture and customs—books that a loving spiritual father had checked out and studied solely so he could enter his student's world and show him how cherished he was.

*Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ Another incident involved a bachur from a different yeshivah, who was found with inappropriate material. His Roshei Yeshivah felt that his place was not in yeshivah, and he should enroll in another type of school. (In those days, one asked Rabbi Shach's advice before taking such drastic action. One did not simply expel a bachur) When the question was brought to Rabbi Shach, he asked to meet the bachur before offering advice. He spoke to the bachur for a few minutes, and sensed that the bachur was having problems in emunah. So he continued to speak to the bachur a bit more. Whoever heard Rabbi Shach's shmuessen was familiar with the tremendous impact of hearing his emunah shmuess, because in the same way that he breathed Torah, he also breathed emunah. As soon as the bachur left — this meeting had taken place at the end of the winter z'man (semester)—Rabbi Shach indicated that he hoped that the bachur would straighten out over the spring intersession, but the bachur (who lived in Tel Aviv) should meet with him in the interim. After Pesach, this boy's Rabbi asked Rabbi Shach if the bachur had come to see him. He said, "The bachur did not have to come to me. I traveled twice to Tel Aviv to see him during the Pesach intersession. I hope b'ezras Hashem that next Z'man everything will be in order." At the outset of the next z'man, the bachur came back to yeshivah, and told his Rebbi that he had no doubts in emunah at all. If Klal Yisroel could produce a person who is so caring, that he actually traveled to Tel Aviv to see him twice, he doesn't have any more questions.

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Dov is a respected member of an American Torah community. Twenty years ago, Dov was attending public school. Then, a yeshivah in his area began a "buddy" program. Every Tuesday night, boys from the local public school would be brought to the yeshivah for refreshments and half an hour of Torah study in the beis midrash with students of the yeshivah. It was as a result of this program that Dov became religious and began to attend yeshivah. When Dov was already an established member of that yeshivah's beis midrash, he approached one of the married students and said, "You know, I never told you this, but it's thanks to you that I became religious." The other student was taken aback. "Thanks to me? But we never even studied together!" "I know," Dov replied, "but I can vividly recall my first night in the yeshivah. I felt so uncomfortable. All of you with your short haircuts, suits and white shirts, and me with my long hair and jeans! I liked the fellow that studied with me, but not enough to want to come back. "As I was about to leave that night, you came over and greeted me warmly. You asked me my name and said that it was really nice having me and my friends visit your school. And you invited me to come again. I could tell that you meant it and it made me feel very good. "That is why I came back the next week."

*Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ As a young student, Rav Nosson Wachtfogel used to study in a synagogue on the Lower East Side where students from various yeshivos gathered to learn. Reb Nosson once noticed a diligent young man, walked over, greeted him with a warm "Shalom aleichem," and inquired about his studies. The young man complained that he was struggling terribly with his learning. Surprised, Reb Nosson asked him for some examples. The young man began pouring out his questions: "I don't understand how the Gemara here says one thing, when just three pages further the Gemara says the exact opposite! And I

don't understand the reasoning of this Tosafos!" After hearing several of his questions, Reb Nosson exclaimed, "These aren't problems at all—they are solid eiseneh kashas, ironclad questions! They ask just such questions in the great yeshivos of Europe. That's where you belong!" Inspired, the student decided to make the trip to Europe. Reb Nosson himself also longed to study in Europe, but his parents were apprehensive about letting him travel so far at his young age. This time, Reb Nosson's new friend stepped in: self-assured and impressive, he went straight to Reb Nosson's parents, shared his own plans, and reassured them that if they allowed their son to come along, he would personally take full responsibility for his welfare. They agreed. The two young men did not go alone; they convinced a group of other promising bachurim of the immense benefit of studying under the great Roshei Yeshivah and Mashgichim of Europe. That young man with the "constant difficulties" was Rav Yehudah Davis, later the Rosh Yeshivah of Mountaindale, and together they brought with them Rav Mordechai Gifter, Rav Mordechai Yoffe, and—the most difficult of all to convince—Rabbi Avigdor Miller. One greeting caused the spread of Torah of the highest order.

*The Living Mishnas Reb Aharon, By Rabbi Yitzchak Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim*

❖ During the shivah of Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, a secular taxi driver in Jerusalem told a passenger, "I heard on the radio that Rabbi Auerbach did not want his tombstone higher than those of his parents. In today's world, which child honors his parents? My children hardly look at me! And the Rav was concerned with honoring his parents who died many years ago! Ah, if I would be a bit younger, I would become a baal teshuvah!"

*5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ While driving down the street to meet with a wealthy man on behalf of the yeshivah, Rav Shlomo once noticed a young teenager shooting some basketball hoops in his driveway. Immediately, Rav Shlomo stopped his car and started walking in the direction of the boy. "Throw me the ball!" Rav Shlomo exclaimed. The boy looked incredulously at Rav Shlomo, as if thinking, Here is a rabbi with a white beard, hat, jacket, and all, and he wants me to pass him the ball! But he reluctantly passed the ball to Rav Shlomo, who was standing about fifty feet away from the basket. Before the boy even had a chance to digest what was going on, Rav Shlomo took a two-hand set shot from that amazing distance... and swished it! The boy was bewildered. He just stared at this most interesting rabbi in total astonishment. But not for long, for Rav Shlomo wasn't done. "You want to give me a game?" "Um... okay, sure," the boy answered. Though he threw himself into the game, giving it his all, the boy hardly got his hands on the ball, as the rabbi kept scoring. The over quickly. Game was "Okay, Rabbi," he said, panting, as Rav Shlomo stretched out his hand. "Who are you? I never saw a rabbi play ball like that before." Rav Shlomo broke into a warm smile. "Shalom aleichem. My name is Shlomo Rothenberg, and I have a yeshivah in Mountaindale. One day, I want you to come and learn there--I think it would be great for you." A head counselor of Camp Agudah recounted a time when Rav Shlomo visited the campgrounds and asked him who in camp was in need of a dose of chizuk. The head counselor directed him to two of the lifeguards, and so, with his usual warm and loving smile, Rav Shlomo approached them. "Would you like to learn something together?" Rav Shlomo "Well, thanks, Rabbi," said the boy. "I'll definitely keep it in mind if I ever decide to go back to yeshivah." "I understand," said Rabbi Rothenberg. "But don't worry about the learning. I see you have a lot of talent playing ball, and with a little coaching, you could be really great. Come to my yeshivah, and I'll coach you on how to play better, and then maybe we'll get in a little learning, too." A while later, the boy's friend told him he was planning on going to a yeshivah in Mountaindale. "Why don't you come along and try it out?" he suggested to his friend. After inquiring around a bit, the boy decided to make the move, After Ma'ariv on the first night of yeshivah, the talmidim formed a line to greet the Rosh Yeshivah. As he came closer, the boy watched Rav Shlomo exchange a warm greeting with each student. Finally, when he stepped up to greet Rav Shlomo, he said "Remember me, Rebbi?" he nearly shouted in excitement. "I played basketball with you on my driveway a couple of years ago!" Rav Shlomo was just as enthusiastic. "I told you so! I told you that one day you would come and learn here!" He wrapped the boy in a warm embrace, welcoming him home like a long-lost son.

*From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Nineteen years old. Yes, at a mere nineteen years of age, I was switching to my third yeshivah in four years. Let's just say I wasn't a model student. Finally the time had come for me to throw off the stifling feeling that I had in the various yeshivos that I had attended. Finally I would be able to have a good time. I couldn't wait to go to Eretz Yisrael for a taste of some freedom. Still, I was only nineteen and couldn't figure out exactly where I should go. I had a cousin in Lakewood, a yungerman learning in kollel, who had been a Gateshead talmid. "You know," he told me, "just this past year, Rav Mattisyahu came to Lakewood. Everyone is already talking about him. Why don't you discuss it with him?" That is how I found myself at the house, on 8th and Private Way, where the Salomon family lived during their first year in Lakewood. I asked the Mashgiach which yeshivah he would recommend that I attend in Eretz Yisrael. Listening to his answer, I was completely dumbfounded. "I can't tell you which yeshivah to attend," the Mashgiach replied with his signature, gentle smile, "because I barely know you. Why don't you stay at my house for a week? We will learn together for a short time every day, and I will get to know you. Perhaps then I will be able to advise you. I was blown away! To live in the house of the great Mashgiach? I was beyond flattered by the offer and agreed. In hindsight, I understand how, just with his offer, the Mashgiach was inspiring me, giving me confidence, and building me. Indeed, I moved in for one week. True to his word, the Mashgiach made time to learn Gemara with me for about twenty-five minutes every single day. At the end of the week, the Mashgiach again took me by surprise when he recommended that I not go to Eretz Yisrael at all. He advised me to join Beth Medrash Govoha, right there in Lakewood. What a bombshell! I had my mind and heart set on going to Eretz Yisrael and having a good time, and now the Mashgiach was telling me to stay in Lakewood and learn in a yeshivah where the youngest bachurim were already twenty-one, and I was only nineteen. Also, how would I fit in the dorm with bachurim so much older than I was? Rav Mattisyahu heard my reservations and gave me what I later learned was a classic Rav Mattisyahu reply. "Why don't you live with me in my house for the summer zeman? This way you will have one zeman to acclimate to yeshivah life. Then, by the time Elul comes, you will feel comfortable moving into the yeshivah." It was an offer I couldn't refuse an offer that I would never regret accepting! The next zeman found me living in his house. For most of those three to four months, I lived in the warm, loving home of the Mashgiach and the Rebbetzin. They set me on my feet, and I owe them everything in my life. Throughout that time, I walked around Lakewood with pride. I was Rav Mattisyahu's house bachur. I made his coffee, answered the phone when the Rebbetzin wasn't available, changed light bulbs, and even drove him at times. He made me feel special. Those few months were transformative. I saw the Mashgiach up close. Living with him in such close proximity made me realize that not only was the Mashgiach boosting my confidence, elevating me, and enabling me to understand my own kochos, but he was doing the same for dozens of others as well. I saw how, both on a klal level and on an individual level, the Mashgiach had the uncanny ability and talent to connect with and lift up each person. I was awed to see how the Mashgiach, without compromise, managed to discern the unique maalos of each person, making each one feel special. He did it for me, and he did it for many thousands of Yidden, the world over.

*From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The son of one of Rav Pam's former talmidim was about to begin his first job, in a Manhattan office where the boss was a non-religious Jew and the workers were gentiles. The father told his son that before he began work, he should meet with Rav Pam and present any questions he might have relating to a ben Torah's conduct in the workplace. The young man had one question for Rav Pam: Given that he was going to be the only Orthodox Jew in the office, should he perhaps not wear a yarmulke at work? Rav Pam said that this was out of the question; if taking off his yarmulka was the only way he could work there, he should not take the job. However, said, Rav Pam, "To succeed there, make sure to fulfill these three conditions: you must be the hardest worker in the office, the most honest worker in the office and the most pleasant worker in the office."

*Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Greenbaums had been working on their cousins for years, but the Romanos still exhibited no interest in Yiddishkeit. After declining numerous invitations to come spend a Shabbos in Bnei Brak, they finally acquiesced. They enjoyed the food, but they were having none of the Greenbaums' pleas to give Torah a chance. On motza'ei Shabbos the hosts walked their guests to the bus stop, the guests showing zero change in their attitude. Suddenly Mrs. Romano stopped and asked her hostess, "What's that noise?" She had heard a low rumbling sound which seemed to get louder as they continued walking. "That's coming from one of the local shuls. There's someone in town who is very ill, and several hundred people have gathered to say Tehillim on his behalf. As a matter of fact, after we drop you off at the bus stop we're heading there, too." "Do you know the guy who's sick?" "No. But, then again, neither do most of the people who are gathered in the shul. But he needs our tefillos, so we daven." "You mean you're gonna give up your Saturday night for someone you don't even know?" The contrast between the selfishness of her own society in suburban Tel Aviv and the selflessness of the religious Jews in the Torah city hit hard. Very hard. The Romanos decided to become frum.

*Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ David Baran was a non-religious Jew living in the town of Lomza. One Erev Yom Kippur he walked down the street of the Lomza yeshivah. There were throngs of people. He then noticed that an elderly, angelic figure, wearing his kittel was going in and out of each of the outhouses. When he came closer he saw it was Rav Eliahu Dushintzer, the mashgiach of the yeshivah. Very surprised, he asked him what he was doing in the bathrooms right before Yom Kippur. Rav Eliyahu smiled and explained that on Yom Kippur there were going to be throngs of people and I want to make sure there is enough toilet paper. David was so struck by the humility of Rav Eliahu, and decided to daven there and join the yeshivah. He later moved to Eretz Yisrael, and has many frum grandchildren and great grandchildren.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 86*

❖ Karen, an assimilated American college student vacationing in Israel, had begun attending a few introductory Torah classes in Yerushalayim when she casually mentioned to a friend that she was pregnant and had scheduled an abortion. Knowing that Karen had not yet accepted the authority of halachah and subscribed to secular notions of bodily autonomy, Rabbi Stein persuaded her that before undergoing any medical procedure carrying physical risk, she should first receive a blessing from a renowned sage. Karen agreed and accompanied Rabbi Stein to the study of HaRav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, with Rabbi Stein serving as interpreter. When Karen explained that she had come for a blessing before terminating her pregnancy so that a baby would not derail her long years of graduate study, Rav Shlomo Zalman gently asked, "What career do you plan to pursue?" "I want to be a doctor," Karen replied proudly. "And why do you hold medicine in such high esteem?" the Rav inquired. Taken aback at having to explain something so obvious to a revered sage, Karen exclaimed, "Because through medicine one is able to save lives!" Rav Shlomo Zalman sat in quiet contemplation, then asked softly, "And what is so important about saving lives?" Stumped by the question, Karen declared emphatically, "There is simply nothing more important in the entire universe than saving a human life!" Suddenly catching the implication of her own words, Karen pointed to her abdomen and protested, "Oh, no—this is only a fetus, not a life!" "But you agree that this fetus will become a baby?" Rav Shlomo Zalman asked warmly. "What if I told you that this child is destined to become a great person?" "There is no way of knowing how a child will turn out," Karen countered. "That depends on genetics, nutrition, environment—nature versus nurture." "True," Rav Shlomo Zalman smiled. "Since you are clearly a bright, capable woman, the child's 'nature' is already assured; the only question is 'nurture'—the loving environment in which the child will be raised. "Therefore," Rav Shlomo Zalman concluded with calm certainty, "you really have only two choices before you: either you raise this child yourself and give the baby the love and nurture it deserves, or you give the baby to me. My name is Shlomo Zalman Auerbach—you can ask around, I am fairly well known—and I will gladly see to it that your child receives all the love and care it needs. Those are your only two choices." Struck to the core by the sage's Socratic wisdom and

warmth, Karen whispered, "The only two choices... Do I have to decide between them right now?" In a single gentle conversation, Rav Shlomo Zalman had guided her to recognize on her own that choosing life for her child was the only true path—and that daughter later grew up to study in a Bais Yaakov seminary.

*From Jerusalem His Word, By Rabbi Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Prior to Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler's arrival in Ponevezh, one of the bachurim went around telling everyone that Rav Dessler would be very strict and that "even the best would not be good enough for him." Yet the bachurim soon found out that he was the warmest and gentlest of men. Indeed, there were those who complained to the Chazan Ish that he was not strict enough. The Chazon Ish replied, "M'shichah (drawing something towards one) is a stronger kinyan (means of acquisition) than chazakah (showing one's control over an object).

*Rav Dessler, By Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 262*

❖ Rabbi Klein went to be menachem avel a man in his town by the name of Moshe the tailor. Moshe was an assimilated Jew — until the rav's visit. He was so touched by the gesture, he decided to go to shul to say Kaddish and from there he went on to become a full ba'al teshuvah. Avraham, the rav's son, was thirteen when he was taken to a concentration camp. Five years later, the orphaned young man was sitting on a street car in the DP zone smoking a cigarette on Shabbos. Looking out the window, he saw someone who looked vaguely familiar. Hey, that's Moshe the tailor, he thought to himself. Here he is a ba'al teshuvah and I've become a mechallel Shabbos. No more. He got off the street car, threw away his cigarette, and eventually became a wealthy supporter of Torah institutions.

*Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology*

❖ Each interaction with another human being was viewed by Rav Shlomo Rothenberg as an opportunity to uplift and impact the person's life; therefore, the amount of lives touched by Rav Shlomo is surely impossible to calculate. A boy from a foreign country arrived at a certain yeshivah, not knowing much about anything. He was trying to fit in and learn how to play basketball. Rav Shlomo was visiting that particular yeshivah at that time and noticed the boy. He immediately rolled up his sleeves and began to teach him the ropes of basketball. This seemingly insignificant act filled the boy with such warm feelings toward Yiddishkeit, and soon enough, he became a solid yeshivah boy who took great pride in his identity.

*From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

# 3. To write and own a Sefer Torah and Torah books

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 15**

*As the Torah says "Now therefore write this song" (Devarim 31:19 Parshas Vayeilech)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Do you have to write it yourself?
- Does one have to write a new one if he already has one as an heirloom from his parents?
- Does one have to write the entire Torah to fulfill this mitzvah?
- What is the reason for this mitzvah?
- Can one buy other books to fulfill this mitzvah?
- Which Jewish books is one required to own?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

Our Sages explained that the biblical command, "Now therefore write down this song for yourselves" (Devarim 31:19), obligates one to write the entire Sefer Torah which contains this song, for the Torah may not be written or preserved in disjointed scrolls.

If a person writes a Sefer Torah with his own hand, Scripture accounts it to him as though he received the Torah directly from Mount Sinai.

If one is unable to write the scroll himself, he should purchase one or hire a qualified scribe (sofer) to write it on his behalf. Even if a person inherited a Sefer Torah from his forefathers, it is an independent mitzvah for him to write his own. Furthermore, if one corrects even a single defective letter in a Sefer Torah, it is considered as though he wrote the entire scroll himself.

Rabbeinu Asher (the Rosh) of blessed memory wrote that the biblical commandment of writing a Sefer Torah applied primarily in earlier generations, when people would write scrolls in order to study directly from them. In our era, however, when a Sefer Torah is written and housed in the synagogue ark specifically for public reading during congregational prayer, it is an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh) for every Jew who possesses the financial means to purchase Chumashim, volumes of the Mishnah and Talmud, and their commentaries, so that he and his sons may study from them. This is because the underlying purpose of writing a Sefer Torah is to facilitate its study, and nowadays it is through the Talmud and its codifiers that one comes to know the meaning of the mitzvos and the halachic rulings thoroughly. Therefore, in our time, these are the sacred volumes that a man is commanded to acquire or have printed.

Whoever possesses the ability to fulfill both dimensions of this commandment — commissioning a Sefer Torah in its literal sense and acquiring sacred texts for continuous study — fortunate is his lot. This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

When we study Torah, we emulate Hashem by sharing His wisdom. For example, when we strain our minds to understand a complicated section of Gemara (Talmud), we are expanding our minds to think in a Godly way.

Additionally, when we learn Torah, we absorb a spiritual energy, a hashpa of kedushah that sanctifies us and helps us become holy like Hashem.

Finally, this is a basic prerequisite of the Torah. We can't become G-dly and emulate Hashem, unless we learn the Torah to learn how to do mitzvos to emulate Hashem.

We need to purchase and write Torah books in order for us and others to learn Torah.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 613)

If you have Torah books, you will be able to study from them. Additionally, you will be able to lend them out for others to learn. The more Torah books there are in the world, the more that will be available for people to study from.

### IBN EZRA

When a Jew complains about his problems a Torah should be available immediately for his guidance. In the Torah one can find the solution to his problems.

### SFAS EMES

• How do we hold on to Hashem when the world feels dark? The Sfas Emes explains this in 5645. Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to hide all the original spiritual lights inside the letters of the scroll: "V'ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu tzivah l'Moshe Rabbeinu ahav rav lignoz kol ha-he'aros b'soch ha-Sefer Torah" — "The Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Moshe our teacher to store away all the illuminations inside the Sefer Torah." Notice the verb he uses: to store away (lignoz). Moshe's generation prepared this gift for us with deep love. They knew our struggles before we were born, and they left us this written map so we could always find our way home to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Vayeilech 5645).

• In 5648, the Sfas Emes raises a searching question. Why does Hashem command us to write the Torah immediately after warning, "Hasteir asteir panai" — "I will surely hide My face" (Devarim 31:18)? He explains that during Moshe's lifetime, the revelation in human hearts was so clear that people did not rely on physical writing in the same way. Our Sages teach: "Oraisa v'Kudsha Brich Hu v'Yisrael kula chad" — "Torah, the Holy One, and Israel are all one" (Zohar, Acharei Mos 73a). The people lived that unity with open clarity. But in later generations, that direct vision would fade. The whole Torah was given to accompany us through our ups and downs. Through the written letters, we are tethered to eternity (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Vayeilech 5648).

• In 5641, the Sfas Emes takes us back to the dawn of Creation. Where did He store it? The Sfas Emes answers: He hid it inside the Torah! Even before humanity sinned, creation already held a hidden depth that could be reached only through spiritual labor. After our mistakes, a double veil descended: concealment upon concealment (hester al hester). Reaching the inner soul of Torah (penimiyus ha-Torah) now requires real sweat and toil (yegiah). Why, then, does Hashem command Moshe to write the scroll right when He announces the exile? The Sfas Emes reveals a golden principle of faith: "Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu bara refuah kodem la-makkah" — the Holy One created the remedy before the wound. On days when our hearts feel numb and our minds feel foggy, we can still pronounce the holy words aloud. By moving our lips and studying with patience, we draw down the light that Hashem hid for us before the world began (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Vayeilech 5641).

• Why does the Torah call this scroll a song (shirah), when it contains severe warnings of suffering and exile? Can painful rebuke truly be sung? The Sfas Emes points us to the words of King David: "Chesed u-mishpat ashirah" — "Of kindness and of judgment I will sing" (Tehillim 101:1). Our Sages explain in tractate Berachos (60b) that we must praise Hashem in times of difficulty just as we praise Him in times of joy. The Sfas Emes applies this directly to the song of Vayeilech in 5651: "Inyan shirah zo, hagam ki yesh bah onshin — Ki kol ha-mishpatim li-Bnei Yisrael heim l'tovah" — "The matter of this song, even though it contains punishments, is that all judgments

concerning the Children of Israel are for their ultimate good." That is why this parshah is called a song. It reassures us that no matter how far we fall, our story is moving toward ultimate redemption and closeness (kirvah) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Vayeilech 5651).

• In 5639, the Sfas Emes examines Hashem's promise. What does the survival of Torah testify when a Jew feels broken and cries out, "Ein Elokai b'kirbi" — "My Hashem is not within me"? The Sfas Emes explains that the Torah gives us clarity. It reveals this timeless truth: "Ki Torah or, v'ein ha-choshech yachol l'hachshich or ha-Torah" — "For the Torah is light, and the darkness cannot darken the light of the Torah." Whenever a Jewish child opens a Chumash or a talmid chacham pores over a Gemara in exile, that persistent voice is living proof of Hashem's presence. The ancient Mishkan proved to the world that Hashem forgave the golden calf. In the very same way, the Sefer Torah in our synagogues proves that Hashem remains our loving Father, walking with us through every dark valley (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Vayeilech 5639).

## RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ If a person bought a Torah book not because they wanted to perform this mitzvah, do they still get a mitzvah? Discuss the idea of mitzvos tzrichos kavanah, of how mitzvos require the intent to perform a mitzvah.

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

A Rosh Yeshivah approached a generous philanthropist seeking funding to commission a new Sefer Torah. The donor agreed to cover half of the total cost, provided the yeshivah secured a second donor for the remaining balance. A second benefactor agreed to fund the other half, but on the strict condition that only his name appear on the dedication mantle, crown, and casing. The first donor graciously consented, wishing to give anonymously without public honor. However, the Rosh Yeshivah was conflicted: would presenting the scroll as if funded exclusively by the second donor constitute falsehood (midvar sheker tirchak) or generate an improper public impression (geneivas da'as)?

**Answer:** They can do it if the Torah would only have been completed because of the second person.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 607*

A recognized Torah scholar who was also an expert scribe (sofer) wished to write a kosher scroll of Ruth for his synagogue. Several colleagues questioned his undertaking, arguing that spending dozens of hours forming calligraphy letters constituted a neglect of advanced Torah study (bitul Torah) when compared to delving into complex halachic treatises. Is an accomplished scholar permitted to dedicate hours to sacred scribal craftsmanship?

**Answer:** It is not bitul Torah. As Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein explains, citing the Gemara in Bava Basra (164b) and the Chazon Ish — when an accomplished Torah scholar who is a skilled scribe (sofer) dedicates time to writing a kosher Megillas Ruth scroll for the congregation to read in the synagogue, preparing sacred scriptures (kisvei ha-kodesh) for public mitzvah observance is itself a direct fulfillment of spreading Torah and hidur mitzvah rather than bitul Torah.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 590*

A synagogue possessed surplus funds in its maintenance treasury. The leadership faced a dilemma: should they allocate the money to hire a sofer to repair an invalid (pasul) Sefer Torah so it can be returned to the Ark, or should they use the funds to rebind and repair dozens of worn communal Gemaras and halachah sefarim that cannot currently be studied due to their dilapidated condition? Which project takes halachic precedence?

**Answer:** Citing Rav Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim (the Aderes) in Sefer Har HaMoriyah (Siman 32), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that when a synagogue already possesses another kosher Sefer Torah for public reading, using limited funds to purchase or rebind essential study sefarim (Gemaras, Shulchan Aruch, and poskim) takes priority over repairing the additional Sefer Torah, because communal Talmud Torah and knowing practical halachah take precedence.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 147*

A certain Rosh Yeshivah was in need of a new Sefer Torah for his yeshivah. The Rosh Yeshivah approached a very generous donor and asked him if he would help sponsor the purchase of a new Torah. The man said he would sponsor $30,000 to pay for half of the Torah on the condition that they find a matching donor who would sponsor the other half. The Rosh Yeshivah was very excited about the offer and sure enough he found another donor who agreed to sponsor the other half. When the Rosh Yeshivah told the first donor that he found someone, the donor said as follows: I will give you the money on the following condition. My portion should remain completely anonymous. I want that only the other family will have their names written on the Torah mantel. I don't want my donation to be known at all. In fact, I want it to appear that the other donor was the sole donor for the entire Torah. The other donor agreed to be listed as the sole donor. The Rosh Yeshivah was pleased with the arrangement, but then had the following question. Was it honest to list only the second family on the Torah? Would it not be lying to create the impression that one person paid for the whole Torah when there were really two people who did it. Would it be okay to only list the second family and give the impression that they contributed more than they actually did? Would the Rosh Yeshivah have to say no to this arrangement and find a new donor? What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question of putting one name in the Torah, Rav Zilberstein said it was permitted because the second family made the writing of the Torah possible.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 607*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred when Rabbi Chalafta went before Rabban Gamliel and found him sitting at his table holding an Aramaic translation (Targum) of the Book of Job and reading from it. Rabbi Chalafta said to him: 'My Master, will you permit me to tell you what my own eyes once saw?' Rabban Gamliel replied: 'Speak!' Rabbi Chalafta said: 'I remember Rabban Gamliel the Elder, your grandfather, standing atop a structure on the Temple Mount when an Aramaic Targum of Job was brought before him; he instructed the master builder to bury it beneath the course of stones so that unauthorized translations would not displace the sacred Hebrew text.'

*Maseches Soferim 5:15*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Although Harav Ovadia Yosef considered it his main objective in life to study the halachic sections of the Torah and issue rulings for the public, his library was hardly confined to halachic works. He would purchase any sefer that could aid his learning or his general knowledge of Torah and Judaism, study it, and then place it on a shelf. Rabbanit Margalit once told a visitor that no new volume made its way onto a shelf until Harav Ovadia had learned it cover to cover. This feat would have been astounding even if his library had contained a few thousand works, let alone the nearly 40,000 volumes that the family counted shortly before his passing. And it wasn't just about learning the material. He annotated or commented on almost every volume he learned, pointing out where the author had missed some point or noting where else a particular topic was discussed. During the last twenty years of his life, Harav Ovadia lived in a large apartment in Har Nof with his son Rav Moshe, and his daughter-in — law Rabbanit Yehudit, and their children. Aside from covering every

wall of the large study and an adjacent room, sefarim also lined the hallways leading to these rooms. During his early years in that apartment, tefillos were held in his study. At one point, however, he asked his helpers to arrange for a separate beis knesses to be designated for the tefillos. Before long, they were able to rent an apartment below Harav Ovadia's and convert it into a beis knesses. Logic would have dictated that as he grew older, the Rav should have sought to make things easier for himself rather than move the beis knesses downstairs. The family wondered why he wanted to move it out of his study, especially since his health was deteriorating. Harav Ovadia explained, "When I write comments in the margins of sefarim, I do so for myself, not for others to see. Sometimes, those comments can be interpreted as derogatory to the author, even if no offense was intended. Recently, the author of a sefer told me that his friend had prayed with me one day, and had noticed the sefer on a shelf. He opened it and saw that I had written a comment that could be interpreted as a criticism of his work. The author was very hurt, and he came to discuss it with me. "It's worthwhile to me to have to leave my home for every tefillah rather than take the chance of hurting the feelings of an author."

*Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ If Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman wanted to disagree in print with the way someone else understood a topic, he was careful not to write his questions or insights in language that could be construed as argumentative. When writing his sefer on Bava Kamma, he had a long piece with proof from many areas in Shas against a concept of the Brisker Rav. While reviewing the manuscript, he told R' Shraga that he didn't feel it was proper to begin a sefer by arguing with the Brisker Rav, so he didn't publish the majority of that piece and, rather, focused on his own chiddushei Torah. Once R' Aharon Leib showed his son R' Shraga a relatively unknown sefer written by a tzaddik who lived several hundred years ago. "I saw this sefer in the Ponevezh library and was so impressed with it that I purchased a copy," he said. "In the beginning, I was wondering why the sefer and its author are not well known, as it is obvious that this sefer was written with superb, deep insights. It took a little time for me to realize that when the author quotes other sefarim and disagrees with them, he sometimes uses harsh language against the other writers." That's why, in R' Aharon Leib's opinion, the sefer was not widely disseminated in later generations.

*From Rav Aharon Leib, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ At the cemetery of Punzevitz, bachurim were burying worn out sefarim that were unusable. The bachurim were somber like a levaye. But Rav Yosef Kahaneman was singing and asked them to do hakafos like simchas Torah. They thought it was absurd, why was it so happy? He said when a mother has to buy new pants for a child who wears them out the mother should be happy that her child is healthy. There are two mothers whose children don't wear out their pants. A mother of a sick child or a cruel mother who does not let her child go out. We have worn out sefarim. It shows us how lucky we are that we can wear out the sefarim. We aren't "sick" and unlearned, and we aren't forbidden to learn. We have to rejoice that we wore out a sefer.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 156*

❖ Throughout the years, various people gave the Rosh Hayeshiva Rav Aharon Schechter seforim as gifts, most of which he did not need, and many of which he had very little interest in. When he moved from his house on East 17th Street to the house on East 12th Street, he needed to downsize his library due to space constraints. The Rosh Hayeshiva said, "If someone gave me this sefer, it is because they wanted to benefit me, to give something to me. So how can I just give away the sefer?" So he sat, opened up each gifted sefer, and read from it until he felt he was able to get something from it, a vort, a kasheh, a diyuk, something he had not known. He refused to give away a sefer until he got something from it. Even though the benefactor had given it years beforehand, and was completely unaware that the Rosh Hayeshiva was doing so.

*Table Talk, Edition 385, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ Rav Chaim Yosef Gottlieb, the Rav of Stropkov, had an enormously large collection of sefarim. Rav Chaim Sanzer saw the collection and was very displeased. "Don't you think that with such rampant poverty in the world, it is wrong to spend excessively on sefarim?" he rebuked the rav. Answered Rav Gottlieb, "When I want to help a talmid chacham financially, I buy a sefer from him. That way he can cam the money in a respectable fashion that is where most of these sefarim come from."

*Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ For the title of his major work, Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman incorporated the word "Ayeles" because it is an acronym of his and his wife's, Rebbetzin Tamar's, initials: Alef — Aharon, Yud — Yehudah, Lamed — Leib, Tav — Tamar R' Aharon Leib made sure to include his wife's name in his sefarim to recognize her sacrifices and assistance which enabled him to write his sefarim."

*From Rav Aharon Leib, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Shmaryahu Greineman's son, R' Baruch, remembers his father telling him about the time when the Chazon Ish took back an entire section (Chapter 12 of Tractate Keilim) from Chazon Ish and erased it. When the time came to print the work, Rav Greineman wanted to change the numbering of the chapters so that the missing section would not be noticed. The Chazon Ish, however, insisted on leaving the numbering as was. That way people would notice, the missing chapter and learn that one must be prepared to erase an entire chapter if it is wrong.

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ The Steipler once discovered an interpretation of an especially perplexing Rambam which pleased him so much that he was happy for days. He later found a mishna which mildly refuted his interpretation. Although he had five different methods of solidly answering the mishna's refutation, he refused to print his concept for fear that in Heaven its veracity could be challenged. A rabbi in London found the words "This is an exceedingly great mistake" scrawled in the margin of a page in one of the Steipler's books. The rabbi was aghast at the temerity of the individual writing such a critique, until he learned that it was the Steipler himself who had written those words; in fact, many volumes with similar objections can be found in Kollel Chazon Ish in Bnei Brak.

*Sunset, by Rabbi Hanoch Teller*

❖ For most down syndrome children, singing and dancing have special meaning. For Nota Shlomo, Simchas Torah is a highlight of the year. When Nota Shlomo was almost eight years old, his grandparents bought him a child's safer Torah to hold on Simchas Torah. Throughout the night and day in shul, he held the Torah tightly to his chest, displaying an attachment that was cause for wonder. Only with great encouragement did he relinquish the safer Torah from time to time and dance. On the morning of Simchas Torah when the Torah reading commenced in the beis midrash of Torah Vodaath, Nota Shlomo approached the gabbai at the bimah and offered him his sefer Torah to use for the Torah reading. The gabbai politely refused the offer, but Nota Shlomo continued to ask that his sefer Torah be used. And though his father instructed him to return to his seat, the child returned to the bimah a number of times to again make his request. Finally, Rabbi Rabinowitz told his son quietly but firmly that the gabbai would not use his sefer Torah, and that he should return to his seat and sit quietly. Rav Pam, who was sitting in his regular seat only a few feet away from the bimah, overheard this. He motioned for Nota Shlomo to come over to him. Rav Pam spoke to the child in a whisper for less than a minute and succeeded in calming him. Nota Shlomo happily returned to his seat. When Mussaf began, Nota Shlomo became increasingly anxious, asking his father every few minutes how much time was left until davening would be over. As soon as davening ended, Nota Shlomo said, "Abba, now my turn." He then took his sefer Torah to the bimah, put it down and said, "Rav Pam said that now my turn." Rabbi Rabinowitz approached Rav Pam, who explained, "I told Nota Shlomo that right now we are using the big sefer Torah, but after davening we would do more leining from his sefer Torah and that we will call up people to the Torah." And so after most of the congregants had left, Nota Shlomo's Sefer Torah was opened on the

bimah in Mesivta Torah Vodaath and with some fifteen people crowded around the bimah, three people were called up by name for their aliyos. "After each man pretended to recite the blessing over the Torah, Nota Shlomo, standing on a chair, proudly "read" from his sefer Torah. When the third "aliyah" was completed, two men were honored with "hagbaah" and "gelilah. " Then, the sefer Torah was given to Nota Shlomo and an enthusiastic rikud (dance) ensued.

*Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A talmid chocham brought the manuscripts of a sefer he had written on tefillah to show the Vilna Gaon, hoping to gain his approval. There was a rather simple idea presented near the beginning. The Gaon enjoyed the idea very much and told the author it would be worth publishing the book if only for that one vort. Someone asked the Brisker Rav why the Gaon was so excited. "After all," said the man, "it really is a simple idea." Answered the Rav, "If the Gaon got excited about it, it means the vort is emes, and by emes there is no difference between small and big."

*Impact, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

## PRESERVATION OF THE TORAH

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section are designed to preserve the Torah for posterity, in the manner that was first revealed to us by Hashem*

# 4. To obey the tradition and teachings of our Sages

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 158**

*As the Torah says, you shall not turn aside from the word which they shall tell you, neither to the right nor to the left (Devarim 17:11, Parshas Shoftim).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Which teachings of the Sages are we required to obey?
- Why did the Sages institute certain enactments?
- Does this apply to modern Torah leaders?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

Included within the scope of this mitzvah is the obligation to obey the entirety of the sacred tradition transmitted to us by our Sages of blessed memory, as codified in the Talmud. Whoever believes in Moshe Rabbeinu and his Divine Torah is obligated to ground his observance of our faith upon the authoritative words of our Sages and to place complete trust in them.

This obligation applies equally to three areas: (a) matters that the Sages received through the unbroken oral tradition from Sinai, which constitute the Oral Torah (Torah Shebe'al Peh); (b) matters that they derived through the classical principles of Torah exposition (middos shehaTorah nidreshes bahen); and (c) protective decrees and safeguards (gezeiros and siyagim) that they instituted to create a 'fence around the Torah.' Each of these categories is fully encompassed within this commandment.

The Sefer HaChinuch writes that this mitzvah obligates us to obey the teachings of our early Sages of antiquity, the preeminent Torah authorities (gedolei haTorah), and the halachic judges (dayanim) established in our own generation.

If someone transgresses this commandment and breaches any protective fence instituted by our Sages, or rejects any matter they taught in elucidating the Torah, he violates an explicit negative prohibition.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Torah is a manual teaching us how to perfect our character to resemble Hashem. We can only follow the Torah and become godly, if we preserve and interpret the Torah properly. This mitzvah helps us to preserve the Torah in the way Hashem desired, and to make sure it is transmitted, interpreted, and applied correctly, so that we can follow its ways and become G-dly.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 496)

When we follow the interpretation of the majority of our Sages, this gives Klal Yisrael a uniform way to keep the Torah. If we didn't follow the opinions and decisions of our Sages, every difference of opinion could split Klal Yisrael, the Jewish community into different groups.

#### RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (3:3)

There are different levels of ruach hakodesh. There are differences in Strength, The time that you get it, How you get it, The content. Nevertheless in each of these levels, the recipient knows that he received a ruach hakodesh. This is in contrast to a hashpah nisteres. Hashpah nisteres is a form of hashpah that is really not ruach hakodesh. In this hashpah, you learn of a hidden thing but you don't feel that you received a hashpa. A gadol who has daas Torah can have this hashpa nisteres.

#### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 3)

In a world that obscures spiritual danger and causes people to mistake harm for good, we cannot rely solely on our own unguided judgment. We must seek guidance from those who have successfully navigated the maze of worldly illusions. That is why the Torah commands us to cleave to our Sages and heed their Daas Torah.

#### SFAS EMES

• The Talmud in Maseches Avodah Zarah quotes the passionate declaration of the Sages: 'The words of the Scribes are more beloved to Hashem than the wine of the Torah itself.' This paradoxical statement demands explanation. The Sfas Emes explains that when Hashem gave the Written Torah at Mount Sinai, the revelation was an overwhelming descent of light from above to below. The Jewish people stood in awe beneath the trembling mountain as the Almighty proclaimed His eternal statutes. The words of the Sages, however, represent the spontaneous, loving ascent of the human soul from below to above. Lighting Chanukah candles or washing our hands before bread are not dry bureaucratic rituals. They are romantic love letters written by the Jewish people to the Almighty, celebrating an enduring bond that flourishes even in exile (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5648).

• In Parshas Nasso, the Midrash presents an extraordinary statement regarding the authority of the Sages: Hashem declared to Israel that whenever the righteous leaders of the generation issue a decree, the Almighty Himself upholds and ratifies their ruling in heaven. The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos famously asks: where in the Torah did He command us to light these candles? In his discourse on Chanukah (5638), the Sfas Emes explains that the commandments of the Written Torah are like seeds planted by Hashem in the soil of this world. For

those seeds to sprout, blossom, and bear nourishing fruit across changing historical eras, they require master gardeners who understand the soil and the seasons. The Sages of the Oral Law are those faithful gardeners. Their decrees are not external human additions imposed upon divine law; they are the organic flowering of the Torah's deepest roots. We do not view rabbinic fences as burdensome legal technicalities invented by mortal scholars. We recognize them as loving extensions of the divine will, designed to shelter our souls and illuminate our daily lives (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5638).

• Maseches Avos opens with a chain of transmission: Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua (Mosheh kibeil Torah mi-Sinai u-mesarah li-Yehoshua), and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets. The Sfas Emes answers: the sages placed this mishnah first so that no man should think to measure the words of the fathers of the world by the gauge of his own intellect — for these words are as an inheritance from Sinai (bi-yerushah mi-Sinai). That is why the chain stands at the head of Avos: before any teaching of the fathers can be heard, the hearer must accept that their words arrive by inheritance from Sinai — and inheritance is not measured, it is taken (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5637).

• In Parshas Matos, the Torah describes the campaign against the Midianites, detailing the meticulous preparation and strategic mobilization of the Jewish army. Why did the Sages compare Torah scholars specifically to straight, orderly rows of teeth, and what does this image teach us about military victory and rabbinic authority? The Sfas Emes examines how strict adherence to rabbinic sequence guarantees spiritual success. The Sfas Emes explains that before food can nourish the human body, it must be carefully ground and crushed by the teeth in a precise anatomical sequence. If an individual swallows unchewed chunks of meat, the stomach cannot process the nutrients, and serious illness ensues. The teeth break down coarse, heavy substances into digestible portions so that the life-force can enter the bloodstream. We do not possess the spiritual teeth required to digest the raw light of Scripture on our own. By following the refined guidance of our Sages, we receive wholesome spiritual nourishment that sustains our souls in every circumstance (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Matos 5646).

• Our Sages establish a striking halachic choreography at the entrance of a Jewish home during Chanukah: the mezuzah is affixed to the right doorpost, while the Chanukah menorah is placed on the left, surrounding the person who enters with commandments on both sides. Why did the halachah position biblical law on the right and rabbinic law on the left? The Sfas Emes explains that the right side of reality is naturally drawn to the divine light of the Written Torah. However, if a person relies exclusively on direct biblical commandments, the weaker, vulnerable left side of his life remains exposed to worldly temptation and confusion. The left side represents everyday mundane affairs, commercial dealings, and periods of moral darkness where explicit biblical commands might seem abstract. When we observe rabbinic enactments alongside biblical commands, we create an unbroken perimeter of holiness around our homes. Walking between the mezuzah and the menorah, we move through life fully protected on every side (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5640).

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- Discuss some of the proofs that there is an oral Torah
- Discuss the relationship between the written Torah and the oral Torah, and how it is like the shorthand, condensed notes of all of the oral Torah lectures that the Jews heard from Moshe in the desert.
- Discuss the purpose of the Oral Torah

- Discuss some of the reasons why it was kept oral. (One can only know true meaning from a teacher not a text, makes you have a relationship with a mentor and role model, it can't be stolen and misinterpreted like what happened to the bible, it forces us to study to preserve it, it is portable, it stays flexible to emerging situations because it is not all written)
- Discuss why we are not worried about "broken telephone". (It was written down just not published, there are multiple lines of the mesorah, the entire generation studied it together and the greatest among them passed it to the next generation)
- Discuss the parameters of the divinity of the oral Torah. Was every word in the Gemara given to Moshe at Har Sinai, and were Abaya and Rava just acting out a script?
- How there can be machlokes, disputes in the oral Torah if it was revealed at Har Sinai. (Forgot things, machlokes in application of principles)

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ On that great day in the academy of Yavneh, the Sages debated what tithes should be separated in the lands of Ammon and Moab during the Sabbatical Year, when fields in the Land of Israel lie fallow and the poor have nothing to glean. Rabbi Tarfon decreed that farmers there should give the Poor Man's Tithe, while Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah decreed the Second Tithe. Rabbi Yishmael challenged Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva defended him, and finally the thirty-two elders voted and ruled like Rabbi Tarfon that they must give the Poor Man's Tithe to sustain the poor! Afterward, Rabbi Yose of Damascus traveled to visit the aged Rabbi Eliezer in Lydda. Rabbi Eliezer asked him eagerly: 'What new Torah insight did you have in the study hall today?' Rabbi Yose answered playfully, 'They voted and decided that Ammon and Moab give the Poor Man's Tithe in the Seventh Year!' Upon hearing that the academy had arrived at the exact tradition he had received from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai going back to Sinai, Rabbi Eliezer wept with emotion and exclaimed: 'Stretch out your eyes to see, Yose! You have heard the secret of the Lord to those who revere Him—go in peace, for this is an unbroken Halachah to Moshe from Sinai!'

*Mishnah, Yadayim 4:3*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ For the first two decades of his life, Tuvia Kadel lived as a secular Israeli. Born and raised in the Holy Land, Tuvia knew next to nothing about his religious heritage. And then Tuvia joined the growing throng of Israeli baalei teshuvah. Fired by a deep sense of commitment to Torah and mitzvos, Tuvia joined a yeshivah and dedicated himself fully to Hashem's service. Just one year after his return to Torah and Yiddishkeit, Tuvia had already made tremendous strides in his learning and yiras shomayim. But then Divine Providence intervened. Tuvia contracted a life threatening illness, and he grew weaker as the days passed. Friends prayed for his recovery but Hashem had other plans. Only a short time later, Tuvia passed away. His fellow students, his rabbeim, all those who had come to know and admire the enthusiastic young man were devastated by the news. But even as they tried to come to terms with their grief, the rabbeim in the yeshivah were faced with a troubling dilemma. They knew that they ought to visit Tuvia's parents to console them for their loss. Yet they also knew that Tuvia's parents had been furious when their son had become religious. Would the parents even want to see or speak to his rabbeim? Torn by the conflict, the rabbeim finally decided to consult with a gadol. They went to speak to Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, the son and successor of the Steipler Gaon. After hearing them out, Reb Chaim said, "Tell them that in truth, their son should have passed away the year before. But because he became religious, Hashem granted him another year of life to fulfill Torah and mitzvos." The rabbeim left in a quandary. No doubt Reb Chaim knew what he was talking about. Yet how could they go to irreligious parents and offer this as a condolence? What did such people know of the power of a tzaddik and a gadol? Surely they would mock Reb Chaim's words! No, the rabbeim decided, they would simply have to come up with a more prosaic way of consoling the parents. The meeting proceeded much as the rabbeim had feared. "You religious Jews!"

the parents said bitterly. "What did our son gain by becoming religious? Nothing! He lost everything, including his life!" With anger and accusations being hurled at them from all sides, the rabbeim slowly realized that none of their carefully prepared remarks were helping. Perhaps, they thought, they should simply say what Reb Chaim had suggested. "We spoke to Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky about your son," one of the rabbeim began cautiously. "He told us that, far from costing your son his life, his newfound interest in religion actually saved his life." The parents remained silent for a moment. Emboldened, the rebbi continued. "In fact, Reb Chaim said that your son was actually supposed to die the year before and that it was only because he became religious that he was granted another year of life." There was a sudden gasp from Tuvia's mother. "It's true!" she yelled hysterically. "Every word the rabbi said is true!" "You are right," Tuvia's father said, tears streaming down his cheeks. "We blamed you for my son's death, but the rabbi is right. Becoming religious did save his life." The rabbeim simply could not understand it. What had brought about this change in attitude? What was there about Reb Chaim's message that had finally gotten through to Tuvia's parents? After she calmed down, Tuvia's mother explained. "Last year, my son began thinking about keeping Shabbos, though he wasn't really religious yet. Exactly one year ago, on one Shabbos morning, his old group of friends drove up to the house and tried to convince him to go along for some fun. Tuvia thought about it, but he decided against joining them. They drove away, laughing and mocking Tuvia for his beliefs. "Later that day, the same group of friends were involved in a car accident and all of them were killed. If Tuvia had gone along with them, he would also have been killed. It was his newfound interest in religion and keeping Shabbos that saved his life. "I wasn't willing to admit it then, but deep down I suppose I really knew that religion was helping Tuvia, not harming him. When you told me the rabbi's words, I realized that you were right. "Thank you. You have consoled us for our loss." And when Tuvia's rabbeim left the house, they went with a new understanding of the faith and trust we must have in our Torah leaders' guidance.

*Visions of Greatness, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers*

❖ One time, while learning with Rabbi Azriel Goldfein, the two of them came across a question that was asked by Rav Akiva Eiger, who had written that he could not resolve this difficulty. Rav Gifter suggested an answer for Rav Akiva's question on the Gemara. But then he said, "How can it be that Rav Akiva Eiger could not think of this answer, while I could?" Thereupon, he sat down and learned through the Gemara for three hours until he found the flaw in his own logic, so that the original difficulty still remained.

*Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Reb Yitzchak Aizik of Zhidachov once related the following episode involving the learned tzaddik Reb Avraham of Ulianov to the latter's son. Reb Avraham was head of the rabbinical court in Ulianov, and the rav of the entire province. One of the townships under his jurisdiction was Rodnik, whose rav was Reb Chaim, later to become famous as Reb Chaim of Zanz. Another citizen of stature in that little town was Reb Melech, the saintly grandson of Reb Elimelech of Lyzhansk. Now in those regions the custom was that since, "When Adar begins, joy is to be increased", the townsfolk would get together and appoint..... just for one rollicking day - an officious Purim-kahal (community council), presided over by a duly pompous Purim-rosh kahal; a quick-witted Purim-rav, who was fussed over by a witless but loyal Purim-shammes; and so on. In Rodnik one year such a Purim-kahal was duly elected. Its first official act was to send off a letter to Reb Avraham, the provincial rav, informing him of the names of the newly sworn-in office-bearers. They enclosed a gift of money in honor of the forthcoming festival, and added a letter - just for fun, of course - informing him that the members of the Purim-kahal of Rodnik hereby ordered him, the celebrated gaon of Ulianov, and the revered doyen of the rabbinate of that entire region, to appear in their hamlet on Purim the fourteenth of Adar, together with all his material possessions, right down to the last shoelace. All the worthies and unworthies of the Purim-council signed this document. Moreover, some of the more serious members of the community also joined in the prevailing spirit of harmless fun, and so it was that Reb Chaim and Reb Melech likewise appended their signatures. The letter went off, being expected to provoke no more than a smile. The fourteenth of Adar came as expected. In the morning the townsfolk of Rodnik were streaming out of their little gabled

weatherboard shul for the sheer joy of Purim. Then one after another they looked up in horror, for one by one, creaking their way over the hill towards them crawled half-a-dozen wagons, loaded to the clouds with beds and basins, kapotes and books. And bearing up the rear, in a modest carriage all alone, they beheld the venerable presence of the rabbi in person! When he descended, he was quick to put them at ease by explaining himself: "Among the signatories are eminent scholars. And does the Talmud not teach us, that it is a mitzvah to heed the words of sages? So here I am!" The townspeople of Rodnik were ashamed no end, and repeatedly begged his forgiveness. This he countered by asking their forgiveness, for he confessed that in violation of their summons, he had left his sifrei Torah at home.

*A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 301*

❖ There is a story that has been attributed to a few different gedolim, but I heard it in reference to Rabbi Shlomo Heiman. During shiur, he quoted two questions from the Rosh. One was a contradiction from another Gemara, and the other was a logical question. R' Shlomo asked his bachurim to suggest which question was stronger. They chose the one from the Gemara, but R' Shlomo corrected them. The first question is from only one Gemara, but when a gadol asks something based on his logic, the whole Shas, from which his knowledge is acquired, is asking the question! When we speak of daas Torah, the Torah's viewpoint, therefore, it is not only about the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos. They are the starting point from which a person is molded to think in a Torahdik way. That is why the words of Chazal are like the Torah itself!

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 316*

❖ R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa was the rebbe of the Kotzker and the Chidushei Ha'rim, the first Gerer rebbe. When R' Simcha Bunim died they all accepted their colleague the kotzker as their rebbe. The Chidushei Ha'rim wrote a "mishna berura" on chosen mishpat. He brought it to his rebbe for a haskamah. The Kotzer read it. He said it was incredible. It is a one of a kind. It is incredibly clear. However I don't think you should print it. Because your commentary is so clear, people will stop using the classic traditional commentaries on the Choshen Mishpat, like the Shach and Taz. Without a moment's hesitation he went to a furnace in a shul next door. He took each page of his chidushim and with tears running down his cheeks, said "baruch Rachmana, asher kideshanu, lishmoa divrei chachamim". He kissed the page, and tossed it into the fire. The words of his rebbe, were the words of the Torah, and the words of Hashem.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 132*

❖ It was too cold to continue on his trip without warming up a little, so the peasant Ivan stopped off at an inn along the way soon after nightfall. He drank a glass of vodka and felt his body grow warm once again. One drink led to another and soon he was sleeping drunkenly. "Wake up," the innkeeper said as he shook him hours later. "It's way past midnight and you better get going on your way. "Don't be silly," cautioned another guest. "A thick snow has been falling since you fell asleep and all the roads are covered. You'll never find your way to the city in the darkness. It's best that you wait until morning before setting out on your trip." "I can find the road with my eyes closed and my hands tied behind my back," boasted Ivan as he drunkenly tottered out of the inn. He soon had hitched up his horse Natushka to his sleigh and then took a good look at the deep snow which hid the fields and roads like a big white blanket playing 'hide and seek'. That tree over there, he thought, isn't that where the road turns towards the city? Wait, there are two trees there now and I don't know which one marks the road. Is it a left turn that I must make or a right one? "It's no use fooling myself, Natushka," he finally said to his horse, "I'm too drunk to figure out any road in this darkness. You, my faithful horse, will lead the way and just pull me along while I go back to sleep." Early the next morning, even before the sun had risen, the inn guests arose and started making preparations for their long trip to the city through the snow. As the innkeeper bade his guests farewell he said: "It's a lucky thing for you that there was a guest here last night who already made the trip through the snow. He swore that he knew the way to the city so you will be able to follow his tracks even in the darkness of early morning." The travelers heeded his advice and followed Ivan's route. Only later when the sun rose did they realize that they had been wandering all the time in the wrong direction and that they had foolishly followed the tracks of a drunken peasant and his horse. People sometimes

follow an ideology or a way of life simply because they have seen others do so. They foolishly think that such a road must lead to happiness because someone has trod on it before, but they forget that they may only be following the path made by a drunken peasant and his horse in the darkness of night.

*Who Wants Life?, By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*

❖ Sam Margolin, a very successful lawyer in Memphis, was a proud Jew. Under the influence of Reb Nota Greenblat and Sy Kutner, Sam and his wife Rose sent their little girl, Gerry, to the Memphis Hebrew Academy. One Shabbos morning, as the Margolin's were driving to shul with second grader Gerry in the back seat, they noticed one of the Rabbis from the Academy. He was on his way to shul as well. Naturally, he was walking. When Gerry noticed that they were quickly approaching her Rabbi she jumped down from her seat and crouched down below window level. Her mother looked at the back seat and told her daughter to sit on the seat. (This was before seat belts.) Gerry said that was not going to sit on the seat until her Rabbi was out of sight. "I do not want my Rabbi to see me in a car on Shabbos." When they arrived at shul and parked the car, Sam shut his door, looked over the hood to his wife. "Rose, I cannot drive on Shabbos if our daughter is going to be ashamed because of this. We will not be driving on Shabbos anymore." That Shabbos the Margolin family stayed on that side of town. That decision changed their lives. True to his word, Sam never drove on Shabbos after that. They bought a Shabbos home near the shul. Sam who was a very well spoken businessman became a spokesman for Torah U'mesorah and promoted Torah observance in Memphis and around the country. He would say "From where will come the future leaders of our people... if not from our children who have been properly trained in the ideals of Judaism... Jewish laymen must come to know the beauty and sincerity of traditional Judaism through actual practice and knowledge. Only in such an institution as the Memphis Hebrew Academy can such training be attained."

*As told by Gerry Fink to Paysach Diskind*

❖ For all his care in observance of Halachah, Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky had little taste for new chumros in observance that had been unknown In Europe. The whole concept of a mesorah, he told his students, was threatened by departures in the direction of greater restrictiveness, as well as those towards greater leniency. He frequently decried the impulse not to be frum but to be frumer. Some of the modern chumros, he told Rabbi Elias, were 'nosein ta'am lefgam' — i.e., they were not only incorrect but had potentially adverse halachic consequences. The description of Torah as 'darchei noam — ways of pleasantness' was itself a halachic principle for Reb Yaakov. On more than one occasion, he said of a certain chumra, 'if it isn't sweet, it isn't Torah.'

*Reb Yaakov, By Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Shortly after Menachem Begin was elected Prime Minister in 1977 Agudas Yisrael took a historic decision to join Prime Minister Begin's coalition. As part of the coalition negotiations between Agudas Yisrael and Prime Minister Begin, I was appointed to meet Begin and convince him to raise the governments allocations for yeshivos and Torah institutions. Until that point, yeshivos received only a small fraction of their operating budget from the government, while secular institutions received full funding. To my dismay, when I made my request for an increase in funding to the Prime Minister, he replied, "I am unwilling to raise the percentage of financial allowances for Torah institutions." But my disappointment was not long lasting. Minister Begin" immediately added, Why should I raise the percentage of funding I? I think that 'Torah institutions should receive full support from the government, just like any other educational institution. I knew that as I was negotiating with the prime minister, the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah was meeting in Telz-Stone, a suburb just outside of Jerusalem. I could hardly wait to give wonderful news. Sure enough, my tidings were met with great excitement; I never received more blessings from the members of the Moetzes than when I shared Begin's words with them. When the excitement in the room settled a bit, Rav Shach rose from his seat. From his expression, it was clear that powerful emotions were welling up inside. In a lion's voice, he suddenly roared, "It is forbidden for us to agree to have Torah institutions take full funding from the government, by virtue of a tradition received from the Chofetz Chaim himself!" Rav Shach then

spelled out the Chofetz Chaim's reasons for not becoming fully dependent on the government. First, merit of supporting Torah institutions belongs to Klal Yisrael as a whole, and we have no right to deny them that merit completely. Secondly, those collecting for Torah, institutions often make powerful impact on those from whom they are collecting. When a wealthy balebos meets a Jew with beard and peyos, he is reminded of how his own ancestors looked and acted. The wealthy man's attitude toward Torah may change, and he may even decide to send his children to a yeshivah. Most important, Chazal teach, "Do not become overly familiar with the government" (Pirkei Avos 1:10). We cannot rely on any government, even the best government. Today they may decide in our favor. But tomorrow — when the government changes or the interests of those in the government shift — this decision can easily be overturned. If at some point in the future the government decides to cut the allocations for Torah institutions, the yeshivos will be faced by a huge financial burden that they will be unable to meet. By that time, Torah institutions will have long ceased to raised funds, and they will find it very hard to start again. Benefactors will no longer be accustomed to giving freely to yeshivos, and it will be hard to convince them of the need once again. Therefore," Rav Shach announced, with an air of finality, "no more than fifty percent of our funding can come from the government; the yeshivos must continue to raise the other fifty percent. I request that we write into our protocol that we will never take more than fifty percent — at most sixty percent — of our funding from the government." The other members of the Moetzes were shocked. They had been so excited by my news, and had, all been quite ready to accept the Prime Minister's generous offer. Yet when they saw that Rav Shach felt so strongly about the issue, not a single member of the Moetzes argued against him, and his decision became final.

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

## A. TO FOLLOW THE MAJORITY OF SAGES IF THERE IS A DISPUTE

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 12-30**

*As it says "You shall turn after the majority" (Shemos 23:2, Parshas Mishpatim)*

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

In every generation, whenever a halachic dispute arises among Torah scholars regarding matters of ritual prohibition or monetary law, it is an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh) to follow the decision of the majority, as Scripture states: "Incline after the majority" (Shemos 23:2).

One who violates this principle incurs severe spiritual punishment, for this rule is the central pillar upon which the integrity and continuity of the Torah stand. The Talmud explicitly affirms that adhering to the majority is an absolute biblical commandment.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SFAS EMES

• The Talmud in Maseches Eruvin records the famous heavenly voice that settled the multi-generational dispute between the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai: 'Both these and those are the words of the living God, but the halachah follows the School of Hillel.' This declaration presents a deep philosophical dilemma. The Sfas Emes explains that the divine wisdom of the Torah is boundless and rich with seventy luminous faces of truth. Because every human soul is unique, different scholars perceive different facets of the divine prism. One scholar perceives the dimension of strict justice and declares an object forbidden, while another perceives the dimension

of lovingkindness and declares it permissible. Arguments for the sake of heaven are not petty political battles; they are holy efforts to discern the divine will. By accepting majority decisions with humble hearts, we turn diverse insights into a single harmonious pathway of holy action (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5631).

• In Parshas Vayeitzei, the Torah describes Yaakov gathering stones at Mount Moriah: 'And he took from the stones of the place and placed them under his head, and he lay down in that place.' Rashi, citing the famous Midrash, notes that Scripture first speaks of multiple 'stones' in the plural, but later in the morning refers to a single 'stone' in the singular. In his discourse on Parshas Vayigash (5640), the Sfas Emes reveals how disparate sacred arguments unite to establish the throne of truth. The Sfas Emes explains that each stone represented an authentic, holy perspective within the realm of divine service. Just as each stone possessed a genuine desire to serve the righteous patriarch, so too every sincere scholar in the Sanhedrin desires to serve the divine will through his unique reasoning. We should never fear passionate disagreement when it is conducted for the sake of heaven. When we allow the principle of majority rule to unite our differing perspectives, we build a radiant sanctuary of peace in our midst (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayigash 5640).

• The Mishnah in Maseches Uktzin concludes the entire corpus of the Oral Law with a profound declaration from Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta: 'The Holy One found no vessel that could contain blessing for Israel except peace, as it is said: Hashem will give strength to His people; Hashem will bless His people with peace.' Why did the redactor of the Mishnah, Rabbeinu HaKadosh, choose to end thousands of intricate legal debates spanning all six orders of the Talmud with a general meditation on peace? The Sfas Emes examines the conclusion of Korach's rebellion to illustrate how majority rule preserves national brotherhood. The Sfas Emes explains that controversy is a natural byproduct of intellectual vigor; when passionate scholars search for truth, sharp disagreements are inevitable. Without a clear, universally recognized mechanism for closure, every intellectual disagreement would harden into a permanent sectarian split. True peace is not the artificial suppression of differing views; it is the shared commitment to walk together once a decision is made. By honoring majority consensus, we create the vessel of peace that enables all of Hashem's blessings to dwell among us (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5640).

• In Parshas Vayechi, Yaakov Avinu addresses the fiery zeal of his sons Shimon and Levi, rebuking their impulsive anger with the enigmatic words, 'In their willful desire they lamed an ox.' Rashi and the Midrash explain that their anger sought to dismantle the natural order of the world, acting on extreme spiritual impulses that bypassed the measured processes of earthly reality. Contemplating this truth deeply, the Sfas Emes explains that the physical universe was created to be the dwelling place for the Almighty through the deliberate toil of human beings. If halachah were decided by angels, heavenly voices, or individual prophetic visions, the physical world would be bypassed, leaving the material realm unconsecrated. The Torah was given specifically to mortal human beings who live within the boundaries of time, space, and society. Our practices are not based on vague mysticism or arbitrary personal feelings. They are grounded in the seasoned, collective wisdom of the rabbinic court, ensuring that our daily actions align perfectly with the divine will on earth (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayechi 5648).

• In Parshas Vayishlach, Scripture describes the patriarch Yaakov parting ways from Esav and beginning his independent settlement: 'And Yaakov journeyed to Succoth, and he built himself a house, and for his livestock he made booths; therefore he called the name of the place Succoth.' The Sages in Maseches Sukkah and the Midrash connect this historical journey to the architectural laws of sukkah construction, where the Tannaim debate the minimum height, number of walls, and types of roofing required for the holiday. The Sfas Emes explains that a temporary booth represents the dynamic, fluid realm of theoretical Torah debate, where different scholars

propose varied interpretations that shift like the wind through the leafy covering. A permanent house, however, represents the fixed, unshakeable structure of established halachah. Yaakov represents the middle pillar of truth, which harmonizes the lovingkindness of Avraham with the awe and judgment of Yitzchak. We are not wandering in the wilderness of theological confusion, forced to guess what Hashem desires from us. Through the stabilizing mechanism of majority rule, our Sages have built an enduring home of clear halachah in which our families can thrive (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5638).

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

Yaakov, a religious doctor and medical researcher living in Israel, had a rare congenital disease. The disease could be managed with minor lifestyle adjustments. However, there was some considerable discussion whether a person with such a disease could fast without putting himself at risk. Yaakov spent years studying his own illness and was certain that fasting would not cause any serious problem. However, most of the other experts on this disease felt that fasting was a risk that could place him in mortal danger. Yaakov asked Rav Zilberstein if he was allowed to fast on Yom Kippur. Based on his research he felt that it was entirely safe to fast. However a majority of other doctors disagreed. According to them he was forbidden to fast. Halachah often follows the majority opinion. Do we say that Yaakov is allowed to follow his own medical opinion and fast? Or do we say that he is obligated to listen to the opinion of his medical colleagues and that he was not allowed to fast. What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question if the doctor should fast, Rav Zilberstein answered that the doctor cannot eat himself because according to him he is obligated. However others should feed him, so he will not be in any danger.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Berachos, p. 230*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Regarding a segmented earthenware oven reinforced with sand between its rings—called the 'Oven of Achnai' because the Sages surrounded it with arguments like a coiled serpent and declared it susceptible to ritual impurity, while Rabbi Eliezer declared it pure—a Tanna taught: On that day Rabbi Eliezer presented every possible argument in the world, yet the Sages did not accept his view. Rabbi Eliezer said to them, 'If the halachah is in accordance with me, let this carob tree prove it!' The carob tree was uprooted from its place a hundred cubits—and some say four hundred cubits. They replied, 'One does not bring halachic proof from a carob tree.' He said to them, 'If the halachah is in accordance with me, let the water channel prove it!' The water in the channel flowed backward. They replied, 'One does not bring proof from a water channel.' He said to them, 'If the halachah is in accordance with me, let the walls of the study hall prove it!' The walls of the study hall leaned inward to fall. Rabbi Yehoshua rebuked the walls, saying, 'If Torah scholars are debating one another in halachah, what business is it of yours?!' The walls did not fall out of respect for Rabbi Yehoshua, nor did they straighten up out of respect for Rabbi Eliezer, and they remain leaning to this day. Finally, Rabbi Eliezer said, 'If the halachah is in accordance with me, let it be proved from Heaven!' A Heavenly Voice went forth and proclaimed, 'What have you against Rabbi Eliezer, for the halachah is in accordance with him everywhere!' Rabbi Yehoshua rose to his feet and declared: 'It is not in Heaven!' (Devarim 30:12). What does 'It is not in Heaven' mean? Rabbi Yirmiyah explained: Since the Torah was already given at Mount Sinai, we do not decide halachah by a Heavenly Voice, because You already wrote at Mount Sinai in the Torah, 'Incline after the majority' (Shemos 23:2). Later, Rabbi Natan encountered Eliyahu the Prophet and asked him, 'What was the Holy One, blessed be He, doing at that moment?' Eliyahu answered, 'He smiled and said: My children have triumphed

over Me! My children have triumphed over Me!' Yet when the Sages voted to place Rabbi Eliezer under a ban so as to preserve halachic unity, Rabbi Akiva volunteered to break the news gently, dressing in black and sitting four cubits away so that the world would not be destroyed by sudden anguish.

*Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 59b*

## B. TWO COURTS SHOULD NOT ADOPT TWO OPPOSING CUSTOMS IN THE SAME CITY

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 28**

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

As the Torah states: "You shall not gash yourselves" (Devarim 14:1).

Included in the biblical prohibition of lo sisgodedu is the rabbinic injunction not to divide into conflicting factions (agudos agudos). Halachically, this mandates that two rabbinical courts (batei din) must not operate in a single city where one follows one custom and the other follows a conflicting custom, which would create division and cause the Torah to appear as two distinct laws.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Re'eh, the Torah opens its discussion of communal boundaries with a tender familial declaration: 'You are children to Hashem your God; you shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.' The Talmud in Maseches Yevamos derives from the phrase 'you shall not cut yourselves' (lo titgodedu) an essential halachic prohibition that governs community life: 'Do not form separate factions' (lo ta'asu agudos agudos). The Sfas Emes explains that when people walk into a town and observe citizens adhering to contradictory religious customs, the immediate human impression is that there are multiple sovereigns or competing revelations. It gives the tragic appearance of two different Torahs given by two different deities. The fundamental purpose of the Jewish nation in history is to bear witness to the absolute oneness of the Creator. While personal customs are treasured within families, public life requires sensitivity, humility, and cohesion. By refusing to flaunt divisive practices, we honor our heavenly Father and strengthen the brotherhood of Israel (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5635).

• In Parshas Noach, the Torah records the foundational catastrophe of early human civilization: the Tower of Babel. The Sfas Emes explains that the generation of Babel used their external unity for self-aggrandizement, attempting to build a tower to wage war against heaven. Because their unity was built on personal ego and rebellion, it naturally disintegrated into mutual hostility, misunderstanding, and geographical dispersion. The historic purpose of the Jewish people is to repair the fracture of Babel. By gathering under the banner of the Torah, Israel re-establishes a society animated by 'one language and unified words,' dedicated solely to the service of the Creator. We were redeemed from Egypt and brought to Sinai to heal the fractures of a divided world. By refusing to participate in divisive politics, we build an enduring sanctuary where all voices join in one unified song of praise (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Noach 5636).

• The placing side by side of laws in Parshas Re'eh has intrigued Torah commentators across the centuries: 'You shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead; for you are a holy people to Hashem your God.' On the literal level, the verse prohibits pagan practices of self-mutilation and pulling out hair in wild grief when a relative passes away. The Sfas Emes explains that excessive grief that leads to self-mutilation stems from a lack of faith in the continuous life of the soul and the providential wisdom of the Creator. The mourner feels an unbearable hole in his existence and lashes out by tearing his own flesh, treating the loss as absolute destruction. A person who forms a splinter faction suffers from an identical spiritual blind spot within the communal realm. When we feel frustrated by communal challenges, the answer is never to tear away and start an isolated sect. We must remain bound to the living body of Israel, working from within to foster health, warmth, and enduring peace (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5638).

• In Parshas Re'eh, the Torah emphasizes two distinct dimensions of our identity in consecutive verses: first, 'You are children to Hashem your God,' and immediately following, 'For you are a holy people to Hashem your God, and Hashem chose you to be a treasured people.' The phrase 'children' appears in the plural, emphasizing the distinct personality, talent, and spiritual mission of every individual Jew. The Sfas Emes examines this dual identity to delineate the boundaries of personal expression and public halachah. The Sfas Emes explains that in the private realm of the heart, every Jew is encouraged to cultivate his personal relationship with Hashem. One individual serves Hashem primarily through deep intellectual study, another through broken-hearted prayer, and a third through exuberant acts of lovingkindness. We can pursue the highest levels of personal piety without making others feel inadequate or creating divisive barriers. True greatness lies in cultivating a rich, private spiritual life while standing shoulder to shoulder with every fellow Jew in complete love (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5644).

## RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- What lesson is learned from the fact that the prohibition to break into different groups is derived from the prohibition to gash yourself?
- Discuss the different customs that prevail among different groups of Jews, like Sephardic, Chasidic & Lithuanian Jewry

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Abba said in the name of Shmuel: For three years the academy of Shammai and the academy of Hillel debated one another. These said, "The halachah follows us," and those said, "The halachah follows us." Finally, a Heavenly Voice went forth and proclaimed: "Both these and those are the words of the living God, yet the practical halachah follows Beis Hillel." The Gemara asks: Since both these and those are the words of the living God, why did Beis Hillel merit to have the halachah established according to their view? Because they were gentle and humble in spirit —patiently bearing insult without insulting back—and when they taught Torah, they always studied both their own words and the words of Beis Shammai; and not only that, but out of respect they always stated the opinion of Beis Shammai before their own opinion.

*Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It was the 9th day of shevat 1944 and Reb Ahrele Of Belz finally arrived on the holy soil of Eretz Yisrael. A large brigade of well-wishers was there to welcome him. As he had just completed a very arduous journey, fleeing from the Nazis. Most of his family had been killed during the course of the war and the Rebbe would now have to start life anew. During his

miraculous escape from the hands of the Nazi beast. The Rebbe had maintained an incredible and uncompromising loyalty to the letter of the law of Torah. He was very careful not to allow anything that was not of the highest standard of kashrus to touch his lips, Shabbos and Yom Tov were observed in the strictest manner; he was committed to complete and total adherence to Torah and mitzvos. Once he arrived in Eretz Yisrael. It was decided that the Rebbe's first Shabbos would be spent in Haifa; since he was unsure if there were kosher chickens available he asked if there was a shochet in the city. The chassidim replied that indeed there was. But Reb Elimelech Ashkenazi. One of the Rebbe's staunchest followers. Told the Rebbe that he had brought a special shochet from Yerushalayim to shecht chickens for the Rebbe. Upon hearing this. The Rebbe looked at Reb Elimelech quizzically. "Didn't you tell me that there is a shochet here in the city?" The Rebbe's question somewhat flustered his chassid. "Well yes Rebbe but the shochet I brought from Yerushalayim is one with an outstanding reputation. Certainly the Rebbe wants the highest standard of kashrus. So I just thought it would be best if I brought this outstanding shochet." This logic was really correct. The Belzer Rebbe was a man with unusual standards of kedushah. During the war. While he was in the ghetto. He was meticulous about keeping his hands ritually clean and would wash them with unusual frequency. His saintliness was otherworldly. It made good sense to assume that now. In Eretz Yisrael. As he was rebuilding his life. He would insist on the highest level of kashrus and mitzvah observance. To everyone's surprise. The Rebbe replied that he was not comfortable using the shochet from Yerushalayim. Was there something he knew about the shochet that the rest of them did not? It was widely accepted that this man was the very best shochet around. His reputation was unparalleled: he had received his kabbalah from none other than Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld many years before. But the Rebbe's mind was made up. "Don't you understand? We are guests coming to a kehillah. Just because we might have a different standard does not give us a right to be mevazeh a kehillah. What message would we be giving if I used my own shochet? The kavod of the tzibbur is more important than anything!" With that. The Rebbe asked to meet with the head shochet of Haifa, An elderly man with a white beard walked into the room. He was so honored. Humbly he presented his chalaf to be checked by the Rebbe. But it was unnecessary. The Rebbe had full confidence in him. He was the shochet of the city and the Rebbe would not allow anyone to undermine the man's position. When someones dignity was in danger, for the Rebbe it was a matter of life and death.

*Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology*

# 5. Not to add mitzvos

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 159**

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

As the Torah commands: 'You shall not add to it' (Devarim 13:1, Parshas Re'eh).

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Torah is a manual teaching us how to perfect our character to resemble Hashem. We can only follow the Torah and become godly, if we preserve and interpret the Torah properly. This mitzvah helps us to preserve the Torah in the way Hashem desired, and to make sure it is transmitted, interpreted, and applied correctly, so that we can follow its ways and become g-dly.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 454)

Hashem is synonymous with perfection and everything that comes from Him is perfect. One who wants to add or subtract from the Torah is really challenging Hashem's perfection.

### ABARBANEL (DEVARIM 4)

This mitzvah shows that the Torah is not a man-made system that one can add to. When we refuse to add to it, we testify that it is Divine.

### SFORNO

One may add something that their contemporary culture thinks is ok, but is objectively really wrong and immoral. For example certain cultures thought that sacrificing their children to their god was a moral thing to do, but it is really wrong.

### RABVAZ

This also means we are forbidden to edit the text of the Torah. If it was ever allowed to be edited, then the text would become an object of debate and controversy and it would not be the supreme authority.

Also, if we would be allowed to edit the Torah then the first thing that would be removed would be the parts that do not honor the Jewish people like the sin of the golden calf.

### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Ki Seitzei, the Midrash connects the diverse commandments to the famous teaching in Maseches Makkos: six hundred and thirteen commandments were stated to Moshe at Mount Sinai, corresponding to the two hundred and forty-eight physical limbs and three hundred and sixty-five sinews of the human body. The Sfas Emes explains that a human body is an exquisitely balanced organism engineered by divine wisdom. If an individual were born with six fingers on one hand or a third eye in the center of his forehead, the extra appendage would not enhance his strength or beauty; it would be a severe deformity that hampers normal functioning. The six hundred and thirteen commandments are the precise spiritual blueprint of the soul's stature. True service of Hashem is not about creating rituals that satisfy our emotional whims or aesthetic tastes. By fulfilling the mitzvos exactly as commanded without addition, we preserve the harmonious perfection of the divine image within us (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5639).

• In Parshas Vayishlach, Yaakov Avinu sends a message to his estranged brother Esav: 'With Lavan I have sojourned.' Rashi famously quotes the teaching of our Sages: the numerical value of the Hebrew word garti (sojourned) is six hundred and thirteen, conveying Yaakov's declaration: 'I sojourned with the wicked Lavan, yet I observed the 613 commandments, and I did not learn from his evil deeds.' Why did Yaakov emphasize the precise number of six hundred and thirteen rather than simply declaring that he remained faithful to the God of his fathers? The Sfas Emes examines the inner spiritual mechanics that protected Yaakov inside Lavan's corrupt household. The Sfas Emes explains that each of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos serves as a specialized, hollow spiritual channel that allows divine light to flow into a specific aspect of human experience. We do not

need to invent esoteric practices to withstand the corrupting influences of modern society. By faithfully maintaining the six hundred and thirteen sacred channels handed down from our ancestors, our souls remain fully protected and radiant (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5634).

• In the Likkutim on Sefer Bereishis, the Sfas Emes reflects upon the Midrash in Tanchuma quoting King David's verse in Psalms: 'You have formed me back and front, and laid Your hand upon me.' Our Sages interpret this verse as describing the original creation of Adam HaRishon, who was sculpted by the Almighty as an exact reflection of the upper spiritual realms. The Sfas Emes explains that human beings were created in the image of Hashem to serve as a micro-universe, mirroring the sublime harmony of creation. The Torah is the spiritual DNA through which the universe was engineered. Just as altering a single base pair in a biological genetic code can corrupt an entire living organism, so too altering the divine commandments corrupts the spiritual genetics of the soul. Our task is not to redesign human spirituality, but to allow the pristine image of Hashem to shine through our daily conduct. By respecting the boundaries set by the Creator, we mirror His divine harmony with flawless clarity (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Bereishis 5638).

• The prohibition against adding to the mitzvos (bal tosif) (Devarim 4:2, 13:1) bars man from adding to the mitzvos — yet the Sfas Emes raises the prohibition's sharpest paradox from within the Chanukah sugya itself. The Gemara opens, “What is Chanukah?” (Mai Chanukah), and the answer is a story of expansion — a miracle (nes) that renews and spreads itself every year, and the Sfas Emes asks why the Gemara first brings all the laws of Chanukah on a side-path before even saying what Chanukah is. If adding is forbidden, how did the Sages command an observance whose very form is addition, and why does its light increase rather than diminish? The resolution does not narrow the prohibition; it draws its boundary — between the two Torahs. His sacred addition (tosefes) has a home, and it is the oral Torah, where each generation's beautification of a mitzvah (hiddur) and spiritual renewal (hischadshus) are not foreign additions but the Torah's own growth from within, “continually increasing” (nosaf ve-holeich) according to the spiritual need of the generation (ke-fi ha-dor), lighting one more flame than the night before (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5640).

• The midrash confronts the prohibition against adding to the mitzvos (bal tosif) with a difficulty: wherever the Torah says “And these” (ve-eileh) it adds to what came before, just as “And these are the ordinances” (Ve-eileh ha-mishpatim) follows the Ten Commandments (Aseres HaDibros). If the Torah itself adds, what exactly does the prohibition forbid? The Sfas Emes explains that the key lies in the Torah's oneness: the whole Torah is one unbroken divine unity, with everything contained in every letter, all its orders — suprarational statutes (chukim), civil laws (Mishpatim), commandments (mitzvos). What man invents from himself is a foreign body grafted onto the one Name; this implies, by the very act of adding, that the Giver's gift was lacking — a crack in the unity. The adder who invents from himself stands outside the circle of Sinai; only what flows from the one Name may join the one Name — and that is why the Torah's unity is itself the guard against addition (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Mishpatim 5654).

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Pam would caution against adopting chumros or other optional good deeds which might create hardship or discomfort for others. Rav Pam also stressed the importance of distinguishing between what is required by halachah and what is a chumrah (optional stringency). When a talmid reported to him that a certain girls' school was teaching chumros as

if they were halachah, Rav Pam responded, "-If everything is forbidden, then everything becomes permissible."

*Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One of the things about which Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky specifically warned boys going home for vacation was not to make a show of following chumros (stringencies) in halachah in the presence of those who do not keep the same stringencies lest they seem to imply criticism of those who do not keep their chumra. He noted that the prohibition against adding to the mitzvos of the Torah applies to treating optional acts as if they were required by the Torah and even to excessive stringencies with respect to Rabbinic lawn and customs.

*Reb Yaakov, By Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ R' Avraham Wachsman, was a Rav in a small town in Holland. One day on Shabbos, the gabbai came in during lunch and said breathlessly that an important member of the shul, R' Shloimy, had started to open his store on Shabbos. R' Wachsman took his son, walked to the open store, and went upstairs where the man lived. He asked his son to tell the man that the Rav was waiting for him outside his apartment. The man came upstairs and saw his Rav crying uncontrollably. "What's wrong, Rebbe?" he asked. "I am such a terrible rav! What kind of rav am I? There was someone in my kehillah who was so desperately poor that he felt forced to begin opening on Shabbos. How could I have been so oblivious to his suffering? I am so sorry!" R' Shloimy looked embarrassed and began to cry as well: "Rebbe, I swear, that is exactly what happened. We were struggling so hard that I felt I had no other choice." The Rav told him how sorry he was that he hadn't known. He embraced him and, through tears, spoke about the beauty of Shabbos and promised to help him. R' Shloimy never violated Shabbos ever again.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 122*

❖ Gary Korn was having a Bar Mitzvah, at a conservadox shul. Michael Korn, his father wanted Gary to say Kiddush as part of the ceremony, on Sunday using a Kiddush cup that was a family heirloom. The Rabbi, Bruce Perlman agreed because he felt that would be a meaningful good start. At the Bar Mitzvah Gary did a tefillin ceremony, then he chanted the Kiddush using his grandfathers antique Kiddush cup. After that everyone went to the party, food and dancing. As everyone left the rabbi told the president that the cup was so beautiful and he was going to wash the cup. That was the last time anyone saw the cup. Rumors began to spread that the rabbi stole the cup. But Michael or Gary didn't want to raise the issue with the Rabbi because they were embarrassed. Eventually everyone forgot about the cup. Ten years later Gary got engaged. Michael wanted Gary to meet the Rabbi with his fiance. The Rabbi spoke about the importance of honesty. Gary was enraged that the Rabbi showed hypocrisy when he himself stole the cup. The Rabbi said, Gary I put the cup where I knew you would immediately find it, in your tefillin bag.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 73*

❖ Reuvein Lowenstein and Yossi Fishbein were in the Gateshead Yeshivah. There was a yeshivah library. They would go there to smoke and take a break even though that was forbidden. They locked the door. Someone started knocking, "It's Rav Aryeh Zev Gurwicz (the Rosh Yeshivah), I need to prepare a shiur". They kept making fun that it wasn't him. Finally they realized it really was the Rosh Yeshivah. They thought about jumping out the window but it was too far up. They were humiliated about what they did. They opened the door expecting to be scolded, but the Rosh Yeshivah covered his face to not see them, because he realized they learned their lesson.

*Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 244*

❖ During the Yom Kippur war a soldier, Yair, was shot. He was medi-vaced to Bikur Cholim hospital in Yerushalayim. All of the doctors decided if they were going to save the man, they were going to have to amputate his leg. As they were about to amputate, one doctor said let me look at one more option one more time. They were all puzzled and frustrated because they all came to a consensus that this was necessary, and with all of the other major injuries coming in because of the war

they didn't have time to dither. They finally listened to him, and tried another option. It was successful, and Yair's leg was saved. Later the doctors asked the objecting doctor what inspired him to take so much time with the case. He said, my name is Nachum Kook, and my great uncle is Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook. He gave his life trying to save estranged Yidden who everyone else gave up on. When I became a doctor he gave me one piece of advice. He said that just like Klal Yisrael is one body, and we can never just cut some people we think are hopeless off, also with a body, we must do whatever we can that is possible to make sure that a patient can stay whole. We can never cut anyone off.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 87*

# 6. Not to remove mitzvos

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 160**

*As the Torah says, nor shall you diminish from it (Devarim 13:1, Parshas Re'eh).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is this referring only to the Written Torah?
- What would be an example of adding or subtracting?
- How were the Sages allowed to add the Mitzvah of Chanuka?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition encompasses both the Written and the Oral Torah. If a scholar teaches that an enactment of the Sages is an actual Biblical commandment from the Torah, he is guilty of adding to it (bal tosif). Conversely, if a scholar subtracts anything from the mitzvos of the Torah, he is guilty of diminishing it (bal tigra).

The Sages of blessed memory, however, possessed the authority to institute rabbinic commandments (mitzvos d'Rabbanan) as protective fences (gezeiros) or enactments (takkanos). For example, the reading of the Megillah on Purim and the lighting of the Chanukah menorah were instituted as expressions of praise and thanksgiving to Hashem, and Chazal explicitly designated them as rabbinic mitzvos. These enactments do not fall under the prohibition of 'You shall not add to it' (bal tosif), because the Sages never claimed that the Holy One, blessed is He, commanded that these specific mitzvos be added to the Biblical commandments of the Torah.

Similarly, if a kohen recites an additional blessing alongside the three verses of Birkas Kohanim (the Priestly Blessing) mandated in the Torah, he violates this prohibition by adding to the mitzvah.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Torah is a manual teaching us how to perfect our character to resemble Hashem. We can only follow the Torah and become godly, if we preserve and interpret the Torah properly. This mitzvah helps us to preserve the Torah in the way Hashem desired, and to make sure it is transmitted, interpreted, and applied correctly, so that we can follow its ways and become g-dly.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SFAS EMES

• King Solomon instructs in Proverbs, 'Above all that is guarded, protect your heart, for out of it are the issues of life.' The Midrash Tanchuma on Parshas Ki Seitzei comments on this verse by expounding upon the mystery of the commandments, comparing them to an interconnected reservoir of life-giving waters that nourish the spiritual heart. The Sfas Emes examines how human additions disrupt the delicate calibration of spiritual purification. The Sfas Emes explains that the divine commandments are not arbitrary behavioral tests; they are precision remedies formulated by the Great Physician to heal and elevate the human psyche. Consider a master pharmacist preparing a life-saving medication from potent botanical extracts. The recipe requires exact milligrams of each ingredient; an untrained patient who decides to add extra chemical compounds because he thinks 'more medicine is always better' will turn the life-saving cure into a lethal poison. We do not need to invent new paths to spiritual enlightenment; the Creator has already provided the perfect prescription. By adhering faithfully to the Torah's boundaries, we drink pure, untainted water from the fountain of eternal life (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5645).

• In Parshas Mishpatim, the Midrash comments on the opening phrase, 'And these are the judgments,' noting that the conjunctive letter 'vav' (and) links the social civil laws of Mishpatim directly to the transcendent Ten Commandments revealed at Mount Sinai. The Sfas Emes explains why subtracting either category collapses the entire structure of Judaism. The Sfas Emes explains that chukim and mishpatim represent the two legs upon which a human being walks toward the Creator. Mishpatim—such as returning lost objects, paying fair wages, and avoiding theft—govern our interactions with our fellow human beings on the earthly plane. Chukim—such as dietary laws, shatnez, and the red heifer—train our souls in total, humble surrender to the divine will beyond human comprehension. We must never compartmentalize our religious lives into disconnected spiritual and secular spheres. By observing both the rational ethics and the mysterious decrees of the Torah, we walk upright with wholeness and integrity before Hashem and man (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Mishpatim 5632).

• In Parshas Acharei Mos, the Torah introduces the prohibition against slaughtering consecrated offerings outside the Temple courtyard (shechutei chutz). Why does the Torah apply this ecological principle to the prohibition against subtracting commandments? The Sfas Emes examines how every commandment corresponds to a unique corner of the physical world. The Sfas Emes explains that the material universe was created in a state of concealment, waiting for human beings to uncover and elevate its hidden sparks of godliness. Hashem did not assign all aspects of creation to be elevated through the same activity. Each of the six hundred and thirteen commandments was crafted to sanctify a specific domain of physical reality. No matter how mundane an activity may appear, there is a specific mitzvah designed to sanctify it. By embracing the totality of the commandments without subtraction, we participate in the complete redemption of creation (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5638).

• In Parshas Vayishlach, the Sfas Emes returns to Yaakov's dramatic encounter with Esav and his declaration: 'With Lavan I have sojourned, and I kept the 613 commandments.' The Sfas Emes asks: why was Yaakov so concerned about meeting Esav if he had already successfully maintained his righteousness throughout twenty years of deception in Lavan's house? The Sfas Emes explains that every commandment observed creates a protective layer of holiness over a corresponding aspect of the human personality. Together, the six hundred and thirteen commandments form a seamless, interlocking suit of chainmail armor covering the soul from head to

foot. When an archer shoots arrows at a warrior wearing complete armor, the deadly missiles bounce harmlessly off the steel plates. We are engaged in a lifelong battle for moral purity and spiritual integrity. By putting on the complete armor of the Torah's commandments every day, we stand invulnerable against temptation and doubt (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5645).

• The mitzvos seem discrete — one can keep Shabbos and neglect another; each deed stands on its own account. The Sfas Emes, in the Acharei inyan on the verse which a person shall perform and live by them (asher ya'aseh osam ha-adam va-chai bahem), teaches: the mitzvos draw life into the limbs, for the two hundred and forty-eight positive commandments stand opposite the two hundred and forty-eight limbs of the body — and from the law of the offerings, excluding a sacrifice that is missing a limb from being offered upon the Altar (mema'eit mechisar eiver le-hakravah), a body missing a limb is excluded from the altar. This implies that the one who removes a mitzvah does not lose one good deed — he leaves the Torah's body maimed, and a maimed body cannot carry the fullness of life. The korban rule teaches this plainly: the blemished is excluded from the altar, and the mitzvah-subtractor blemishes the altar of his own deeds (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5661).

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- Why can't the Torah change?
- Does the Torah adapt to modern developments, technologies, and perspectives?
- Discuss other movements among Jews who decided to remove mitzvos.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rabbi Yochanan Berman was a rebbe in a Hebrew school at the beginning of the 20th century in the US. He tried his best to instill Torah and yiras shomayim in his students, who mostly came from backgrounds where there was minimal support for the importance of learning. One day he taught the student the halachos of putting on our shoes, from Kitzur Shulchan Aruch. That night the principal got a call from a father in R' Berman's class. "I sent my son to Hebrew to get a good education, Not to be taught this medieval nonsense about shoes. If you don't stop that I will take my kid out of the school". The principal promised to speak to the teacher. The next day he told Rabbi Berman not to teach halachos that seem like nonsense anymore. R' Berman politely said that he can't modify what the Torah says. The principal then asked him to leave the school, and R' Berman sadly found another job. One of his students, Philip, was raised in a home that had little respect for Yiddishkeit; he attended a secular high school and college and became fully assimilated. Eventually, he asked his non-Jewish sweetheart, Donna, to marry him, and they became engaged. One morning before the wedding, Philip noticed that he was putting his shoes on with the right shoe first and tying the left shoe first. Suddenly, he remembered why he did that: he had been taught that halachah by Rabbi Berman in Hebrew school. He did that because he was a Jew and lived like a Jew. Suddenly he felt a surge of kedushah and resolved to learn more about Judaism. He then realized that he can't marry a non Jew. He sadly broke off the engagement explaining to Donna that Judaism was even more important. She was very powerfully impacted by his painful decision. He eventually became a full bal Teshuvah. He then called Rabbi Berman up and told him his story. Rabbi Berman was so inspired to see how a seemingly small halachah had such a powerful effect, and thanked Philip for teaching him about the power of Torah. A few years later Philip was suggested to go out with a girl on a shiduch date. When he met her at the restaurant he was shocked to see Donna, his former fiancée. She explained that she was so impacted by his decision that she decided on her own to learn more about Judaism and became a full giores. They got married, all because of the power of a halachah.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 193*

❖ A sociology professor once called on one of his students and said, "Murphy, you're a Christian. Please tell us something about your religion." Murphy stood up and spoke about Christianity for 2 minutes. The professor continued, "Mohammed, you're a Muslim. Please tell us something about your religion." Mohammed got up and spoke about Islam. Then the professor said, "Goldstein, you're a Jew. Please tell us something about your religion." "I'm sorry, sir, I can't." "Why not, Goldstein?" "You see, sir, I'm a Reform Jew." "Well, Goldstein," replied the professor, don't you think you should know something about your religion before you reform it?" Barry Goldstein was then inspired to learn and became fully observant.

*Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

# 7. Not to be a false prophet

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 175**

*As the Torah says, But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name which I have not commanded him to speak [etc.] (Devarim 18:20, Parshas Shoftim).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What does someone have to do to be considered a false prophet?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition forbids any person from claiming that words were prophetically conveyed to him by Hashem when Hashem never spoke them to him.

One who transgresses this prohibition and prophesies falsely is liable to capital punishment by the court (beis din). This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

In order to be G-dly, we are to demonstrate love toward all of Hashem's creations, and avoid harming them in any way. We therefore have to avoid bringing people spiritual harm as well. Being a false prophet can be a great moral and spiritual hazard to others.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 517)

If people give false prophecy, this will disparage true neviim, prophets and people will not listen to the words of true neviim.

### RALBAG (DEVARIM 18:20)

A navi can tell people to violate a mitzvah for a horass shaa, (a temporary emergency measure) like going to war on Shabbos. If a person is a false navi people may follow his commands to violate the Torah, when it was really not the will of Hashem.

### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Shoftim, the Torah contrasts pagan divination with authentic Jewish prophecy: 'When you come into the land — You shall not learn to do like the abominations of those nations.' The Sfas Emes explains that pagan soothsayers, astrologers, and false prophets operate entirely within the closed matrix of natural cause and effect. Through their dark arts, they discern the fixed astrological patterns and natural forces that govern the physical cosmos. Their prophecies trap human beings inside fatalism, convincing them that their destiny is rigidly determined by the stars, biological destiny, or worldly fortune. We are not prisoners of our stars, our genes, or our past mistakes. By placing our wholehearted trust in Hashem, we rise above all worldly limitations into the realm of infinite divine blessing (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5631).

• In Parshas Shoftim, the Sfas Emes returns to the spiritual distinction between the pagan diviners and the true prophets of Israel. What spiritual boundary was shattered at Sinai that exposed the falsehood of pagan prophecy? The Sfas Emes examines the two distinct frequencies of divine speech that structure reality. The Sfas Emes explains that the natural universe was brought into being through the Ten Utterances recorded in Genesis. These utterances formed the physical elements, biological organisms, and natural laws of the physical world. Pagan seers and false prophets draw their spiritual energy strictly from this natural realm of the Ten Utterances. Spiritual rhetoric that glorifies power, pride, or self-indulgence at the expense of Torah ethics is an ancient deception. By remaining steadfastly aligned with Sinai, we preserve the moral clarity and divine holiness of our people (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5642).

• The Midrash Tanchuma on Parshas Shoftim expounds upon the foundational commandment of wholehearted faith: 'You shall be wholehearted (tamim) with Hashem your God.' The Midrash connects this wholehearted simplicity to the promise in Parshas Ki Savo: 'And Hashem will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall be only above, and you shall not be beneath.' Why is wholehearted simplicity, characterized by a refusal to seek omens, fortunes, or secret prophecies, the secret to standing 'only above' all other nations? The Sfas Emes explains that worldly sophisticated cunning is inherently fragile and insecure. A person who relies on calculations, predictions, and esoteric omens is constantly anxious, nervously scanning the horizon for signs of impending misfortune. Because he lives in fear of what tomorrow may bring, he becomes vulnerable to every charlatan, false prophet, and demagogue who promises certainty. We do not need to obsessively predict every turn of the future to live meaningful lives. By cultivating wholehearted trust in Hashem and focusing on doing what is right today, we experience an inner peace that no worldly storm can disturb (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5650).

• In Parshas Shoftim, the Sfas Emes quotes a profound insight from his holy grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, addressing the spiritual reality of the post-prophetic era. How does a modern Jew navigate personal dilemmas and spiritual perplexities without the living voice of a prophet to clarify the divine will? The Sfas Emes explains that when prophecy ceased, the divine light did not vanish from the world; it transformed its mode of revelation. The illumination that previously manifested as sudden prophetic visions was folded directly into the sacred letters and words of the Oral Torah. Our Sages teach in the Talmud: 'A sage is superior to a prophet.' A prophet

receives a momentary vision from the outside, but a Torah scholar, through arduous labor, intellectual humility, and selfless devotion, assimilates the divine wisdom into the very fabric of his own mind. We do not need to mourn the loss of ancient prophets; the voice of Sinai speaks to us from every page of the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch. By immersing our minds in sacred study, we walk in the radiant, unshakeable light of the living God (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5652).

• In Parshas Shoftim, the Torah specifies that a legitimate prophet must arise 'from your midst, of your brethren.' Rashi emphasizes that authentic prophecy requires moral refinement, humble character, and rigorous intellectual toil in the Torah. Why does human nature naturally crave the instant magic of a false prophet, and why does the Torah strictly forbid us from following such leaders? The Sfas Emes explains that the purpose of human existence in this world is to cultivate character, overcome selfishness, and earn holiness through honest personal toil. Hashem deliberately hid His light within the garment of nature so that our spiritual achievements would be genuine and meaningful. A false prophet preys upon human laziness. He promises his followers effortless spiritual elevation, claiming that gazing at amulets, uttering secret incantations, or swearing blind devotion to his charismatic persona will guarantee heavenly rewards without the hard work of conquering negative character traits. Authentic Judaism does not promise effortless shortcuts or magical solutions to complex human struggles. By dedicating ourselves to patient daily toil in Torah and mitzvos, we build an enduring, authentic connection with Hashem (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5641).

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- Discuss why this mitzvah is the basis of why Jews rejected the teachings of the prophets of Christianity, and Islam, because these prophets were clearly false because they revoked parts of the Torah.
- Discuss what nevuah is
- How does one get it?
- Why don't we have it today?
- What is the difference between nevuah and ruach hakodesh.
- Discuss the Rambam's four principles out of the 13 that deal with nevuah.
- Why is the belief in nevuah the basis of the Torah?
- Why is it important to believe that Moshe was the greatest navi?
- Discuss the parameters of when a navi can tell us to do an aveirah.

## TO HONOR TEACHERS OF WISDOM

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section all ask us to honor those who teach us wisdom. This helps us to receive their wisdom, as well as promote the pursuit of wisdom.*

# 8. To honor the elderly and Torah scholars

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 17**

*As the Torah says, You shall rise up before a "sevah", a man with a white head of hair, and honor the presence of a "zaken", an old man (Vayikra 19:32, Parshas Kedoshim).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the difference between zaken and sevah?
- Does one have to honor an older person even if he is not a man of wisdom?
- Does a Torah scholar have to honor him?
- Does one have to honor a Torah scholar who is very young?
- When do you have to rise for him?
- Do you have to honor your teacher?
- Can a Torah scholar ask not to be honored?
- Is there anything wrong with disparaging Torah scholars if one disagrees with them?
- How severe do you think the transgression of embarrassing a Torah scholar is?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The term seivah ('an elder of advanced age') refers to someone who has reached seventy years of age, even if he is not a man of Torah wisdom. Everyone is obligated to stand before him — even an accomplished Torah scholar who is much younger.

However, an accomplished Torah scholar is not obligated to rise to his full height before an elderly layperson, but rather needs only to stand sufficiently to show him dignity and honor.

The term zaken is an acronym for zeh she-kanah chochmah — one who has acquired wisdom. Even if the Torah scholar is very young, one is obligated to rise to his full height before him, from the moment the scholar enters within four cubits (arba amos) until he has departed from one's presence.

One is likewise obligated to treat his Torah teacher with profound honor, even if he did not acquire the majority of his Torah knowledge from him.

If a Torah teacher chooses to forgo the honor due to him, his honor is forgiven (rav she-machal al kevodo, kevodo machul).

It is a severe sin to demean, disgrace, or harbor hatred toward Torah scholars. Chazal teach that whoever treats Torah scholars with contempt has no share in the World to Come (Olam HaBa).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Our teachers transmit the Torah received from Moshe, down for posterity. Only if we respect our teachers can we respect their teachings. This respect allows us to learn the Torah from them which teaches us how to be godly.

Also, we are defined by things that we respect. If we respect wisdom, that makes us into people who are inclined towards a life of wisdom and the spirit.

Additionally, we want to create a culture, where the people that we respect most, are people who develop their minds in a G-dly way through the wisdom of the Torah. This will encourage more people to make that their own pursuit.

Finally the same way that Hashem respects people who develop their mind through the Torah wisdom, we should emulate that and respect them as well.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 257)

This mitzvah helps us to demonstrate what is truly important, so that others will strive to pursue wisdom.

#### RALBAG (VAYIKRA 19:32)

If we respect our elders and our Sages, we will be more inclined to listen to and obey them.

#### RABBEINU MENACHEM RECANATI

Peace in the world can be sustained by the intelligence of man. This intelligence is manifest in the Torah Sage. If we respect the wisdom of the sage, and try to perpetuate and promulgate that wisdom then we help to sustain the world.

#### SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes here supplies a concise map of occult practices. He explains the difference with a striking observation about “And I have placed My words in your mouth” (va-asim devarai be-ficha). The Hebrew verb va-asim (“I constantly place”) indicates a continuous, ongoing placement far beyond a one-time event at Sinai. The letters of Torah were placed within the hearts of Israel, and yet they can unfold through changing explanations and combinations at every moment. Across these composite discourses (5647–5649), the Sfas Emes contrasts the fatalistic bondage of onenus—subjugating oneself to auspicious and inauspicious hours—with the liberating power of Torah speech, which sanctifies and elevates time itself (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5647).

• In Parshas Tazria, the Sfas Emes turns to a famous verse in Psalms: "Achor va-kedem tzartani" — "You formed me back and front" (Tehillim 139:5). He explains that every human being contains two opposite directions. In our physical biology, we were created last, appearing after all the animals. But in our spiritual soul, we were conceived first, rooted in the original thought of Hashem! Our life's challenge is to bridge this gap. We begin our

childhood under the dominance of our animal cravings. As we grow, our good inclination (yetzer tov) enters the arena to battle our selfish drives (yetzer hara). When a youth conquers his anger or guards his purity, he possesses the wisdom of an elder. When we stand before a zaken, we salute a life where Torah has gained sovereignty over selfish desire (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tazria 5659).

• Why does the Torah say of our forefather, "V'Avraham zaken ba ba-yamim" — "And Avraham was old, coming with his days" (Bereishis 24:1)? In 5631, the Sfas Emes explains: "Kol ha-he'aros she-hayu lo nish'aru etzlo l'olam" — all the spiritual illuminations that Avraham had ever experienced remained with him forever! To acquire wisdom (kanah chochmah) means to make it an eternal possession, never letting it slip away into forgetfulness. Do we not all know this struggle in our personal lives? On Yom Kippur or at a wedding, our souls catch fire with inspiration. Because his life was anchored in Hashem, his spirit renewed itself like a bubbling spring. When we rise before an elder, we honor a living treasury of accumulated spiritual light (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Chayei Sarah 5631).

• In Parshas Kedoshim, the Torah weaves together commands that seem entirely distinct. In 5651, the Sfas Emes explains that human knowledge can be used in two opposite ways. A person can use cleverness to manipulate the physical world for selfish ego. Or he can use wisdom to elevate his body and actions in the service of Hashem. Hashem commands us: "V'hayisa rak l'ma'alah" — remain oriented upward! In his discourse on Parshas Emor (5651), the Sfas Emes organizes the mitzvos across world, year, and soul (olam, shanah, nefesh). When you rise before a venerable sage, you train your physical limbs to yield before a lifetime of wisdom. Just as Shabbos sanctifies our week and the Mikdash sanctifies our world, rising for an elder sanctifies our human relationships with the fear of Heaven (yiras Shamayim) (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5651).

• In Parshas Shoftim, the Sfas Emes reflects upon a talmid chacham who reaches an advanced age. Does this mean his divine service is diminished? In 5651, the Sfas Emes answers with deep warmth. Hashem opens a new and glorious avenue of service for the elder: "L'kareiv u-l'lameid anashim acherim derech avodas ha-Borei" — to draw others close and teach them the path of serving the Creator! He quotes our Sages: "Divrei zkenim nishma'in b'yoseir" — the gentle words of the aged are heard with special reverence and receptivity. When physical strength fades, the soul's light shines unobstructed to guide our youth. When we stand before an elder, we honor the living bridge that carries our sacred tradition into the future (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5651).

**MORAL DILEMMAS:**

There was once a small Jewish community, that was "out of town". It was far from all of the major Torah centers. The community had a shul and was looking to hire a new rabbi. Many different rabbis came in for a "proba" (a formal audition for a Rabbi) and eventually they narrowed down their list to two excellent candidates. The two candidates were very different. The first, Rabbi Rosen, was an exceptional talmid chacham. He was an expert in Halachah and was an accomplished posek (One who can decide matters of halachah that are not explicitly discussed in the Shulchan Aruch and Mishna Berura). He was an incredible masmid and knew much of the Torah fluently. He was extremely nice, kind and soft spoken. He was not, however, an inspiring speaker. Furthermore, he was introverted and he was not very warm. The second candidate, Rabbi Fried, was quite different. He had a lot of experience working with people who were not religious. He was an excellent speaker. He was articulate, knowledgeable and was an extremely passionate person. He was a people person, with a warm and passionate personality. He gave very inspiring talks about coming close to HaShem. Although he was a Rav with semicha and was very knowledgeable about halachah, he was not a posek. He was not as scholarly as Rabbi Rosen. The board in charge of choosing the Rav was torn, and had the

following question. According to the Torah, what is a more important factor when choosing a Rav in a small community? One who is the biggest talmid chacham, but who is not as warm and outwardly passionate about Yiddishkeit? Or one who is warm and passionate about Yiddishkeit, but not as big a talmid chacham? This question was eventually brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question of which Rav to choose Rav Zilberstein said that there is no single preference. It really depends on the primary need of the community. If the community needs one to pasken halachah, that is preferred. However if the community needs someone to inspire and uplift them, then the second one would be preferred.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 112 (Table Talk Edition 155)*

Avromi entered a city bus and sat down. Very quickly the bus filled up and all the seats were filled. Avromi had plans to travel across town and planned to be on the bus for a while. Shortly after, an elderly man entered the bus. Every seat was taken, but no one moved to offer the elderly man a seat. Avromi very kindly asked the man if he would like his seat. “No, thank you for you very kind offer”, the man replied. “As long as I have these two feet I don't mind using them”. “Are you sure?’, Avromi confirmed. “Yes” the man replied. Avromi continued sitting for a moment but then a thought struck him. The bus was filled. He was sitting at the front of the bus with an elderly man standing beside him. Perhaps staying seated was a Chillul Hashem, a desecration of Hashem’s name. “But the man didn’t want the seat”, Avromi thought to himself. “And If I just get up without saying anything there is a good chance that another inconsiderate person might quickly take the seat”. “Perhaps I can tell the elderly man that I plan to get off at the next stop, so he should take the seat. That way I will do the mitzvah, and avoid the Chillul Hashem”. “But on the other hand”, Avromi thought, “if the man sits down and he sees that I didn’t get off, he might feel deceived and that might be a Chillul Hashem.” Avromi wondered what the best course of action should be: 1) Should he just ignore it? But sitting might be a chillul Hashem. 2) Could he tell the man a white lie that he was getting off at the next stop? Perhaps that might be a chillul Hashem. 3) Should he just get up and not say anything? But then the elderly man might not get the seat. According to the Torah what do you think would be the best course of action in this case?

**Answer:** Based on the Gemara in Kesubos (67b) and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah 253:9) — which rule that if a dignified poor person refuses charity, one should employ tactful discretion (ha'aramah) by offering it as a loan or gift — Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if an elderly person refuses a seat out of politeness and it is difficult for him to stand, or if remaining seated while an elderly person stands creates an appearance of disrespect and chillul Hashem, it is permitted and praiseworthy to say that one is getting off soon so that he will accept the seat.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 429*

Yoni was riding on a packed city bus in Yerushalayim during the evening rush hour. Every seat was taken, and several passengers were holding onto the handrails in the aisle. At the next stop, an elderly Greek Orthodox priest boarded the bus dressed in flowing clerical robes, with a large, prominent crucifix hanging against his chest. Seeing the elderly man struggling to steady himself as the bus jerked forward, Yoni’s instinctive reaction was to stand up immediately and offer him his seat. But just as he began to rise, a thought stopped him in his tracks: Could standing up for a priest wearing prominent clerical vestments appear as though he were according honor to the cross and to Christianity? After all, Mordechai famously refused to bow before Haman because Haman wore an idolatrous image upon his garments. On the other hand, the Torah explicitly commands reverence and basic human dignity for the elderly ("mipnei seivah takum"), regardless of their background. Should Yoni give up his seat, or remain seated? What do you think?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that Yoni should stand up and offer his seat to the elderly priest. The halachic obligation to honor and assist elderly human beings (mipnei seivah takum) applies to non-Jews as well, both out of fundamental respect for age and for the ways of peace (darchei shalom). Offering a seat to a frail person struggling on a moving bus is universally recognized as an act of basic human kindness and elder dignity; it is not an act of religious deference to the cross. Therefore, one does not withhold common decency from an elderly human being out of concern for the religious symbols he happens to be wearing.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 88*

In Eretz Yisrael, there was once a Chief Rabbi who was a great gadol and talmid chacham. However within a circle of kana'im, (zealots) this Gadol was seen as controversial. Unfortunately, whenever the kana'im would see the Chief Rabbi, they would shout at him. The gadol did not mind. One day the Chief Rabbi walked into a beis medrash to learn. The Rabbi had many students and admirers in the room. However some of the kana'im were also present in the beis medrash. A group of his students saw the Chief Rabbi and wanted to stand up for him. But the students had the following question among themselves. If they all stand up to honor him, the kana'im will notice him and will shout at him. If no one stands up the kana'im may not notice him. They wondered how to show their respect for the Rabbi. On one hand, to stand up would cause the kana'im to embarrass him, but not standing up for him was in itself a disgrace to him. They brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question of whether to stand up for the Rav, if the kana'im may start shouting at him, Rav Zilberstein answered that they should stand up, because remaining sitting would be disrespectful.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed Yoma, p. 355*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once Rabbi Abbahu and Rabbi Chiya bar Abba arrived in the same town at the same time. Rabbi Abbahu gave a public lecture in Aggadah, while Rabbi Chiya bar Abba gave a deep lecture in Halachah. All the townspeople left Rabbi Chiya bar Abba's lecture and crowded into Rabbi Abbahu's lecture to hear the stories, leaving Rabbi Chiya bar Abba feeling deeply disheartened. Sensing his colleague's pain, Rabbi Abbahu comforted him with a famous parable: 'Let me tell you what this is like! It is like two merchants who came into a town—one selling priceless pearls and precious gems, and the other selling inexpensive haberdashery, pins, and ribbons. Whom do the crowds rush to buy from? Surely from the seller of pins and ribbons, because everyone can easily afford them!' Moreover, whereas every other day Rabbi Chiya bar Abba used to escort Rabbi Abbahu to his inn out of respect for Rabbi Abbahu's standing before the royal court, that day Rabbi Abbahu insisted on walking behind Rabbi Chiya bar Abba and escorting him all the way to his inn to honor him publicly!

*Talmud Bavli, Sotah 40a*

❖ When Rav Abba bar Papa saw a group of people in his path, he would take a different path so as not to trouble them to stand up for him. When he told this to R' Yose ben Zevida, R' Yose said, "You should purposely pass before them so they should see you and stand up for you, and this would bring them to fear of God!"

*Midrash Tanchuma, Beha'aloscha 11*

❖ R' Yehudah Bar Ammi's home was near the beis midrash in Teveriah. R' Zera used to go to R' Yehudah bar Ammi's home to rest after learning at the beis midrash. R' Yehudah sat by the doorway and said, "When the rabbis come out I will rise before them and fulfill a mitzvah.

*Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 28b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Psychologist Yaakov Guttman, who works with youth at risk, related that he acquired his educational outlook from Rav Yaakov Edelstein. He related the following story. It happened one Shabbos morning. An elderly Jew, around ninety years old, who had learned in a yeshivah in Europe as a young man before the Holocaust, approached Rav Edelstein and asked if he could share a short devar Torah before Krias HaTorah. This wasn't the usual routine, so Rav Edelstein told him he needed to ask permission from the gabbaim. However, the guest did not do this. After Kaddish, he stood up to deliver his devar Torah. "Birshus ha'gabbaim," he began. As far as he was concerned, this constituted permission. We were somewhat confused, but we prepared ourselves to listen respectfully. It soon became clear that the elderly man's mind was no longer fully coherent. Although he had clearly learned a great deal of Torah in his lifetime, his words now lacked clarity and coherence. It was uncomfortable, and even somewhat embarrassing. As the guest continued his derashah, several minutes passed. Some men in the congregation started losing patience. A few began calling out to him to stop, but he persisted. Eventually, these interruptions intensified, becoming rude. Finally, the elderly man stopped and sat down, allowing us to proceed with the Torah reading. I felt uncomfortable with the situation. True, he had imposed on the tzibbur, but it was evident that he was speaking sincerely and from the heart. In his perspective, he felt obligated to deliver his derashah. Although I wasn't among those who shouted, I still felt badly about what had occurred. Afterward, I noticed Rav Edelstein approaching the elderly man. He warmly thanked him for the devar Torah, then began discussing the subject of the derashah with him, gently posing questions and offering insights. I watched as Rav Edelstein patiently sat and discussed the sugyah with the elderly Jew, despite the fact that the man's original presentation had lacked logical sequence. By treating his derashah seriously, Rav Edelstein provided him with a profound sense of dignity and self-worth. In a world filled with challenges, this is where Rav Edelstein's greatness lay, in his ability to give others a feeling of importance and belonging. When I encounter struggling teens, I can't help but wish that this attitude could serve as a guideline for all of us: recognizing that every individual is important and worthy.

*From Reaching To Heaven, By Yedidya Meir and Sivan Rahav-Meir, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Avraham Stern, a grandson of Rabbi Hirsch Diskind, shared the following story he heard from his grandfather. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky would regularly visit Reb Yechiel Mordechai Gordon, the Lomzer Rosh Yeshivah, each Friday after he finished giving shiur in Torah V'daas. It was not an easy commute. It was a train and a bus, and it was an exhausting trip to do each way and then head home in time to prepare for Shabbos. My grandfather once asked him why he goes to such lengths to visit him each week. Is it really necessary at such personal sacrifice? Reb Yaakov explained the reason for his behavior. He described how he had been a refugee during the first world war and had found refuge in the Lomza Yeshivah where he spent a good part of the war years. He was eternally grateful to the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Yechiel Mordechai, for all that he had done for him, providing him with a safe haven where he was able to continue to thrive, away from both physical and spiritual dangers. Unfortunately, during the second world war, Reb Yechiel Mordechai lost his wife and children, along with his beloved talmidim and never fully recovered from his devastating loss. Upon his arrival in America after the war, he remarried an American woman who had lost her husband with no children. She was a very choshuve person, but she had never seen Reb Yechiel Mordechai in his former glory, as one of the leading Roshei Yeshivah in pre-war Europe. In America during those years, he did not have any real position either and his stature in her eyes may not have been reflective of his true greatness. The man she knew was a mere shadow of his former self, with a heart laden with the loss and pain and suffering from all the horrors he had witnessed during the war years. Reb Yaakov felt compelled to visit him regularly in order to give his wife some appreciation of who her husband really was and of his importance and regard in the pre-war Torah world. He reasoned that it would surely make a strong impression on her if the Torah V'daas Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky, deemed it worthy to shlep out each week to visit her husband, he must really be someone special.

*Table Talk, Edition 218 (Parshas Beshalach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ On one occasion, the entire delegation of American Gedolim including Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yackov Kamenetsky, the Novimensker Rebbe and the Kopishnitzer Rebbe paid a visit to Mr. A.B. Y. an extremely wealthy traditional Jew, who tried to keep Shabbos in his own way. The members of the delegation had high hopes for our application to him and hoped that he would give a sizeable donation to Chinuch Atzmai. We arrived at his office without an appointment. Usually, we try making appointments because experience had shown that on the whole such requests were met with refusal. When we reached the office, the secretary asked, "what shall I tell the boss? Who are the gentlemen who want to see him?" We gave her the names of the gedolei Yisrael who had come and she went into her boss's office. She returned somewhat bewildered and said, "I'm sorry, but Mr. Y. isn't in." It was obvious that she was lying on her boss's instructions. The rabbanim left disappointed. I (Rav Shlomo Lorincz, Member of Knesses) stayed on, giving the secretary my card and asking her to take it into her boss. The door of his office opened immediately, the boss came out, greeted me with a genial Shalom Aleichem and told me how glad he was that I'd come and how great an honor it was for him to host a Knesses member from Israel. Then he invited me to come into his office. I asked him if he knew what Gehinom was. "Sure," he said. "I believe there isn't a deep enough place in Gehinnom for you," I told him. "You treated the gedolei Yisrael with contempt, refusing to meet them, While me, the Knesses member, you are happy to welcome, even though I am a layman." Once the words were out of my mouth I wondered how I'd had the courage to speak so strongly. I must have been incensed by the scorn he had shown the gedolei Hatorah. My words made a powerful impression on him and he asked me how he could make amends. I suggested he run after them; perhaps he could catch up with them and mollify them. He took my advice. He caught them, asked their forgiveness and invited them to return to his office, where he welcomed them with all fitting honor and made a large donation, larger than what we were expecting, apparently in order to appease the gedolei haTorah.

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Those who accompanied The Brisker Rav on that Pesach visit in Vilna in 1940 can testify regarding the tremendous sense of awe he felt in the presence of R. Chaim Ozer: The Brisker Rav's family members noticed that the sugar sold in Vilna was different from the raw sugar they used to buy in Brisk, and the question came up whether the local sugar might have some vegetable oil mixed in during processing, thus raising a she'eilah of kitnios. The Brisker Rav therefore instructed his family to cook the sugar before Pesach in large quantities of water, such that the volume of their mixture would certainly be sixty times more than that of any oil that might be in the sugar; thus rendering any oil in the sugar halachically nullified before Pesach, allowing the sugar to be eaten during Pesach. During that Pesach visit, The Brisker Rav was served a cup of tea, and R. Chaim Ozer himself passed him a plate of sugar cubes. The Brisker Rav helped himself to one of the cubes, mixed it into his tea and drank, in honor of his host. Immediately upon leaving the house, The Brisker Rav was seen spitting, trying to get any remnants of sugar out of his mouth. How did he explain his behavior to those who had noticed what had happened? "The custom not to eat kitnios is a chumrah of rabbinic origin, whereas to eat what is offered by Rav Chaim Ozer is kavod hatorah, which is d'Oraisa (an obligation from the Torah)!" This story is all the more meaningful when we remember The Brisker Rav's life-long commitment to following every halachah to the letter and how he trembled over the smallest detail without giving the slightest thought to what others would say — this, even in cases where a normal person would have rationalized and allowed himself to be lenient, as the concern was very remote. And yet — kavod hatorah, is d'Oraisa!

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 458*

❖ A close talmid visiting from Eretz Yisrael came to see Rav Kulefsky and shared a "cute" kasha, something he had heard from an adam gadol in Yerushalayim: Why are we not obligated to stand up for a pregnant woman? If she is really carrying a fetus that has learned the entire Torah with a malach (Niddah 30b), one should have to stand up for the child she is carrying, and for her by extension. The adam gadol answered by citing Rav Chaim Shmulevitz (Sichos Mussar, Yisro 5732), who discusses how the Torah learned by the fetus comes without any ameilus, without any toil or effort. As such, there is no

reason to give him honor or respect. The toil and the labor are the reason behind the kavod we accord a talmid chacham. To Rav Kulefsky, such a vort was basic and obvious, no chiddush at all; ameilus was his way of life! He grabbed his talmid's shirt and spoke to him with great intensity. "This is what you went to learn in Eretz Yisrael? Shtussim?! Of course, you don't stand up for the child. What have I been relegated to? A Talmudic professor in Yale? We don't stand for the information of an individual who has learned Torah; we stand for the mentch. We value the fact that he has grown to become a talmid chacham. We celebrate his toil and effort — that through his Torah, he has become a cheilek of Torah."

*From Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Avrohom Ehrlich lived all alone in his tiny apartment in the storied Battei Varsha section of Meah Shearim. He earned his parnassah by delivering the daily Hamodia. For the rest of his day, he would sit and learn Torah with great depth in the beis medrash in Battei Varsha. The Gerrer Rebbe, the Lev Simcha, would often say about him, "He is the prototype of a true talmid chacham." Anyone who knew how careful the Lev Simcha was with his words recognized the magnitude of that praise. The Pnei Menachem also had a close relationship with Rav Avrohom. Once, Rav Avrohom took ill and was hospitalized with a stomach ailment. The doctors decided that they had no choice but to operate in order to heal him. Rav Avrohom, however, was not convinced that he should undergo the operation. The Pnei Menachem heard about this and immediately hurried to the hospital. Rav Avrohom was instructed to drink three cups of a certain fluid in preparation for his operation, but he refused. The Pnei Menachem sat by his bed and engaged him in a wide-ranging Torah conversation, all the while slowly spooning the liquid into his mouth as they talked. Throughout, he kept saying, "Don't worry, the operation will be successful. You will emerge better than before..." The words of encouragement, spoken straight from the heart, worked their magic, and Rav Avrohom agreed to the operation.

*From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The wedding was a simple one, very much reflecting the poverty of Bnei Brak in those early years. The chasan, Yosef, was one of the rising stars of the Ponevezher Yeshivah, and a bright future was predicted for the dedicated young scholar. The participants in the simchah rejoiced with the young couple, never missing the lack of gastronomic delights and elaborate floral arrangements. At the head of the chassan's tisch sat his Rebbe, the great Ponevezher Rav, Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, glowing with pride, much like a father at the wedding of his son. Next to him sat a distinguished guest from America. The kallah's uncle, who had come especially in honor of the wedding. He leaned over to the Rav and asked him. "Nu, so what will the chasan do after the wedding?" His tone made it clear that he believed strongly in the responsibilities of a young husband to support his wife in style. The Rav smiled. "He is a builder," he replied pleasantly. The uncle digested this piece of news with interest for at the time, there wasn't a more lucrative profession than building in the new country, where the contractors couldn't work fast enough to meet the demand. Later on, the Rav turned to Rav Yankel Galinsky who was seated nearby, and explained. "Chazal HaKedoshim tell us that talmidei chachamim are not just 'Bonayich,' your sons, but also 'bona'yich,' your builders. The Gemara states in Masechta Megillah 3 that a village becomes a city by virtue of having 10 full-time Torah scholars. "Do you know what that means, Reb Yankel? It means that Tokyo is an insignificant little village, and Radin is a metropolis. "Tell me, Reb Yankel, is unzer chasan not a builder?"

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Plitnick, a talmid of the Chofetz Chaim was the Rav of Liverpool England. There was one man who was the wealthiest and most influential person in town. He would undermine the Rav at every opportunity. One night the tables were turned. The man came to the Rav with a problem that his daughter had rejected Yiddishkeit and was going to marry a non-Jew, tearfully, he asked if the Rav can intervene. The Rav kindly said he would be happy to help. He spoke with the girl, but she refused to listen to him. Later the man asked how it could be that she would just ignore the Rav. Sadly Rav Plitnik said he will tell him a story he heard from the Chofetz Chaim. There was once an epidemic in a certain country. A doctor, who was a great humanitarian had discovered a medicine to cure this disease and kindly went from city to city to help the

victims of the disease. One day as he was traveling to a city he was attacked by robbers. They searched all of his belongings for food. He pleaded with them that there was no money just medicine to cure sick people. They didn't listen. When they didn't find the money they were looking for the chief bandit dumped all of his medicine from his suitcase over the bridge into a river. He now had no medicines left. The doctor was devastated. He later arrived at the city he was traveling to cure. When the city heard the doctor was nearby, they all gathered to him for him to cure them. One father came with his child who was very ill. "Can you please help my sick daughter she may die". The doctor recognized the man. He was none other than the chief bandit, the same one who threw the medicine in the river. The doctor said he would really love to help but evil bandits threw his medicine away. The father realized what he had done and walked away sadly. Rav Plitnick said to the father, Talmidei Chachamim are marbe shalom, between spouses, parents, other people, and Hashem. But if people undermine the talmidei chachamim it destroys their effectiveness.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 36*

❖ Rav Hillel Zaks, a grandson of the Chofetz Chaim and Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshiva Knesses Hagedola in Kiryat Sefer, once traveled to South America to fundraise for the yeshiva. He arrived toward the end of the week and succeeded in getting an appointment to meet a wealthy potential donor on Sunday. When Reb Hillel learned that a recommendation by Reb Shmuel Auerbach would be helpful, he asked a talmid to see if Reb Shmuel could call the man, which he happily agreed to do. Due to the time difference, however, Reb Shmuel could not do so before Shabbos, which ended in South America when it was already almost dawn in Yerushalayim. Only upon arriving for his appointment on Sunday did Reb Hillel learn that Reb Shmuel had stayed awake throughout motzaei Shabbos to be able to speak with the man before meeting with Reb Hillel. Upon his return to Eretz Yisroel, Reb Hillel wrote an emotional letter of thanks to Reb Shmuel, who responded with a letter of his own, writing that he was "offended" by the need for thanks. "Is it possible," he wrote, "that a great talmid chacham should be forced to travel abroad to support his yeshiva and someone who can be of help in some small way won't do so?!"

*From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press*

❖ The Skverer Rebbe once needed a substantial sum of money to complete a school building, as the children were studying in makeshift building. One donor paid for a majority of the building. At the groundbreaking the Skverer Rebbe was in an exalted mood, and a long line of people waited in line to receive a berachah during that auspicious hour. The benefactor, too, walked by the Rebbe and, as the astonished chassidim watched, received the exact same reception as everyone else; a brief, albeit warm berachah. Just a moment later, however, the great gaon, Reb Shmelke Taubenfeld of Monsey, approached, and the Rebbe rose to his feet as a sign of respect.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ "What resolution should I take on when I go home for bein Hazmanim" the eager bachur asked Rav Moshe Feinstein. Reb Moshe told him that when the local rav gave his mishnayos shiur between Minchah and Maariv, the bachur should attend the shiur rather than take out a Gemara and learn. "If the rav sees you're not interested, he may be very hurt, because he'll feel that his shiur is not at your level and it's only good enough for balebatim. Furthermore, if the locals see you're not interested, they'll stop coming. They'll just stand around and waste their time with devarim beteilim (idle chatter). All because you didn't attend."

*Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ While visiting his daughter in Monsey, Rav Segal arranged to visit a distinguished talmid chacham in the area The hour was late; the Rosh Yeshivah had already prepared to leave for his visit and had donned his coat. Just then a car drove up filled with yeshivah students who had traveled from far to receive a berachah from the Rosh Yeshivah. Someone went outside and told the students that the Rosh Yeshivah was about to leave and could not accept visitors at that time. The Rosh Yeshivah noticed the tumult and asked what it was about. He then went to the window and saw the students standing

outside near their dilapidated car. Said the Rosh Yeshivah, "If a millionaire would drive up now in his Rolls Royce, would you send him away? Well, these bnei Torah are millionaires!" He then went to open the door and called to the students, "Millionaires — come inside!"

*5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Moshe Fensterheim was the first talmid at Yeshivah Torah Vodaath in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Vodaath at the time was Rav Dovid Leibowitz, who would later lead his own yeshivah in Queens. Each Friday night, the talmidim of Torah Vodaath would visit the home of Rav Leibowitz, who would regale the young bnei Torah with divrei Torah. One Friday night, the boys arrived at the Leibowitz home to find none other than Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, the great gaon and son of Rav Chaim Brisker, seated next to their rosh yeshivah. (Rav Soloveitchik had been Rav Leibowitz's rebbi back in Europe.) Large tomes were opened in front of the Torah giants, who were engaged in a spirited Torah discussion, with glasses of hot tea on the table. At one point, one of the glasses of tea was knocked over. The hazel-colored beverage drenched Rav Soloveitchik and the Gemara before him. Not wasting a moment, Rav Fensterheim ran into the kitchen and returned holding a rag. He stood there for a moment, unsure of what to do. Was he to first wipe off the Gemara? Or was he to initially wipe up the liquid that had spilled on Rav Soloveitchik? Rav Leibowitz immediately sensed Rav Fensterheim's unarticulated quandary. In an instant, he took the towel and began to wipe off the tea that had spilled on Rav Soloveitchik, explaining, "Ehr iz ah lebedige Sefer Torah (He is a living Sefer Torah)." As much as the latter lesson remained with Rav Fensterheim, he was equally moved by how quickly his Rosh Yeshivah had picked up on his tacit dilemma.

*Table Talk, Edition 508 (Parshas Nitzavim Vayeilech), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ That straightness in all monetary matters was one of the qualifies that drew many of Agudath Israel's largest supporters to Rabbi Sherer?" Rabbi Sherer was concerned not just with the image Agudath Israel projected to the outside world, but also the image of Agudath Israel in the eyes of its own constituency. One annual report to be distributed at an Agudath Israel convention contained a large 8.5 inch by 11-inch photograph of Rabbi Sherer together with President George Bush, at the White House. Shortly before the convention, when it was already too late to redo the report, Rabbi Sherer had second thoughts about the prominence given to that particular picture. He felt that an organization based on fealty to the direction of gedolei Torah should not act as if the greatest possible honor was to be on good terms with the president. - Rabbi Sherer spent a lifetime developing his connections with dozens of powerful politicians, and he was surely not ashamed of his relationship with the president of the United States. In addition, he knew the value of being known as one who was on intimate terms with many powerful people. One wall of the corner of his office where he sat with his most important guests was covered with pictures of himself with presidents and other political luminaries. Nevertheless, those he chose to emphasize at the conventions were not political leaders but gedolei Torah. Accordingly, a day before the convention, he instructed the staff to post stickers over the photograph of himself with President Bush in over 1,000 annual reports, even though putting out a less than perfect product was anathema to him. But it would have been far worse, in his eyes, for Agudath Israel to promote itself by its association with the president rather than with gedolei Yisrael.

*Rabbi Sherer, By Rabbi Yonasan Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 186*

❖ Once, a close friend of mine was contemplating a business deal involving gold, and he went to ask his Rebbe. He entered the Rebbe's room and informed him about the meteoric rise in the price of gold. The Rebbe reacted with surprising interest. "Azoi, is gold really worth so much? That means that your son-in-law is even more valuable, for yekarah hi mi-p'ninim, Torah is more precious than gold!" In the mundane news of a rise in gold prices, he heard a message about the value of Torah, and saw fit to inform this fellow of the increased worth of his son-in-law, a talmid chacham of note. One definite outcome of that conversation was the entirely fresh appreciation that he had for his son-in-law.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When Rav Hutner was asked how many talmidim he had. Rav Hutner replied. "Only one. I have one talmid 400 times."

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky, author of Chazon Yechezkel, became the Rav of Slutzk in the year 5683 (1923), when Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer left. He said that the people of Slutzk respected the Rav of the town to such an extent that when they went to ask him a question, they would first don Shabbos clothes, to show their respect for the Torah.

*Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 88*

❖ After concluding an address to a gathering on the Lower East Side, 'Rav Moshe Feinstein quickly made his way toward the exit. As he neared the door, he was surprised to hear the Chairman introduce yet another speaker — - a respected Rav of an East Side synagogue; R' Moshe feared that some might interpret his exit as a lack of regard for the Rav, which was certainly not his intention. R' Moshe therefore returned to his seat and sat through the Rav's entire address.

*5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel told this story in his hesped for his father: Rav Kreiswirth zt"l, who at the time was an elderly Rosh Yeshivah, went to visit Rav Nosson Tzvi. While he was there he asked him for a berachah. Later, Rav Kreiswirth was asked, "Why do you go to him when he is so much younger than you?" to which he answered, "A Rosh Yeshivah who has several thousand students and knows them all by name, it is my duty to visit him and ask for a berachah."

*Rav Nosson Tzvi, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ There was a fire burning in the great Ponevezher beis medrash, a fire that embraced the hundreds of eager listeners with its warmth; voices rose and voices fell, sefarim were piled high, and proofs were brought and refuted. Every so often, the tumult would subside and the voice of the diminutive man at the lectern would be heard. He would continue his shiur, until the next outbreak of noise erupted. The shiur of Rav Shach was an experience. For the hundreds of talmidim who filled the massive room, straining their ears to follow the exchange. To appreciate the profundity and depth of his thought process. It was the highlight of their week. One day, as the Rosh Yeshivah delivered the shiur. He suddenly paused in midsentence, as if trying to recall something. He closed his eyes tightly, and there was an unnatural stillness in the room as his eager talmidim watched him. He spoke haltingly, 'I know that Rav Akiva Eiger discusses it somewhere I just can't recall where. He looked around and asked, "Is there someone here who knows the precise location of this Reb Akiva Eiger?" There was a buzz of activity as various distinguished talmidim began to look around, but a minute passed with no resolution. Suddenly, from the fifth row, a talmid rose with a Teshuvos Rav Akiva Eiger in hand, walking confidently up to the Rosh Yeshivah's place. Many interested eyes followed his progress, for while the bachur, Reuven, was known as a good student, He wasn't exceptionally brilliant or diligent, decidedly not a bachur who could locate an obscure passage in one minute. Reuven showed the sefer to the Rosh Yeshivah, who glanced at it briefly. His eyes flashed with obvious delight, and the look he gave Reuven was priceless: gratitude mixed with admiration. Reuven walked back to his seat, taking the same route that he had taken moments earlier, but he was no longer the same Reuven: he was now the bachur who had located the Reb Akiva Eiger in front of some of the greatest talmidei chachamim in Bnei Brak. In the middle of the beis medrash sat Akiva. The only talmid in the room who truly understood what had just transpired. His chavrusah, Reuven, had been seriously involved in a shidduch, and just as he thought he was getting engaged. The girl had second thoughts and ended the relationship. Reuven was devastated, and sat in his room for days afterward. His plight reached the ears of the Rosh Yeshivah, who, despite carrying the burdens of a nation on his shoulders, felt the pain of his talmid ever so poignantly. He summoned Akiva and asked him how Reuven was faring. Akiva replied that his friend had resumed his regular schedule again, but that his heart wasn't in it. The Rosh Yeshivah thought for a moment. "M'darfim freilech machen, We have to gladden him." Just before the shiur the next day, the Rosh Yeshivah called Akiva in to his office, and inquired what he had

learned with his chavrusah that day. Akiva mentioned that they had come across an interesting Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and Rav Shach stopped him. "Perfect." he said. For days afterward. Younger bachurim and older yungerleit threw admiring glances at Reuven as he passed. The Rosh Yeshivah had made him freilech.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ in the "Fifties", the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Kotler, called a meeting to deal with a serious problem. The meeting was held in the office of Dr. Ernst Bodenheimer z"l and attended by many respected laymen, who all took their places around a long conference table. As mentioned elsewhere, the Yeshivah had a rotation system of talmidim to drive the Rosh Yeshivah to various meetings, etc. in New York. That day, Reb Shmuel Blech was the Rosh Yeshivah's driver. When everyone was seated the Rosh Yeshivah quietly told Dr. Bodenheimer - "we need another chair". Dr. Bodenheimer looked around and commented that it seems everyone has a seat. No, said the Rosh Yeshivah, the bochur who drove me doesn't have a seat at the table. He is a Ben Torah [and it's not respectful to have him sit elsewhere - as a simple driver]!

*The Legacy of Rav Aharon Kotler, By Rabbi Yitzchok Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Some of Rav Isser Zalman's talmidim were at his house and one of them, looking out of the window, thought he saw the Brisker Rav ascending the stairs to the house. He hurriedly announced, "Rebbe, the Brisker Rav is coming up to the house right now!" Rav Isser Zalman rushed to put on his Shabbos coat and ran out to the stairs to receive his guest. It quickly became apparent that there had been a mistake — the caller merely bore a strong resemblance to the Brisker Rav. Rav Isser Zalman's enthusiasm was undiminished, however, as was the reverential air he had assumed in anticipation of receiving his distinguished guests. He continued behaving as though the caller was indeed the Brisker Rav. He ushered the man inside respectfully, seated him at the head of the table and asked him humbly, "What can I offer my important guest? Will you perhaps wash for a meal? If not, what can I offer you to drink?" The visitor was astonished and somewhat nonplussed. He apologized to Rav Isser Zalman and said, "Chalilah that our master should go to any trouble on my account. I came to request a recommendation from your Torah honor because I am soon traveling abroad to raise funds to marry off my daughter." With the same respectful air, Rav Isser Zalman immediately took out pen and paper and composed a warm and enthusiastic letter of recommendation for the man. When the caller left, Rav Isser Zalman got up to see him out and accompanied him down the stairs all the way to the street. When he returned, his family and talmidim expressed their wonderment at why he treated the man with such respect. Rav Isser Zalman replied, "The mitzvah of welcoming guests is actually very great indeed. The mitzvah of according honor to a fellow Jew is extremely precious and important, so much so that one should really honor every Jew, no matter who, with the same respect that one accords to a great Torah scholar, just as Avraham Avinu honored the malachim who called on him, though he thought they were Arabs. "However," he continued, "in our many sins, the mitzvos have become cheapened in our eyes, leading us to make distinctions between one Jew and another. Just now, though, having been placed by Providence in a situation where I was getting ready to receive the greatest gaon of our generation and accord him royal honors, albeit mistakenly, should I have refrained from acting upon my pure intention to properly fulfill the mitzvah of welcoming a guest? Should I have thrown away the opportunity to perform a good and worthy deed just because the visitor was an ordinary Jew?! And what's more, who says that he actually is an ordinary person; do we know how to properly evaluate a fellow Jew?" "If Heaven allotted this Jew the superlative honor due to the Brisker Rav," he concluded, "it is inevitable that he eventually receives it."

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ R' Yisrael Besser told over the following beautiful story: At my son's chasunah, there was a moment that illustrated what it means to "be there." Rav Naftali Jaeger, the Rosh Yeshivah of Sh'or Yoshuv, graced the simchah with his presence. Like all great talmidei chachamim, the Rosh Yeshivah exudes nobility, aristocratic in bearing and conduct. He came in, he danced, he wished well, and then he asked me where my father -- in whose zechus he had likely come -- was. My father seemed to have slipped out, and I couldn't find him. One of my relatives walked the Rosh Yeshivah out, all the while looking for my

father, whom he couldn't find. As they reached the door of the hall, he spotted my father and told the Rosh Yeshivah. As this relative hurried to call my father, the Rosh Yeshivah asked him to wait a moment. Rav Naftali took off his coat, placed it on the side, and then went forward to share his mazel tov wishes. He took off his coat. The small actions of a talmid chacham are heavy in significance. If he was going to wish mazel tov, to participate in the simchah of another, he would not do so while in his coat -- which denotes that, even if the body is there, the spirit is already back on the Van Wyck Expressway -- but the opposite. It symbolized that Rav Naftali was not simply fulfilling an obligation or preparing to rush away. By shedding his coat, he communicated clearly and unmistakably: "I am fully here. Not just physically, but with all of my heart and soul. My spirit is not elsewhere, not halfway out the door. Your joy, at this moment, is my entire focus."

*Table Talk, Edition 434, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ Even in his old age, when Rav Shlomo Zalman no longer had the strength to attend selichos in the beis haknesses on erev Rash Hashanah, he would not forgo his custom of visiting the sick and the elderly to wish them a kesivah v'chasimah tovah. Those close to him wondered how he could give up participating in the communal Selichos, while he was evidently able to climb to the highest floors of tall buildings to visit the lonely ' He set their minds at ease by explaining; Hashem knows that I don't have the strength and He won't have any complaints against me for not taking part in Selichos. On the other hand, the elderly and the sick don't know this, and if I don't visit them, they won't forgive me."

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ In the early 1980's, Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky suffered an angina attack and his doctor strongly recommended that he undergo an angiogram, a difficult and sometimes dangerous procedure for a man of his advanced age. My brother Reb Zvi, then a talmid in Ponevezh, resolved to approach the Rosh Yeshivah with a request to pray for Reb Yaakov's welfare. My brother knew he had to present Rabbi Shach with the names of his grandfather, Yaakov, and of Reb Yaakov's mother, but he had no clue to her name. Reb Yaakov was over 90 years old at the time and in excellent health. Reb Zvi could not recall a time where he had mentioned our grandfather's name in the Mi Shebeirach for the sick, so he searched Bnei Brak for people who would know the name of Reb Yaakov's mother. Finally, a cousin told him that her name was Etka. Armed with the information and an update on my grandfather's condition, he approached Rabbi Shach. When he inquired about the welfare of our grandfather, my brother turned white. "That is exactly why I came," he stammered. Immediately Rabbi Shach's face filled with consternation. My brother continued, "You see, my grandfather was not feeling well and must undergo a procedure. I came to inform the Rosh Yeshivah—" Rabbi Shach jumped up from his chair and exclaimed, "We must be mispallel for Reb Yaakov ben Etka!" My brother could not contain himself. "Rebbi," he began meekly. "The last twelve hours I have been trying to find out my great-grandmother's name. Now I see that the Rosh Yeshivah knows her name. How is that?" Rabbi Shach explained. "Years ago, your grandfather visited Eretz Yisroel. After meeting him, I asked him for his mother's name. I could not imagine the Jewish world without a healthy Reb Yaakov, and there is not a single day that goes by that I do not say a special prayer for his well-being!"

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Bobover Rebbe was a sandek at a bris and was unusually joyous. At the bris he explained why. Meir and Rivka Zoberman were unable to have children. Rivka volunteered at Maimonides hospital to visit patients. There was an elderly woman in her seventies who was grumpy and no one visited her. At first the woman rebuffed her efforts. But finally after weeks she opened up and they became close. Eventually the highlight of the elderly woman's day was Rivka's visits. Eventually she got very sick. Before she dies she says, Rivka you are only person in the world who was nice, to me. I have no money to repay you and I can't repay you. But I promise you this. When I go to heaven I will approach the heavenly throne and make a promise that I will not leave there until Hashem grants you the child that you want. She died. The Bobover Rebbe, said this is the child that was born because of her.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 106*

❖ Reb Shabsi Frankel organized a team of talmidei chachamim to fix the Rambam using extremely rare manuscripts. Some were worth millions of dollars, others were impossible to get but took very important connections to get access to. It took him many years to assemble all the manuscripts. The Steipler told him that the Rambam and all of his nosei keilim would be waiting to greet him in Gan Eden. One day, Reb Shabsi was working with a talmid chacham over one of the priceless manuscripts when Mrs. Frankel brought in refreshments, including two mugs of hot coffee. Accidentally, the talmid chacham knocked over his mug, spilling coffee all over the rare manuscript. Without saying a word, Reb Shabsi quickly ran into the kitchen and returned with another cup of coffee: "I figured since the first one spilled, you would like another cup!" The scholar smiled in relief, realizing how graciously Reb Shabsi had spared him from embarrassment. That is what the Steipler really meant.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 142*

❖ A distinguished talmid chacham once asked Rav Pam a halachic question and was told that the answer could be found in a teshuvah (responsum) of the Rashba. Rav Pam then explained how he had come to learn that particular teshuvah. The talmid chacham later remarked, "Some may say that Rav Pam did that out of humility, because he did not want me to think that he was fluent in Teshuvos HaRashba. But I believe that he did it out of concern that I might feel bad that I was unfamiliar with that teshuvah. He wanted me to know that it was only 'by chance' that he knew it."

*Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The discomfort the Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky) felt at any encroachment on someone else's feelings left him no peace of mind. This was especially true when the honor of Torah scholars was involved. One young man succeeded for a while in getting him to accept rides in his car regularly. But this always bothered him: "Maybe this is hard for you? Maybe I'm not permitted to use your services? You know we're not allowed to make use of someone who learns halachah regularly." Another time the young man told him he would pick him up to go daven at a specified time. When the time came, however, he didn't show up for some reason. Even though the Steipler was very worried that he would be late to daven Shacharis, he waited a long time for the driver to come. He didn't want to leave by himself for fear that his ride would come at last and the young man would be upset with himself if the Steipler wasn't still there. When the car finally arrived, the Steipler jumped up and hurried as much as he could so as not to make anyone wait an extra minute.

*The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 192*

❖ Once, in a shmuess during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, Rav Freifeld shared a conversation that he had recently had with an elderly woman. Mrs. Gringrass had been born in Russia and was over 100 years old. She resided in a local nursing home and Rebbe used to visit her often and speak with her. Once, he noticed that she wasn't eating her lunch, and he inquired about it. She explained matter-of-factly that she had undertaken to fast for Baba'b, the Monday. Thursday, and Monday following Pesach and Succos. Rebbe reacted with surprise, as this fast is a chumrah and observed only by the most devout men, and almost unheard of among women, much less an elderly, frail woman like Mrs. Gringrass. She tearfully explained. "Barbara has been my nurse now for years and years, and has been attending to me so faithfully, One day last week, however, she was tired, and when she gave me a shot. She was clumsier than usual. She pricked me, and in my pain. I shouted at her. "She has been so devoted for so long, yet I berated her for one mistake. I apologized several times, yet how can I have allowed that to happen? I have accepted this fast upon myself in order to do complete teshuvah for my unbecoming behavior Rebbe paused when he completed the story, and looked around. "Who is old and who is young? You, who are in your 20's, but cynical and mistrustful about your ability to change, are old. Mrs. Gringrass, who is still trying, is young! "I hope to be as young as her.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ During a zman, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel would travel to Brachfeld on Monday and Wednesday and two times for Shabbos. These were occasions to observe the true meaning-of one talmid chacham honoring another.' During one of those visits, there was a heavy (by Israeli standards) snowstorm in Jerusalem and the journey entailed renting a jeep with four-

wheel drive; this also necessitated that the visit be short. When Reb Nosson Zvi arrived at Brachfeld, he went into a room reserved for him there and interviewed boys he needed to see, but he never entered the beis midrash. It seemed rather odd that he would not enter the beis midrash considering all the trouble involved in arriving at the yeshivah. He explained that he would always attend Reb Aryeh's shiurim, but this time he would be unable to remain for shiur that day. To enter the beis midrash and not remain could be perceived, he feared, as an affront. So he went from his car to his room and back to the car.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 229*

❖ I (Rav Binyamin Gringras) used to bring groups of bachurim to Rav Velvel Eisenbach. They connected to his unassuming manner and were enthralled by his diligent approach to life and the fact that he was so, so busy with learning at an age when the vast majority of people want nothing more than to sit back, read the paper, and drink a cup of coffee. On one such visit, while climbing the steep staircase to Rav Velvel's austere apartment in Batei Ungarin with a group of American kids, we passed his neighbor, a Yerushalmi woman. She took one look at the exuberant group and apparently was disturbed because she knew Rav Velvel had nothing in his pantry to offer his visitors. American tourists were arriving at his home, and one was supposed to put out some refreshments — and there would be nothing to serve. The neighbor ran home to put together a nice plate of refreshments. She did it rapidly and made her way a few minutes later to Rav Velvel's home. - Of course, Rav Velvel couldn't refuse her offering (just try and refuse a Yerushalmi mama), and no doubt a part of him was relieved at being able to offer the simple plate of cut up fruit to his guests: apples, dates, and nuts assembled with efficiency and good taste. Rav Velvel commanded his guests, "make a berachah on the fruits of Eretz Yisrael!" The group were quick to follow his command, the platter of fruit was mostly demolished within mere seconds of being passed around. Everyone made loud berachos and everyone answered "amen," and Rav Velvel was happy. When it was time to leave, the plate was empty save for a few pieces of fruit. As we made our collective way down the staircase of Batei Ungarin, my eye was drawn to the sight of a diminutive figure leaving his home, holding a plate on which rested two lonely pieces of apple, the remains of his neighbor's chesed. It was Rav Velvel on his way to return the plate. Though most people would have assumed that the woman meant for all the fruit to be eaten and would have no doubt consumed the remaining pieces themselves, Rav Velvel wasted no time in returning the apples. They were not his; they had been presented to him for a specific purpose, and now they had to be returned." The memory of the nearly 100-year-old wizened tzaddik, plate in hand, will remain with me for the rest of my life. If I could paint the scene on a canvas, I would title it "Yerushalmi tzaddik and fruit."

*Inside Their Homes*

❖ A number of years ago, the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Schechter, visited a distinguished yeshiva as part of an AARTS accreditation assessment. After touring the yeshiva, the group of Roshei Yeshivos and secular academicians interviewed several yungerleit about the curricula and accomplishments of the bnei hayeshiva. As the meeting drew to a close, the attendees were offered the opportunity to make closing statements. Several participants took the opportunity to thank the board of accreditors for their taking the time to visit and appraise the yeshiva. At that point, the Rosh Hayeshiva tapped on the table and delivered a closing statement of his own. Turning to the assembled professionals, he announced, "We all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all these scholars, who spend their days toiling in the study of Torah, who agreed to briefly interrupt their critical work and spend the time helping us gather the information we needed." With that, he initiated a round of applause, and ended the meeting on a high note of kavod HaTorah.

*From Rav Aharon Schechter Tribute / Table Talk Anthology*

## A. TO REVERE TORAH SCHOLARS

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-12**

*As it says, "you should fear Hashem your God (Devarim 6:13, Parshas Va'eschanan)".*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is a mitzvah to revere Torah scholars as it says, "you should fear Hashem your god (Devarim 6:13)". Our Sages have explained that the word "es" comes to include Torah scholars. Anything that is included in an "es" is a deoraisa, a Torah mandated mitzvah as the Ramban and Rashbatz have clearly proven.

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

Avi was the happy father of a new baby boy. Like many of his colleagues, he was planning to ask the head of his kollel to be the sandek (the person honored with holding the baby during a bris) at the bris. But a few days before the bris, he saw an advertisement in the newspaper that caught his eye. It read: "Dear friends, I am looking to be a sandek at a bris on Wednesday. This is because Wednesday is a fast day, and fasting is difficult for me. However, I don't want to not fast and rely on another heter. Therefore, I am seeking to be a sandek, because it says in the Rema that a sandek is exempt from fasting. If someone is willing to allow me to do this mitzvah, I will pay $1,000." Avi read this and thought, "$1,000 could be a huge help right now!". He had a new baby and all the expenses that come with it. The money sounded very appealing. But on the other hand, he felt uneasy about giving the honor of being the sandek to a random person from a newspaper ad, even if the man was willing to pay for it. It felt wrong not to give the honor to his rosh kollel, someone prestigious and deserving. So, he brought two questions to a Rav, which were then asked to Rav Chaim Kanievsky: Is the person looking to buy the rights to be the sandek to exempt himself from fasting doing the right thing or the wrong thing? Is it acceptable to "sell" the sandek rights to someone willing to pay a lot of money, or should he forgo the money and give the honor of sandek to his rosh kollel? What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about the person who placed an ad seeking to become a sandek: Rav Zilberstein answered that this is, in fact, a good and worthy practice. The individual found it difficult to fast and was willing to spend money to find a legitimate heter (halachic leniency) that would allow him not to fast. As for selling the right to be a sandek, if the purpose was simply to make money, that would be inappropriate and disrespectful to the mitzvah of selecting a worthy sandek. However, in this case, Rav Chaim Kanievsky said that since it was done as an act of kindness to fulfill the Torah mitzvah of chesed, it is indeed a worthy decision to grant him the right to serve as a sandek.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Devarim, p. 31*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Merchants aboard a ship mocked a Torah scholar who carried no bales of silk or spices, asking where his wares were when pirates raided the ship and stripped the merchants of everything, they arrived in port penniless while the scholar entered the local House of Study, delivered a brilliant Torah discourse, and was honored and supported by the entire city; proving that wisdom is the only treasure that can never be stolen.

*Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Terumah 1*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In 1945 my father, Rabbi Hirsch Diskind, still a single man and a talmid of Rav Hutner, was the mashgiach (dorm counselor) at Baltimore's Talmudical Academy High School. In addition, he also taught the 8th grade Hebrew studies class. Rabbi Elliot Berlin, one of his eighth graders, shared the following memory with my nephew: "One morning an electrician

entered the eighth-grade classroom to wire up an intercom system. As he entered, he realized that his work would disturb the class and immediately apologized. He told the Rebbi, Rabbi Diskind, that he would come back later. But the kids jumped up, saying, 'No, no, you can come in now.' "Your grandfather did not say one word. He sat down, took off his glasses, and tears ran down his face. He did not say one word to us. I can still see it today, 70 years later. Until that point, Gemara was for me just another subject. After learning by your grandfather, it was learning Torah. It was a whole different outlook."

*Table Talk, Edition 454 (Parshas Eikev), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ During the Brisker Rav's wartime stay in Switzerland, news of his arrival spread quickly, and many came to him, some to ask his advice, others just to spend time in his presence. A group of religious Jews from Geneva came, wishing to take the opportunity to ask him several questions that had come up in their community. The Brisker Rav didn't want to answer them. Instead, he told them that these were matters for their rav to decide. When they told him that they in fact didn't have a rav in their community, and that there was no one to ask, The Brisker Rav responded: "Really? If so, I certainly do not want to answer the questions. You must immediately make the necessary efforts to appoint a rav to direct your congregation." He then went on to emphasize the necessity of every community's having a rav to lead them and to decide on religious issues."

*The Brisker Rav Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 443*

❖ A talmid of Rav Belsky related the following anecdote: "I knew someone who was in financial trouble. I set him up in a business and put him on his feet. However, instead of being grateful, he said something so nasty to me that actually made me cry. I later told Rav Belsky how hurt I felt." "Rav Belsky turned to me gently and said, "It's time for you to learn mussar." I was shocked. I did not understand. "I should learn mussar? He should learn mussar!", I retorted to Rav Belsky. "No, you don't understand" said Rav Belsky. "You have to become a 'derhoibener mentch' (an exalted individual). You have to learn to be above these sorts of things so they don't even affect you." And for the next two years Rav Belsky became my chavrusa and we learned mussar together regularly. On a similar note; One day, Rav Belsky was in his room learning when a man entered and related that he was employed by a talmid of Rav Belsky. The man admitted that occasionally he would speak disparagingly of Rav Belsky. He proceeded to tell Rav Belsky the negative comments he had made about him. His boss had warned him that he would be fired if he continued such conduct. The practice continued and his boss fired him. The man had come to beg Rav Belsky to intercede with his boss on his behalf so that he would rehire him. On the spot Rav Belsky called the talmid in the man's presence. Rav Belsky said, "You fired this man for the sake of my honor. If you are really concerned for my honor, here is how to honor me. Please give this Yid back his parnasah." And one final anecdote. It once happened that two men who had been close friends became embroiled in a terrible dispute over whether one owed the other $100. They came to Rav Belsky for a psak. Each side said their side of the story. With great wisdom, Rav Belsky gave each person the impression that his claim was valid. Then, Rav Belsky reached into his own pocket and withdrew $100 from his own wallet, and handed it to one of them. With that, the dispute was resolved.

*From Rav Belsky, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## B. TO REVERE A TORAH TEACHER LIKE ONE REVERES HEAVEN

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-16**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is taught in the Mishnah: 'Let the reverence of your teacher be like the fear of Heaven' (Pirkei Avos 4:12). A student must conduct himself before his Torah master with profound reverence, recognizing that the teacher conveys the word and will of Hashem.

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

Avraham lived with his family in one of the towns of the Gaza Envelope (near the Gaza border). His Rebbe (Torah teacher), one of the Gedolei Hador and one of the Tzaddikim of the generation, always encouraged him to live in his neighborhood and not move. "Stay put and have a positive influence on your surroundings," he would say. This year, on October 6th, on the night of Simchas Torah, Avraham's Rebbe, who had recently passed away, came to Avraham in a dream. In Avraham's dream, his Rebbe told him to get up and leave. "Take your wife and kids, and leave your town as it is a Sakanah (danger) to stay here." Avraham woke up and dismissed the dream, then went back to sleep. But his Rebbe appeared to him again, but this time strangling him by the neck, insisting he get up and go, as it was a major danger to stay there. Avraham woke up still physically feeling the tightness around his neck. Alarmed, he woke up his wife, shared what happened and expressed his fear. Usually, Avraham did not pay much attention to dreams, but this time it felt different, and very urgent. Despite being a Shabbos observant Jew, Avraham got in his car with his wife and children, in the early morning and drove away from the border town based on the strong message from his dream. Over the course of Shabbos, and after Shabbos, they heard what happened to everyone who lived on the border with Gaza and Avraham realized that he was saved because of the message from his Rebbe. After all was said and done, Avraham came to Rav Zilberstein with the following question. Did he do the right thing by breaking Shabbos because of the message of his dream? According to Halachah, can a person break Shabbos because of a message in a dream? Perhaps he can, if he thinks it is a matter of life and death. Or, perhaps he did the wrong thing and he should not have broken Shabbos because of a dream. What do you think?

**Answer:** HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Vavei Ha'Amudim V'Chashukeihem, cited in Table Talk) ruled that Avraham was allowed to drive away with his family on Simchas Torah morning. Although ordinary dreams do not permit desecrating Shabbos or Yom Tov, because his deceased Rebbe appeared to him twice with a physical choking sensation and instilled genuine terror of imminent mortal danger (pikuach nefesh) near the Gaza border, he acted permissibly in evacuating immediately, and their lives were miraculously saved.

*— Source: HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Vavei Ha'Amudim V'Chashukeihem / Table Talk Archive*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once, as Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was riding upon a donkey while his disciple Rabbi Elazar ben Arach walked behind him driving the donkey. Rabbi Elazar said to him: 'Master, teach me a single chapter in the Account of the Divine Chariot (Ma'aseh Merkavah).' Rabban Yochanan replied: 'Did I not tell you from the outset that we do not teach the Chariot to an individual unless he is a sage who understands of his own insight?' Rabbi Elazar said to him: 'If so, permit me to lay out before you what I have understood!' Rabban Yochanan said: 'Speak!' As soon as Rabbi Elazar ben Arach opened his discourse on the Account of the Chariot, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai dismounted from his donkey, wrapped himself in his tallis out of awe for the Divine Presence, and the two of them sat upon a stone beneath an olive tree while he expounded before him. Rabban Yochanan stood up, kissed him on his head, and exclaimed: 'Blessed is the Lord, God of Israel, Who gave a descendant to Abraham our father who knows how to understand and expound the glory of his Father in Heaven! There is one who expounds beautifully but does not fulfill beautifully, and another who fulfills beautifully but does not expound beautifully; Elazar ben Arach both expounds beautifully and fulfills beautifully!' Four sages entered the mystical orchard (Pardes): Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher (Elisha ben Avuyah), and Rabbi Akiva... Only Rabbi Akiva ascended in peace and descended in peace. They offered a parable: To what is this comparable? To a highway passing

between two paths, one of scorching fire and one of freezing snow. If a traveler veers to one side, he is burned by fire; if he veers to the other, he is frostbitten by snow. What must a person do? Walk squarely down the middle path without veering to either side!

*Tosefta, Chagigah 2:1–2 (cf. Talmud Bavli, Chagigah 14b)*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelovitch, the Menahel of Yeshivah Torah V'daas, would give a weekly shiur on Pirkei Avos every Friday. One week he was discussing the concept of a gadol b'Yisroel as being someone whose every action is in perfect alignment with the Torah, and how one can actually derive halachos from each action he does. There was one impulsive young bochur in the shiur that shot out "Is there anyone here in the Yeshiva's hanhala that can be included in this category of gadlus?" Rav Mendelovitch first censured the boy and said, "You should know that it is a chutzpah for you to ask such a question in public. However, now that you asked, I will answer you." "There is someone in the Yeshiva's hanhala who is clearly on this level in which his every action is in exact accordance with the Shulchan Aruch, and yes, one can learn from his every action. I have closely studied his actions over the past year and I am confident of this. The person I am referring to is our new Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky".

*Contributed by Rabbi Avraham Stern*

❖ Around fifteen years ago, the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Schechter, flew to Eretz Yisroel for a one-day trip on behalf of Chinuch Atzmai. One of the few things that he made time for on that trip, which ended up being his final one, was a visit to the kever of the Rosh Hayeshiva Rav Hutner zt"l on Har Hazeisim. They parked the car in the parking lot, higher up on the mountain, and slowly made their way down towards the kever, the Rosh Hayeshiva holding on to the arm of a talmid. The talmid recalls, "We were all thinking, the Rosh Hayeshiva does not come to Eretz Yisroel often, the last time he was here was years ago, and this is likely his last ever visit to his rebbi. As we made our way closer and closer to the kever, the Rosh Hayeshiva's grip on my arm became tighter and tighter. I literally felt the sense of eima, of awe, as he approached the makom kevura of his rebbi. By the time we reached the actual matzeiva, I felt like my arm was in a vise, I had lost sensation. His trembling was palpable. He asked us to remain behind and he approached the matzeiva by himself. Watching him there was the greatest possible lesson in how a talmid stands lifnei rabo. The strength of that feeling has stayed with me until this day."

*From Rav Aharon Schechter Tribute / Table Talk Anthology*

❖ R. Avrohom Wolff once brought the following question to The Brisker Rav: A serious situation had arisen regarding two girls, around fifteen years old, who were learning in schools in Bnei Brak (one in the Bais Yaakov and the other in Ohr Hachaim). One of the girls, who worked cleaning houses, had been stealing from her employers. She was said to be executing the thefts shrewdly — "like a talmid chacham." The other was behaving extremely disrespectfully to her teachers. Should the girls be expelled from their schools? "I strongly doubt that there is any hope for the girl who stole," answered The Brisker Rav. Still, she should be given another chance to change her ways." This surprised R. Wolff. "But she's stolen 100 liras (a huge sum in those days)!" he exclaimed. Said the Brisker Rav: "You said she thought it through 'like a talmid chacham.' The planning and cunning she exhibited is more serious than the sum of the theft. Even so, try again to bring her around. However, regarding the girl who was rude to her teachers... this is a more serious matter than the first. "I don't know!" And why is insolence more serious than thievery? The Brisker Rav explained that even though the girl who stole harms her fellow students, she does not lead them to sin. They will not follow her example and begin to steal. But when a girl is insolent toward the teacher, she is attacking the teacher's status, and thus undermining her ability to influence the rest of the students."

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 198*

## C. TO LOVE A TORAH SCHOLAR

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-13**

*As it says "And you should love "es" Hashem your G-d" (Devarim 6:4, Parshas Va'eschanan).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ To what degree does one have to love them?

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is an active mitzvah to love Torah scholars just as one loves his own children, as Scripture states: 'And you shall love (es) Hashem your God' (Devarim 6:5). Our Sages explained that the amplifying particle es comes to include Torah scholars, teaching that loving those who bear and transmit the Torah is an expression of loving Hashem Himself. This obligation applies to both men and women.

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Yudan HaNasi sent Rabbi Chiya, Rabbi Assi, and Rabbi Ami to travel through the towns of the Land of Israel in order to establish teachers of Scripture (sofrin) and teachers of Mishnah (matniyanin) for every community. They entered one place and found neither a teacher of Scripture nor a teacher of Mishnah! They said to the townspeople: 'Bring us the guardians of the city (Neturei Karta)!' The townspeople brought out the armed municipal watchmen (santorei karta). The Sages exclaimed to them: 'Do you call these the guardians of the city?! These are none other than the destroyers of the city (charuvei karta)!' The townspeople asked: 'Who then are the true guardians of the city?' The Sages answered: 'The teachers of Scripture and the teachers of Mishnah! As it is written (Psalms 127:1): "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain!"'

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagigah 1:7 (76c)*

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One of Rabbi Dovid Trenk's boys in Adelphia left yeshivah every day after Minchah, biking home, where he would spend the rest of the day. His mother was upset, and she mentioned it to Rabbi Trenk. "Until he finally leaves, it's 10 o'clock in the morning, and by 2:30, he's back. What kind of day is that?" she asked. Reb Dovid spoke gently. "You're a lucky woman," he said. "Ashrecha, you must be a great mother... Where is your son going, to the movies? To the mall? He's going home, to you. He wants to be here, in your home. That's a great mother."

*From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The following story was related by Rabbi Menachem Porush to Rav Yechiel Aryeh Hacohein Munk. Rabbi Menachem Porush had an acquaintance who lived a more modern lifestyle. He once asked Rabbi Porush "I keep hearing about a יששכר זבולון - partnership concept. Please explain this to me." Rabbi Porush explained how people of means can take upon themselves a partnership with a Torah scholar and his family. In the World to come they equally share in the reward of the Torah study. He thought for a moment and said to Rabbi Porush "I like this idea. Can you please help find a suitable Torah scholar for my family to partner with?" Rabbi Porush approached a Rosh Yeshivah who suggested the family of a Torah scholar in need of support and arranged for them to meet. After the scholar and this person met, the scholar got back to Rabbi Porush saying "I don't think this partner is suitable for me." He explained "I take my Torah study quite seriously. I looked into it, and there are some matters in his lifestyle which are not compatible with the level of my Torah study. I am

not ready to share my Torah with him." Rabbi Porush called his friend back telling him that the scholar was not interested. The fellow responded to Rabbi Porush "I inquired about him and I know that he is living with quite some financial difficulty. If he is refusing us as a partner - I insist on knowing why." Rabbi Porush had no choice but to tell him. "This scholar takes his Torah study seriously. He feels there are some matters in your lifestyle that are not compatible with his Torah study." Upon his friend's insistence for an explanation, Rabbi Porush told him "There are three problems. The first is that your wife does not cover her hair. The second is that the level of schooling for your children is not what he considers adequate and finally your business opens too early Saturday night." The fellow thought for a moment and said "Rabbi Porush, I will get back to you." A few days later, he returned with his wife to Rabbi Porush and said "We gave the matter much thought and decided that if this scholar who is in such dire financial need takes his study of Torah so seriously that he refused our partnership, then he is specifically the one we want to partner with. Please inform him that we will make the changes necessary to qualify us to be his partner. We would be privileged to partner with such a great Torah scholar. The two families met and their lives were changed forever, truly forever and ever!

*Table Talk, Edition 341 (Parshas Shelach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

## D. TO CRY WHEN A RIGHTEOUS PERSON DIES

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 10-3**

*As it says "and your brothers, the whole house of Israel should cry for the burning burned by Hashem" (Vayikra 10:6, Parshas Shemini)...*

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a sacred mitzvah to weep and mourn over the passing of a righteous person (tzaddik).

Our Sages teach that one who fails to mourn and shed tears over the death of an upright person is penalized by having to weep over his own children (Shabbos 105b). Chazal also teach that for all the tears a person sheds over worthy loss, Hashem counts them and places them in His celestial treasury. The Zohar reveals that each tear shed over the death of the righteous and over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash is inscribed upon an angel in the heavenly chamber known as Livnas HaSapir.

Weeping over the passing of the righteous is an organic branch of the mitzvah to love Torah scholars. Because a person is commanded to love Torah scholars as he loves his own children, one who remains indifferent and does not weep over them as though they were his own sons brings upon himself a measure-for-measure consequence (middah k'neged middah) regarding his own offspring.

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss the true idea of misas tzadikim mechaprim, how the death of the righteous brings atonement and how this idea was distorted by Christianity

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ When Rav Isaac Sher was niftar, Rav Chatzkel Levenstein was approached to eulogize him. Rav Levenstein declined. He explained that his grandson had died recently, and he was still bereaved. "If I start crying during the hesped, people will

think the tears are for Rav Sher when in fact they will be because of my grandson."

*Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

## E. TO BLESS A TORAH SCHOLAR WHENEVER ONE MENTIONS HIS NAME

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 37-1**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Rabbi Yitzchak taught (Yoma 38b): Whoever mentions the name of a righteous person (tzaddik) and fails to bless him violates an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh), as it is written: 'The remembrance of the righteous shall be for a blessing' (Mishlei 10:7). Likewise, whoever mentions the name of a wicked person and fails to curse him violates an active positive commandment, as the verse concludes: 'But the name of the wicked shall rot' (Mishlei 10:7).

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ About a year before Rabbi Davis passed away, Rav Shlomo Rothenberg was attending a wedding, and Rav Nosson Wachtfogel noticed him. Rav Nosson called him over and said, "I want to tell you a couple of things about your rebbi. One thing is that half of the Torah in America is because of Rabbi Davis!" What did Rav Nosson mean? Rav Shlomo would share the following story which can give us a glimpse into what Rav Nosson was implying here: One summer, Rabbi Davis took a group of about ten boys to an old resort outside of Baltimore and learned Maseches Sukkah with them. When Sukkos was drawing near, they built a sukkah applying all they had learned during the summer. Around that time, the Telshe Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Bloch, who had just escaped from war-ravaged Europe, came to the United States. Rav Elya Meir had a strong desire to reestablish Yeshivas Telshe on American shores. He was looking for serious bachurim with whom to start the yeshivah but found his search to be unsuccessful, because of the lack of bachurim who were willing to devote themselves to serious learning. Rav Elya Meir expressed surprise upon seeing Rabbi Davis's American bachurim learning with great diligence. Rav Elya Meir's concerns reached the ears of Rabbi Davis. "Where will I find talmidim with which to establish Yeshivas Telshe?" Rabbi Davis had the answer. "Here are your talmidim!" he announced to Rav Elya Meir, referring to the ten bachurim with whom he had learned over the summer. And with that, the great Telshe yeshivah was founded in Cleveland, Ohio. Subsequently, because of this episode, when Rav Elya Meir would meet Rabbi Davis, he'd stand up for him and proclaim, "Er is der meyased fun Telshe! The true founder of Telshe yeshivah is Rav Yehuda Davis!" The second point that Rav Nosson told Rav Shlomo was that in the 1940s, Rav Aharon Kotler didn't make a move in chinuch without first consulting with Rabbi Davis. At the first Torah Umesorah convention that took place in Cleveland, Ohio, Rav Aharon asked Rabbi Davis to deliver a keynote address. "But you are the gadol hador," Rabbi Davis objected. “It is you who should speak and address the klal!" "But you," Rav Aharon adamantly replied, "you are the gadol in chinuch! Klal Yisrael needs your valuable insights on how to be mechanech our generation!"

*From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## F. TO GREET YOUR TORAH TEACHER WHEN HE ARRIVES AFTER A JOURNEY

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-11**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is a mitzvah to greet the countenance of one's Torah teacher (kabalas pnei rabbo) when he arrives following a journey, welcoming him with genuine deference and joy.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ When two disciples visited their elderly teacher Rabbi Yehoshua in Peki'in, he asked them what new Torah insight was taught in the academy at Yavneh, and when they tried to demur out of respect, he declared: 'There is no study hall without a fresh insight!'

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagigah 1:1*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ It might well be the final picture of the beloved Rosh Yeshivah. His talmid, Rabbi Boruch Brull of Baltimore, had come to Lakewood with a group of talmidim, having scheduled the visit with Reb Boruch's rebbi, but now, their host, Rav Schneur Kotler, appeared so ill, so weak and weary. Nevertheless, Rav Schneur welcomed them as planned and somehow managed to spend 45 minutes with the group, greeting each boy individually, asking their names. The Rosh Yeshivah was in too much pain to stand up, or even shake their hands. At the end of the special audience Reb Boruch apologized to Rav Schneur for bothering him with the visit. "Had I known the pain that the Rosh Yeshivah was in, I would not have come". Rav Schneur looked at him pointedly, "The greatest nachas I have is to greet a talmid with HIS talmidim, and you would want to take that from me?" Shortly thereafter Rav Schneur was taken to a hospital in Boston where he niftar. The talmidim he created and their talmidim and now their talmidim continue giving the Rosh Yeshivah nachas.

*Table Talk, Edition 293 (Parshas Chukas), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

# 9. To honor a Kohen

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 50 Sefer Chareidim 12-46**

*As the Torah says You shall hallow him (Vayikra 21:8, Parshas Emor)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- How does one show honor to a Kohen?
- What if he doesn't want to be honored?
- Does this apply even today when we don't have the temple?
- Would this apply to a kohen who has a disfigurement and could not perform the service in the Temple?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This commandment obligates us to sanctify and honor the descendants of Aharon the Kohen in two fundamental respects:

(a) To sanctify and prepare him so that he remains consecrated and fit to offer the sacrifices in the Beis HaMikdash;

(b) To treat him with preeminence and honor in every sacred matter: granting him the first aliyah at the public reading of the Torah, inviting him to lead the recitation of Birkas HaMazon (the Grace after Meals), and according him the privilege to select the finest portion at a meal.

We are obligated to treat the kohen with sanctity even against his will if he attempts to forgo it, as the Torah commands: 'And you shall sanctify him' (Vayikra 21:8) — which Chazal interpret to mean even against his personal preference.

Even if a kohen possesses a physical blemish (mum) that disqualifies him from performing the sacrificial service in the Beis HaMikdash, we remain fully obligated to honor him.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

## HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Our teachers transmit the Torah received from Moshe, down for posterity. Only if we respect our teachers can we respect their teachings. This respect allows us to learn the Torah which teaches us how to be godly, from them.

Also, we are defined by things that we respect. If we respect wisdom, that makes us into people who are inclined towards a life of wisdom and the spirit.

Additionally, we want to create a culture, where the people that we respect most, are people who develop their minds in a G-dly way through the wisdom of the Torah. This will encourage more people to make that their own pursuit.

Finally the same way that Hashem respects people who develop their mind through the Torah wisdom, we should respect them as well.

Kohanim are people who teach Torah and devote their lives to serving Hashem. By giving them respect, we learn to respect their teachings as well as the message that their lifestyle sends to us.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 269)

We should honor those who devote their lives to the service of Hashem. This shows respect for Hashem because our respect shows how important it is to be a servant of Hashem.

### RALBAG (VAYIKRA 21:24)

We want to demonstrate the glory and prestige that comes with devoting your life to serving Hashem. This display of respect teaches the rest of Klal Yisrael that value.

### RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The Kohanim were to be the teachers of Klal Yisrael. This is another example of showing respect to those who teach Torah.

**SFAS EMES**

• Why does the Torah link our honor for the Kohen to his altar offerings? The verse states: "V'kidashto, ki es lechem Elokecha hu makriv" — "You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of your God." What is the inner meaning of this offering? The Sfas Emes explains this secret in 5657. He writes: "Ba'avur she-ha-Kohen mekareiv nafshos Bnei Yisrael el ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu" — because the Kohen draws the souls of the Children of Israel close to the Holy One, blessed be He. The Kohen's work is never for himself. He stands as our loving representative. He gathers the scattered longings of our hearts and lifts them straight to our Creator. He teaches that through this service, our material bread becomes bound to its spiritual source (davuk ba-shoresh). When we honor the Kohen, we honor the channel through which our physical lives become infused with divine purpose (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5657).

• The Torah commands us: "V'kidashto" — "You shall sanctify him." Notice the wording. He explains: "U-me'at kedushah shelo mosif koach l'zeh ha-ish ha-meyuchad li-kedushah" — the small measure of holiness an ordinary Jew creates adds spiritual strength to the person designated for sacred service! He finds proof in the Torah's description of the High Priest: "Ha-Kohen ha-gadol mei'echav" — "The priest who is greater than his brothers" (Vayikra 21:10). Our Sages explain in tractate Yoma (18a): "Gadleihu mi-shel echav" — his brothers must elevate him from their own resources. The Kohen is set apart for service, but he is never detached from his brothers. We rise and fall together (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5637).

• When Korach launched his rebellion against the leadership of Aharon, Moshe Rabbeinu answered with a profound sign. Citing the holy Zohar (Korach 176a), the Sfas Emes explains this in 5658. The Levi corresponds to evening (erev), while the Kohen corresponds to morning (boker). The work of evening involves wrestling with darkness and clearing away impurities. Morning, by contrast, expresses pure clarity and light: "Birur v'havdalah bein yom v'laylah" — the shining light of dawn that dispels all shadows. Both forms of service are vital, and neither can replace the other. Korach, by contrast, brought division and controversy (machlokes). When we honor the Kohen, we honor the divine gift of peace and harmony that unites our people (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5658).

• In Parshas Korach, the Torah describes the priestly gifts as an eternal covenant of salt (beris melach olam, Bamidbar 18:19). In 5646, the Sfas Emes reveals the spiritual secret of this salt. Hashem granted Aharon a unique gift: "Lihyos medabeik kol Bnei Yisrael eilav, k'mo she-kasuv: u-mekarvan la-Torah" — to bind all the Children of Israel to Hashem by drawing them close to Torah. Kehunah is called a service of gift (avodas matanah). Citing the holy Tanya, the Sfas Emes explains that supreme love and attachment (ahavah and dveikus) cannot be manufactured through human intellect alone. When we support Torah leaders and Kohanim today, we are not just giving charity. We are opening our hearts to receive a share of their selfless love and devotion (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5646).

• The Torah commands us to give the Kohen the first portion (reishis) of our grain, wine, oil, and dough. He explains that the root of all abundance flows through the Kohen. He writes: "Kol mah she-ma'alin Bnei Yisrael la-Hashem, retzono Yisborach hu she-al yedei zeh yuchal l'hashpia lahem chesed elyon — Lachen shoresh ha-berachos b'yad ha-Kohen" — whatever the Jewish people elevate to Hashem, His divine desire is to shower them with supreme lovingkindness; therefore, the root of all blessings rests in the Kohen's hand! By placing the beginning (reishis) in the hands of the Kohen, we connect our daily bread to its heavenly source. Through that simple act, Hashem's blessing fills our homes with light (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5656).

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

▪ Why does this apply today, even though we don't have a Beis Hamikdash?

**MORAL DILEMMAS:**

A man saved a baby and raised him in ghetto. Has no other kids. The child is a kohen. Can he pretend the child is his own, if the child will lose his Kohen status?

**Answer:** Rav Ephraim Oshry ruled that the adoptive father may not have the rescued boy called to the Torah under the adoptive father's name, but must call him by the name of his martyred biological father, the Kohen. First, under the mitzvah of honoring one's parents even after their death ('mechabdo b'chayav u-mechabdo b'moso,' Kiddushin 31b), being called to the Torah as the son of one's martyred father preserves his memory and honor, whereas suppressing his name causes disgrace to the deceased (citing Bossem Mordechai on Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Even HaEzer 76, and Ha'amek She'eilah by the Netziv). Second, and even more critically, because the boy's biological father was a Kohen and the adoptive father was a Yisrael, calling the boy to the Torah as the son of a Yisrael would cause his priesthood (kehunah) to be forgotten over time—leading to grave Torah prohibitions such as marrying a divorcee or contracting corpse impurity (tum'as meisim), as well as forfeiting the mitzvah of Birchas Kohanim. Rav Oshry warmly consoled the adoptive father that his eternal reward for rescuing a Jewish child from the 'Kinder-Aktion' and raising him in Torah ('whoever saves a single Jewish life is as if he saved an entire world') was already immeasurable without erasing the martyred father's name.

*— Source: Rav Ephraim Oshry, She'eilos U'Teshuvos MiMa'amakim, Vol. 3, Siman 11*

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ The Torah commands regarding the High Priest (Vayikra 21:10): 'And the High Priest who is greater than his brethren'—teaching that if a Kohen chosen to serve as High Priest is poor, his fellow Kohanim are obligated to elevate and enrich him out of honor for his sacred office. It once happened with Pinchas Ish Chavta, a humble and pious Kohen who earned his living as a stonecutter, that the sacred lot fell upon him to be appointed High Priest. When his fellow Kohanim went out from Jerusalem to notify him and bring him up to the Sanctuary, they found him standing in his quarry dressed in work clothes, hewing heavy stones with his pickaxe. To fulfill the Torah's command 'who is greater than his brethren,' his fellow Kohanim immediately opened their purses and poured gold dinars into the stone quarry before him until the entire trench where he had been cutting stone was filled to the brim with gold!

*Midrash Tanchuma, Emor 4:1*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ A similar incident: R. Refoel hakohen Kook was once davening in the Brisker Rav's (Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik's) home. When the time came for birkas kohanim, R. Kook, being a kohen, went to wash his hands. He found the Brisker Rav there, as is customary for leviyim, with a cup in his hand, waiting to wash the hands of the kohen. This was too much for R. Kook, who was extremely uncomfortable at the thought that the gadol ha-dor should serve him in such a way. "Chalilah, ich hob mom!" ("...I am afraid!") The Brisker Rav put down the cup and allowed him to wash his own hands. After the service was over, however, the Brisker Rav approached him and said, "So you were afraid, but you took a mitzvah away from me!

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 440*

❖ Once when Rav Chaim Ozer and the Chofetz Chaim were both to sign a public proclamation, the Chofetz Chaim refused to sign first, claiming that Reb Chaim Ozer personified Kavod HaTorah (the honor of Torah). Reb Chaim Ozer in turn deferred to the Chofetz Chaim, claiming that he encompassed both "Kavod HaTorah and venerable old age." The

Chofetz Chaim then counter-argued that Reb Chaim Ozer was more than Moreh De'asra of Vilna; he was the Moreh of Klal Yisrael, as well. He should sign first. Finally Reb Chaim Ozer won the "argument," backing his claim with "Vekidashto — you shall sanctify the kohen" — even over his protest - and the Chofetz Chaim was a kohen. The Chofetz Chaim yielded, providing that Reb Chaim Ozer sign alongside his signature, not on the following line.

*The Torah Personality, By Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, Published by Mesorah Publications*

## CLINGING TO TORAH SCHOLARS AND RIGHTEOUS PEERS (U'LDAVKAH BO)

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section all ask us to associate with peers that will encourage us to grow, and to avoid peers that will hinder our spiritual growth*

# 10. To cling to Torah scholars and associate with righteous peers (U'ldavkah Bo)

### A. TO HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH A TORAH SCHOLAR

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 16**

*As the Torah says, and to Him shall you cling (Devarim 10:20, Parshas Eikev)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- How should one have a close relationship to a Torah scholar?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The Sages of blessed memory taught (Kesubos 111b): Whoever binds himself in fellowship to Torah scholars is considered by Scripture as though he cleaves directly to the Shechinah (the Divine Presence).

Therefore, a person should earnestly strive to fulfill this through several tangible avenues:

Marry the daughter of a Torah scholar;

Marry his own daughter to a Torah scholar;

Dine and share meals in the company of Torah scholars;

Conduct business on behalf of Torah scholars and enable them to benefit from his material wealth;

Sit attentively in the dust at the feet of Torah scholars (Pirkei Avos 1:4);

And drink in their holy words with eager thirst.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

We don't learn from books alone. We learn just as much from the people that we associate with and spend time with. It is therefore imperative that we spend as much time as we can with people that can teach us how to live both through their words, as well as their actions. This association is another way to learn the divine wisdom that helps us to emulate Hashem.

In addition, we want to associate with peers who encourage us to strive for the lofty goals of perfection of character, and we don't want to associate too closely with people who denigrate that goal, or who give priority to more mundane goals.

**SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:**

**RAMBAM — HILCHOS DEOS, 10, 2**

If we associate with Torah scholars we will learn from their actions and behaviours.

**RALBAG**

This mitzvah will help us to learn from their words and teachings.

**SFAS EMES**

• In Parshas Matos, the Sfas Emes begins with an ancient Midrash on the verse: "V'nishba'ta chai Hashem b'emes, b'mishpat, u'v'tzedakah" — "And you shall swear, 'As Hashem lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness." The Midrash links these three requirements directly to our verse: fearing Hashem, serving Him, and cleaving to Him through supporting a Torah scholar (talmid chacham). The Sfas Emes explains that truth (emes) means recognizing that our entire life comes from Hashem alone: "Ein lo chiyus rak mimenu Yisborach." Justice (mishpat) means aligning our actual daily decisions with that truth. But what about righteousness (tzedakah)? Here we encounter something that sits outside our physical bodies: our hard-earned money. Money is not part of our physical body at birth. We release a lower attachment to make room for a higher one. Our money, which could have fed our selfish pride, becomes the very tool that lifts our souls toward Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Matos 5633).

• Two years later, in 5635, the Sfas Emes returns to this same Midrash with a penetrating question. Why should someone at this elevated level still need to support a Torah scholar to fulfill the command of cleaving to Hashem? The answer touches the core of religious humility. A truly wise person understands that no matter how much he achieves on his own, his personal deeds are still finite: "Mi-tzad ma'asav ein yachol lizkos l'dabeik bo Yisborach." On the strength of our own private record, none of us can claim true attachment to the Infinite Hashem. If we rely only on our private spiritual accomplishments, we risk falling into subtle arrogance. We celebrate the unique contribution of another servant of Hashem. The Sfas Emes calls this "chasid ha-misgased im kono" — a pious person who acts with kindness toward his Creator by honoring every voice in Hashem's choir (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Matos 5635).

• In his final year of life, in 5665, the Sfas Emes looked at this mitzvah from the perspective of the teacher. What happens to us when we step into the presence of an authentic servant of Hashem? The Sfas Emes answers: "Zeh midas ha-tzaddik, l'ha'alos ha-nidbakim eilav" — it is the defining nature of a righteous person to elevate those who attach themselves to him! When we spend time with someone whose life is devoted to truth, we absorb his values naturally. We see how he speaks to a child, how he handles an insult, and how he prays with quiet reverence. In the same way, when we draw close to a living teacher of Torah, his character refinement rubs off on us, lifting our daily conduct to heights we could never reach alone (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeira 5665).

• Our Sages share a striking insight in the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 19b): "Sichas chullin shel talmidei chachamim tzrichin limud" — even the casual, everyday conversation of a Torah scholar requires careful study. In Parshas Beha'aloscha in 5639, the Sfas Emes explains why this is so. He uses the biblical image of the Tree of Life: "Ha-Torah hi eitz chayim, v'ha-mitzvos heim ha-anafim she-mispashtin mimenu." The Torah is the living trunk of the tree; the commandments are its strong branches spreading outward. But what corresponds to the leaves? Scripture tells us of the righteous person: "V'aleihu lo yibol" — "And its leaf shall not wither" (Tehillim 1:3). When we observe the daily conduct of a true scholar, we discover that Torah is far more than an intellectual philosophy. It is a living guide for becoming a refined, thoughtful human being (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Beha'alosecha 5639).

• In Parshas Naso in 5641, the Sfas Emes explores a fascinating Midrash. Scripture praises wisdom: "Yekarah hi mi-peninim" — "It is more precious than pearls" (Mishlei 3:15). Our Sages interpret this verse as referring to the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) who entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. The Midrash declares that a learned Torah scholar takes precedence over an ignorant High Priest. The Sfas Emes asks a sharp question: if a Torah scholar holds greater spiritual stature than the High Priest, why is he not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies? His answer reveals the true beauty of Torah study. He uses his wisdom to clarify ethical duties and bring moral light to his community. When we attach ourselves to such a scholar, we connect our lives to someone who has transformed his inner character through honest labor (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5641).

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ Discuss the importance of having a Rav who you can consult with for Halachic decisions as well as life decisions.

▪ Discuss the power of our social environment, and the importance of having positive peers.

### MORAL DILEMMAS:

A childless man wished to allocate $50,000 to establish an enduring merit for his soul after his passing. He faced a choice: should he use the funds to commission a Sefer Torah that will endure for generations, or should he dedicate the money to support Torah scholars in their learning? Which path provides the greater spiritual merit?

**Answer:** Regarding the question of which is a greater merit, the Sefer Torah or supporting a Torah scholar, Rav Zilberstein answered as follows: The halachah is that one is allowed to sell a Sefer Torah to support a Torah scholar to learn Torah. This teaches us that supporting a Torah scholar is a greater merit than the Sefer Torah.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 338*

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: 'Greater is personal apprenticeship and service to Torah scholars (shimushah shel Torah) than mere academic study of Torah (limudah), for it is written (II Kings 3:11): "Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, who poured water on the hands of Eliyahu." Scripture does not say "who studied under Eliyahu," but rather "who poured water on the hands of Eliyahu"—teaching that personal service to Torah scholars is even greater than formal study alone.'

*Talmud Bavli, Berachos 7b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ In 1933, while Rav Mordechai Schwab was learning in Kamenitz, it was decided that his youngest brother, Moshe, a boy of sixteen, would join his older brother in yeshivah there. This is how Rav Moshe, subsequently Mashgiach in Gateshead Yeshivah, described his start in the yeshivah world. He later told Rav Mordechai's son that as a German-Jewish youngster of sixteen, he was not planning to stay in the yeshivah for more than one year. On the journey to Poland, he changed trains in Berlin and made sure to buy a newspaper and magazines so that he would come to Eastern Europe as a "cultured" young man. He made sure his hair was properly groomed. On the train, he made it clear to his brother, Rav Mordechai, "I'm not like you, Gustav (Rav Mordechai's German name), I am only going for one year." Rav Mordechai's son asked, "What did my father say?" Rav Moshe answered, "Your father was smart, he said nothing. He just listened." Rav Moshe talked about his first impressions of Kamenitz and the environs in general. He found the poverty, sanitary conditions, and external mannerisms very different from those in Germany. This only confirmed his resolve that he would not be staying in yeshivah for any longer than one year. After alighting from the train in a nearby town, they took a horse and carriage shared with other passengers to Kamenitz. There was much haggling between the passengers and the coach driver, with the use of coarse language. Arriving in Kamenitz, Rav Mordechai took young Moshe to his prearranged lodgings. Then something happened that very first night that changed Moshe's perspective completely. That night he was having dinner with other bachurim at his stanzia (lodgings). After dinner, when tea was served, Moshe accidentally knocked over his cup of tea, and it fell onto the lap of the bachur sitting next to him, scalding him. Moshe was horrified by what he had done but was completely unprepared for the other boy's reaction. His neighbor, while rubbing his burned thigh, was at the same time asking their hostess if she could bring Reb Moshe another cup of tea. When retelling this story, Rav Moshe emphasized that this was a cup of very hot Russian tea, not a cup of English tea. This completely changed Moshe's attitude toward learning Torah. He realized what the Torah can do to a person. The external surroundings and mannerisms were not important; what was important was how the Torah could perfect a person. Rav Moshe's first day in Kamenitz changed him forever. After one zeman in Kamenitz, he continued on to Baranovich where he formed a very close relationship with the Mashgiach, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Lubchansky. After spending five years learning in Baranovich, he returned to Kamenitz.

*From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press*

❖ A young man once came to visit with the Slonimer Rebbe, the Beis Avraham. "I learn almost all of the books of the Chassidic greats, follow their advice, and try to incorporate into my life-style all of the good practices they speak of. I see no need to have a Rebbe, " he told the Beis Avraham. The Rebbe said to him: "Let me explain your situation with a parable. A man once felt ill. Rather than visiting a doctor, he decided to go to a pharmacy on his own. 'I'll buy all the medicines and take them, and that way I'll be cured of all disease. There is no need to see a doctor.' "Of course, this is utter foolishness. One who uses drugs without proper supervision places himself in serious danger. Drugs that are beneficial in treating certain diseases may be fatal in treating others. Only a doctor, with his medical expertise and his knowledge of the patient's history, can properly diagnose the sickness and prescribe the appropriate medicine. "Similarly, all that you learn in the books of the great Chassidic masters is like medicine. In the wrong doses or incorrectly prescribed, such 'medicines' can be fatal to your spiritual welfare. You should follow the dictum of the Sages that one should select a teacher for himself, who can serve as the doctor for your soul, diagnose your needs and prescribe the proper spiritual medicine."

*The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ I am currently in Eretz Yisroel and am in awe of the hundreds of thousands of families who have dedicated their lives to the studying of the Torah of our people. Many of these families have chosen this path despite the limited income they have as a result. There are opportunities for them to expand their income and to live more comfortably but they nevertheless chose this way because of their absolute commitment to Torah study. One such example I know first hand about my nephew who has chosen this path. He is a great talmid chacham whose lifestyle is extremely simple. A few more shekels a month would make life more comfortable for him. A number of years ago, an outstanding kollel who paid significantly

more wanted him to join them. There was one caveat, his chavrusa would not be able to join him. In order to join the new kollel he would have to give up his chavrusah. Giving up his chavrusah for someone else would have meant that his learning would have been somewhat compromised. When his friend learned of this opportunity, he was very happy for him. Nevertheless, in spite of this chance to bring home more shekels without giving up his Torah study, he rejected the offer. He explained to his friend that if he wanted to earn more shekels he could have done so years ago. The reason he stayed in kollel was to study the Torah of Hashem. "Should I compromise that Torah study by giving up my chavrusah just to earn a few more shekels?!" Hashem, in His infinite chesed, engineered the current Jewish demographics in a way that while these hundreds of thousands of families give up so much for the sake of Hashem's Torah, so many of us in America are blessed with the resources to support those in Eretz Yisroel to do so. With His genius arrangement all members of Klal Yisroel are able to participate in bringing honor to Hashem and to His Torah.

*Written by Paysach Diskind in the streets of the Old City of Yerushalayim*

❖ Larry Levine kept getting laid off from his jobs because he was a hippie with a long pony tail. He saw an ad in the paper for a janitor at a yeshivah. Rav Freifeld interviewed him and asked about his background and learned that Larry learned bava metzia when he was younger, Rav Freifeld said he doesn't have the job of a janitor but a job as a rebbe. He has people in the yeshivah with ponytails longer than his and he will be able to relate to them better. Larry took the job and slowly became frum and became a very popular rebbe with a large family.

*Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 27*

❖ 9 year old boy Ovadia was doing very well in school, but he stopped coming. The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Ezra Atia went to his father's house to see if he was perhaps sick. The father said he simply needed him to help in the family grocery store. Rav Atia said that he had tremendous potential. The next morning Rav Atia was dressed in an apron and met the father at the store. I can work for free. I will work and let Ovadia go to yeshivah. The father saw how much it meant and let the boy go. The boy became Rav Ovadia Yosef.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 30*

❖ Meir Goldbaum, a student of Rav Shimshon Pincus, was frustrated with his lack of spiritual growth before Rosh Hashanah. Rav Pincus told him that during the Yom Kippur War, he saw a 19-year-old soldier who had just had a bullet removed insist on returning immediately to the front lines. When the doctors tried to restrain him, the soldier cried, "My fellow soldiers need me back in the battle!" Rav Pincus told Meir, "You may have been spiritually wounded, but there is a war going on. We need you to fight alongside us—we need you with us!"

*Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 83*

## B. TO ATTEND TO THE NEEDS OF A TORAH SCHOLAR

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-50, 41-2**

*As the Torah says, "and you should serve "es" Hashem your G-d" (Shemos 23:25, Mishpatim).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Which is greater, studying from a Torah scholar or serving one?
- How should one serve him?
- Should a teacher prevent his student from serving him?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is a sacred mitzvah to personally attend to and serve Torah scholars (shimush talmidei chachamim), as Scripture states: 'And you shall serve (es) Hashem your God' (Shemos 23:25) — where the particle es extends the command to serving Torah scholars. Our Sages derived from the Prophets that serving a Torah scholar is even greater than theoretical study of Torah, as Scripture records: 'Then he arose and went after Eliyahu and ministered to him' (Melachim I 19:21). Scripture does not state that Elisha merely studied with Eliyahu, but rather that he 'poured water on the hands of Eliyahu' (Melachim II 3:11), demonstrating that personal service conveys the living essence of the Torah (Berachos 7b).

Our Sages taught (Kesubos 96a) that all manner of service a servant performs for his master, a disciple should perform for his teacher, with the exception of removing his shoes in public where it might cause mistaken identity.

If a teacher prevents his disciples from serving him, he withholds a profound spiritual kindness from them, as Scripture warns: 'One who withholds kindness from his fellow abandons the fear of the Almighty' (Iyov 6:14).

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When Antoninus visited Rebbi, he used to attend on him and serve him food and drink. When Rebbi wanted to get on his bed, Antoninus crouched on the floor and told Rebbi to step on him to get on his bed. When Rebbi claimed that it was not proper for him to treat a king in such a manner, Antoninus said, "If only I could serve as a mattress for you in the World to Come!"

*Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 10b*

❖ The Sages forbade eating figs that were pecked open in the field out of concern that a venomous creature might have bitten them. It once happened that the young daughter of Rabbi Chiyya the Great wanted to save the best figs for her father, so she cleverly poked little holes in the figs so the hungry students wouldn't eat them (thinking a bird or snake had pecked them)! Rabbi Chiyya, who knew his daughter's trick, calmly ate the figs — teaching the students how halachah distinguishes between unknown field hazards and known household facts.

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Terumos 8:3 (45c)*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Toward the end of his life, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk ate very little, and even the entreaties of his friends and relatives had little effect. One time, when his son, Rabbi Elazar, pleaded with him to eat enough to sustain life, Rabbi Elimelech said, "I wish I could eat, but my body rejects all things physical. Ah! One time, during my years of wandering in exile, I lodged at an inn near a certain village, and there I ate a delicious soup. If that were available, I could eat it. But that is so far away!" Many years later, Rabbi Elazar happened to be in that village, and sought out the inn to which his father had referred. He asked the hostess whether he might have some of her special soup, and she said, "How I wish I could serve you the food that is appropriate for a great tzaddik like yourself. But we are very poor. Very few travelers pass this way, and we just have enough flour and beans to eat for our meals. I will be glad to make a bean soup for you." When Rabbi Elazar tasted the soup, he experienced a spiritual delight, as though he were eating of the offerings of the Altar in the Temple in Jerusalem. He asked the hostess, "Please tell me, what ingredients do you use for this soup?" The woman began crying. "I am so sorry that it is so meager. I do not have any spices to put in. All I did was cook the beans with water, and then I prayed to G-d: 'Master of the Universe! You have provided me with the mitzvah of preparing a meal for a great tzaddik. If only I had meat, vegetables, and spices, I would prepare a meal for him that would befit him, but I have nothing. But You, Master of

the Universe, have everything. You have Gan Eden (Paradise), where there are all the finest scents and flavors. Please put some of these in the soup, so that my holy guest can enjoy his food.'" Rabbi Elazar said, "Now I know why my father longed for this soup. This pious woman's sincere prayers were answered, and the soup did indeed have the taste of Gan Eden.

*Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky*

❖ Whenever Reb Elazar of Ternigrad used to visit Reb Yaakov Yitzchak, the Chozeh of Lublin, his host would always make a point of personally attending to his needs in some way, in fulfillment of the mitzvah of waiting on a Torah scholar. Once, after serving his guest coffee, he returned the cup to its place. The guest thereupon asked why he should trouble himself even for this detail. The Chozeh replied: "When the Kohen Gadol took out the empty incense spoon and the ash pan from the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, this too was part of the divine service of the Avodah."

*A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 120*

❖ Rav Nota Greenblatt told of one summer when he went to visit Rav Moshe Feinstein in the Catskill Mountains. He arrived in the evening, and Rav Moshe greeted him warmly. As they spoke, Rav Moshe noticed that Rav Nota had a cough. Rav Moshe insisted that he stay the night rather than travel back to New York. "I didn't sleep that night," Rav Nota said, his eyes welling with tears. "You know why? Because Rav Moshe didn't sleep! He came into my room every half hour to make sure the blanket was covering me properly." The mere mention of Rav Moshe's name brought tears to Rav Nota's eyes.

*From Rav Nota, by R' Shmuel Botnick, published by ArtScroll/Mesorah*

❖ With the help of Heaven, Rav Yisrael Gustman and his wife and daughter survived the horrific WWII. As the Soviet Army engaged the Germans in their battle for control of Lithuania, fighting was fierce in the forests outside Vilna. When R' Gustman, his wife and daughter emerged from hiding, they had not eaten for two days due to fear of being purposely killed by the retreating Nazis or mistakenly killed by the Russians pursuing the Germans. The Soviets took control of Lithuania from the Germans in the summer of 1944. When the Gustmans finally returned to the outskirts of Vilna, they knocked on the door of a Lithuanian home. They asked the woman who opened the door for some bread, but she just looked at them and growled, "Zhid," and slammed the door in their faces. They knocked on a second door and received a similar greeting. The third door on which they knocked was unlocked and opened from the force of R' Gustman's knocking. He entered and saw that it was a shul, miraculously untouched by the Nazis, who had systematically destroyed all the other synagogues in Lithuania. The siddur of the shaliach tzibur had been left open and was dusty on the shtender at the front of the shul. It was as if the members of the minyan had simply gone out on a three year hiatus. This shul had no mezuzah on the door, which is likely the reason the Nazis bypassed it, unlike the rest of the synagogues that they had desecrated. It was, in fact, the shul of the son of R' Avraham Tzvi Eisenshtat, the author of Pischei Teshuvah. R' Gustman looked around at the walls of the shul, which were filled with books, amazed that they had survived the war. He then began to make plans regarding obtaining food. But the Rebbetzin then said, "Du hust sefarim und du redst vegen essen [you have holy books here and you're talking about food]?" His Rebbetzin stood holding their daughter in her arms. The Missis, as he called her, said, "You haven't opened a sefer in two years. First sit down now for an hour and learn something." She insisted and would not take no for an answer. The Rosh Yeshivah exclaimed, "Because of such a wife, I was zoche to both my learning and my talmidim."

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❖ Rav Shimon Katz, Rosh Yeshivas Keser David in Telz-Stone, told an amazing story of Rav Shlomo Brevda's sensitivity to other people's plights. Over the years, Rav Katz had been a talmid of Rav Brevda, and had asked his advice on many issues. When Rav Katz's father fell ill, he consulted Rav Brevda on many issues of how best to care for him. One day, Rav Brevda brought him an envelope containing a large amount of money, as a donation for the yeshivah. Rav Katz was surprised, since

he had not discussed the yeshivah's finances with Rav Brevda, nor asked for his help. Rav Brevda then explained that he understood that with Rav Katz's responsibilities in caring for his ailing father, he would not be able to make his usual fundraising trip to America. Rav Brevda did not wait to be asked for help. When he saw a need, he stepped forward.

*From Rav Shlomo Leib Brevda, Published by Feldheim*

❖ Laibel Gross was learning diligently in kollel, but the financial strain of paying his bills grew so severe that he felt forced to leave learning and look for work. His devoted wife, Chani, handed him her diamond engagement ring and urged him to sell it so that he could remain in kollel for another month. Laibel traveled to 47th Street in Manhattan to have the ring appraised. The diamond dealer, Shmuel Rosenbaum, examined the ring and sensed that this was no ordinary sale. He told Laibel, "I could offer you $1,000, but my brother Chaim upstairs can give you a much better price"—and quietly phoned his brother ahead. When Chaim Rosenbaum gently drew out the full story of Chani's sacrifice for her husband's Torah learning, he was deeply moved and asked to have a share in their mesiras nefesh. He wrote out a check for $10,000 and handed it to a stunned Laibel. As Laibel turned to leave, Chaim handed him a velvet jewelry box as well—With Chani's engagement ring still inside.

*Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Once, a Litvishe yungerman came to the Pnei Menachem (Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter of Gur) with the following question: "I have a dilemma. I am considering joining one of two kollelim. One of them has an extremely high level of learning, and some of the best yungeleit learn in that kollel. The only problem is that the monthly stipend is not enough for me. The second kollel has a less intense level of learning than the first one, but they give $150 more per month—money that I need to live on..." The Rebbe advised him to choose the kollel with the better level of learning. The main objective of a kollel yungerman is to advance in learning, and thus, the place where he will learn better must supersede all monetary concerns. From then on, however, that yungerman received a monthly check from the Rebbe for $150.

*From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Dessler had succeeded in obtaining what was then a very large contribution of £400. Subsequently a representative of Gateshead Yeshivah solicited a contribution from the same benefactor, who responded that he had already given to the Yeshivah. Since there was always some fear on the part of the Yeshivah that the Kollel would draw away money from the Yeshivah, the matter created some tension. The Vaad of the Kollel voted not to return the gift on the grounds that it had been given personally to Rabbi Dessler. But Rabbi Dessler felt that the principle of avoiding any trace of machlokes (dispute) with the Yeshivah was more important than the money, and he insisted that the gift be handed over to the Yeshivah. Since the full responsibility for raising the funds was on his shoulders, the other members of the Vaad eventually acquiesced.

*Rav Dessler, By Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 209*

❖ R. Yisroel Grossman, zt"l, related: I was once asked by a certain Rav to ask The Brisker Rav for help in the case of a talmid chacham who was very ill. Besides the high costs of the medical care, the man had a family to support and he was destitute. I myself, R. Grossman added, found it strange: Here I was being requested to go to the Brisker Rav to ask for help when The Brisker Rav himself was in a very trying financial position. But the rav was so insistent that I just could not refuse. And so, I went to The Brisker Rav's home and told him the sad story of the sick talmid chacham who needed help so desperately. The Brisker Rav listened to me intently, but said he could not possibly help, since his own situation was so difficult. I felt very uncomfortable; I had known this beforehand. However, I felt I had to justify myself, and told him that I knew it was not appropriate to ask him for financial help, but the rav had pleaded so persistently that I felt I had no choice but to come and ask. I then took my leave from him and went back home. The very next day, very early in the morning, I heard someone knocking on my door; to my surprise, it was The Brisker Rav's son, R. Refoel, "My father," he said immediately, "couldn't sleep the whole night after hearing from you about the talmid chacham's dilemma, especially since

you mentioned that his life was potentially in danger. Hearing that the situation was so bad, he could not rest. "First thing in the morning, he asked me to go to the home of a certain wealthy friend and ask for a large sum as a loan. I was then instructed to bring the money directly to you. Here is the envelope with the money."

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 431*

❖ Rabbi Naftali and Rebbetzin Pessia Carlebach (parents of the famous Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach) were not people of means. Torah study was Rabbi Naftali's only occupation, and Pessia, who helped support the family by working as a bookbinder, never had cash to spare. Yet they kept an open house for visiting scholars and made tzedakah a household rule. In the days after World War I, when the Carlebach family lived in Berlin, any visiting rosh yeshivah or charity collector made for their home, knowing that generous hospitality would be available there — as well as good advice, if required. The economic recession that hit Eastern Europe in the late 1920s caused great hardship, and starvation menaced the renowned yeshivah of Ponevezh in Lithuania. "If there is no flour, there is no Torah," the Sages declared, and the cessation of Torah study became an immediate danger. In view of the situation. Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, who was then Rosh Yeshivah, decided to conduct a fundraising tour abroad, visiting one city after another and calling on potential benefactors. Unfortunately, the Jews of Eastern Europe were not the only ones facing hard times: before long, the recession affected communities elsewhere. The number of people requesting charity multiplied, and for every penny of tzedakah, a dozen hands were outstretched. To make matters worse, businessmen in the West also began to suffer. Stock markets crashed, trade slumped, and wealthy folk were impoverished. In desperation. The Ponevezher Rabbi kept trudging around seeking donations, but the money he raised did not even cover his travel expenses. Eventually, he arrived in Berlin, located the Carlebach family's address, and went straight there in the hope of receiving advice and assistance in contacting possible donors. Rabbi Naftali promptly invited him to have a meal and a rest after his difficult journey. While chatting with his host, the Ponevezher Rabbi told Rabbi Carlebach about the grim situation in Lithuania and mentioned the failure of their brethren in Germany and neighboring lands to give a helping hand. Recently, for example. a Polish-Jewish magnate had sent only meager donations with letters bewailing his own misfortunes; another philanthropist, who had previously covered one third of the yeshiva's expenses, was now barely able to make ends meet. Rabbi Kahaneman discussed these problems at length until his voice gave out. Hearing their guest's tale of woe as she prepared a meal in the kitchen, Rebbetzin Pessia Carlebach was struck to the heart. "You're going to stay here with us." she insisted. "and tomorrow. With God's help. There may be a solution to your problem." Bright and early the next morning, when everyone was fast asleep. She got up, gathered all her jewelry and treasured possessions, quietly left the house, and negotiated a loan at the pawnbroker's. Once back home. She went to the Rosh Yeshivah and joyfully presented him with a substantial check. The Ponevezher Rabbi took a hard, silent look at this check. On the one hand. It would enable him to revitalize the yeshivah and its students: on the other hand, it was not difficult to guess how she had obtained the money, and for fear of endangering her financial situation. He could not bring himself to accept the "poor man's lamb." "Well," said the Rosh Yeshivah, "this is indeed a house of God, and the benevolence practiced here knows no bounds. But accepting this money would run counter to the Sages' injunction that one should give at least a tenth, but no more than a fifth of one's means be devoted to charity. Giving tzedakah must not turn anyone into a beggar, and your donating this large sum could easily put your own households finances in jeopardy." "True enough," replied Rebbetzin Carlebach. "As you say. No more than a fifth of one's assets may be spent on tzedakah. But my object in performing the mitzvah is also to educate our children. And the Sages say that for the sake of education. Any financial sacrifice is permitted."'.

*Jewish Tales of Holy Women, By Yitzhak Buxbaum, Published by Jossey-Bass*

❖ A rav entered a small store in Tel Aviv and met two very fine bnei Torah, the sons of the owner, working behind the counter. This was in the early days of the State when Bnei Toreh were few and far between. When their father walked in, the rav called him aside. "You have two wonderful sons. What did you do to deserve them?" he asked point blank. "Oh, nothing special that I can think of." "Come on, there must be something you did at some point in your life. It can't be you

simply ended up with them just like that." After a few minutes of thinking, the man offered the following: "Back in Russia, I was living in a small town. Somehow, I accumulated a small amount of extra tzedakah money, so I asked the local rav what to do with it. He told me there were two young boys he'd like to send to the Slobodka Yeshivah, and he thought the money ought to be used for that. So I gave it to him. I heard the boys did well in their learning. That's the only zechus I can think of." "Do you happen to remember their names?" the rav asked. "Nah, it was a long time ago... Oh, wait a second. Yes, yes, I remember. One was named Yaakov Kamenetsky and the other was Aharon Kotler." COMMENT: Indeed, they "did well" in their learning. And this simple lew shares in their accomplishments. The two boys he was blessed with is inst the tip of the iceberg.

*Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ During Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz's reign at Torah Vodaath, tuition was not a bar to anyone who wanted to learn. One day as he was walking through the hall, he heard the sobbing of a woman in the financial office. Going in to investigate, Reb Shraga Feivel found a woman who had three sons in the yeshivah begging for a tuition reduction. Reb Shraga Feivel signaled to one of those working in the office to follow him out of the room. Once they were outside, he told his assistant, "Let's go see for ourselves how she is living." It was only a few blocks from the Mesivta to the woman's apartment. Knocking on the door, Reb Shraga Feivel and his assistant were admitted to a tiny apartment whose very walls cried out the poverty within. Reb Shraga Feivel stopped only long enough to leave a few dollars on the table. Back in the Mesivta office, he berated those who refused to grant the tuition reduction. "You are dealing here with dinei nefashos (matters of life and death). In the time you stood here arguing with her about whether to reduce her tuition from $5 to $3 dollars a month, you could have gone out and collected much larger sums." He instructed the office staff that from then on they were to look favorably upon all requests for tuition reductions.

*Reb Shraga Feivel, By Yonoson Rosenblum, Published by Mesorah Publications*

❖ There was an unsuccessful appeal for the Satmar Yeshivah in the Tzehlimer Beis Midrash; Afterwards, the Tzehlimer Rebbe said to the Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yoel Teitelbaum), "I don't understand it. 'In your beis medrash there is an appeal for your Yeshivah every week, and it's always successful" The Rebbe replied, 'I have already gotten my Kehillah members into the habit of giving; it has become their nature." Once, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Michoel Ber Weissmandl if he would be making his regular appeal for the Nitra yeshivah in the Satmar Beis Midrash that coming Shabbos. Rabbi Weissmandl replied that the Kehillah members had advised him to wait one more week, since the previous Shabbos there had been another appeal, and the chassidim were not likely to give generously so soon afterward. The rebbe said, "That's what a layman thinks, but the opposite is true. One mitzvah leads to another. Since they were warmed up last Shabbos, they will give this Shabbos as well. But if you wait, they will cool off.

*The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 197*

❖ Before Pesach the Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky) distributed large sums to students with families for the needs of the yam tov. Once he decided to allocate one hundred dollars to a particular student, and he gave the sum to a helper to deliver it to the student in question. Afterwards, he couldn't remember clearly what he had done, and he thought he might have given only fifty dollars. When the money in the helper's possession was checked, it was found that he actually had two one hundred dollar bills stuck together. The helper wanted to return the extra hundred, but the Steipler wouldn't let him. "No. If they've gotten stuck together, it must mean that he needs both of them." "But then someone else will lose out on his share," the helper objected. "It's all right. I've already made a note to deduct the second hundred from the funds to be distributed next year." He absolutely refused to take back any of the extra money.

*The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 261*

❖ A poor, orphaned bachur who learned in one of the Gerrer yeshivos was granted full exemption from paying tuition. One day the Lev Simcha called over the bachur's older brother and explained that it would be better for the younger brother's status if his friends did not look upon him as someone who was supported by the institution. The Lev Simcha then gave him some money to take to the yeshivah's office for his younger brother's tuition. "Don't tell anyone who gave you this money," the Lev Simcha cautioned. When the brother came to the yeshivah's office, however, the administrators refused to accept the money. They said that the Lev Simcha would be upset at them for accepting money from such a poor family. The brother returned to the Lev Simcha and reported what he had been told. The Lev Simcha immediately phoned the yeshivah and told the administrators in a pleasant tone of voice that when the family of an orphaned bachur insists on paying tuition so that they will not feel like recipients of charity, it is proper to take the money.

*From The Summit: Rav Simchah Bunim Alter (The Lev Simchah), by Simcha Leib Grossbard, published by Yeshurun Publications*

❖ Reb Yechezkel Levenstein personally gave generously to a number of causes especially yeshivos. When a certain gadol described his yeshiva's financial crisis, Reb Yechezkel immediately approached a wealthy Jew and sought his support. The man agreed to donate the entire sum needed, on condition that Reb Yechezkel would explain the words of Chazal, "Gadol hama'aseh yoser min ha'oseh" (גָּדוֹל הַמְעַשֶּׂה יוֹתֵר מִן הָעוֹשֶׂה — Bava Basra 9a), he who inspires or petitions the doer is greater than the one who actually performs the deed.' "After all," said the rich man, "why should the Rabbi's reward be greater than mine? It is I who am donating the money!" Reb Yechezkel replied: "When I knocked on your door, I was so nervous I could hear my heart thump. You did not have to experience this fear... overcoming this trepidation is worth far more than the sum that you are donating."

*Sunset, by Rabbi Hanoch Teller*

❖ On another occasion, a Rosh Yeshivah from Jerusalem who was on a fundraising mission in America, entered a shul on his itinerary and found it packed. At first the rabbi couldn't believe how fortunate he was, in that all of the town's potential donors were congregated under one roof. That was until he realized why they were there. The large and enthusiastic crowd had gathered to hear a celebrated guest speaker from overseas; Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman. As the Ponevezher Rav began to deliver his legendary electrifying appeal for greater learning and Torah observance, his colleague became crestfallen and began calculating his losses. The Rosh Yeshivah wearily girded himself for the Rav's segue into the wisdom of contributing to the Ponevezh yeshivah. He was thunderstruck when the Ponevezher Rav, having noticed the visitor's entrance into the shul, appealed for the audience to contribute handsomely to the Jerusalem yeshivah that he represented.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 158*

❖ In 1937 Reb Elchonon Wasserman came to Belgium to conduct a campaign on behalf of his yeshivah. He approached a certain talmid chacham, Rabbi Yehoshua Grossvogel of Heide, to join him in making house calls on potential contributors. Reb Yehoshua was reluctant; he had never before engaged in this type of activity. He was afraid of the humiliation that might ensue. Reb Elchonon sensed what was going through Reb Yehoshua's mind. "You should know," he said, "that if it is your lot to be humiliated, then you will suffer it at home regardless, either through your wife or neighbors. You will not escape. If so, isn't it better to attribute such humiliation, if indeed you receive some, to the merit of Torah.

*Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology*

❖ Rav Mordechai Schwab would also help people who came to Monsey to raise money and would often accompany them to potential donors. Rav Mordechai was totally comfortable collecting tzedakah. Although asking people for favors went against his grain, when it came to tzedakah, he felt he was doing the donor a favor by helping him perform a great mitzvah and did not feel uncomfortable at all. Although Rav Mordechai felt he was doing the donor a favor by asking him for tzedakah, he also showed extreme sensitivity to the donor and was careful not to pressure him. The head of a local kollel asked Rav Mordechai to accompany him to a donor with whom he had an appointment. As they were driving it began to rain heavily, Arriving at the donor's driveway Rav Mordechai said we cannot go in with wet shoes and soil the clean carpets.

Rav Mordechai suggested waiting a few minutes. After a ten-minute wait and no letup in the rain, Rav Mordechai suggested that they turn back, explaining "derachehah darchei no'am," the Torah's ways are pleasant (Mishlei 3:17). Entering the home of a potential donor with wet shoes and coats was not appropriate. The head of the kollel was beside himself. He had been anxiously waiting for this appointment since he was hoping for a large donation. Rav Mordechai tried to allay his concerns and told him that perhaps when they return he would give double that amount. Back home, the head of the kollel called and excused himself for not keeping the appointment. After hearing the reason, the man wrote a large check which was twice the amount that the head of the kollel had expected.

*From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press*

❖ A young kollel fellow who did not own his own apartment moved to the northern city of Tzefas [Safed] so that the burden his parents had assumed to pay the high rental fees for his apartment in Bnei Brak would be alleviated. One day, the new landlord came to discuss a delicate matter. In a subdued tone of voice he explained that since he was undergoing very difficult times, he must ask the young man to vacate the apartment as someone else had offered a substantially higher rent than what he was currently getting. He expressed great sympathy for the young man's situation, acknowledging that he would face tough times finding similar quarters for the rent he was paying, yet, circumstances made the decision final. He did, however, grant him a sufficient amount of time to search for another apartment. The young man was completely shattered. The very move to this distant city was for one, and only one, reason — namely, the financial savings. He felt that the rug was being pulled from underneath him. Not only would he not have gained anything, but he would actually have incurred a great financial loss. The move from one apartment to another with its related expenses would be staggering, involving expenditures that his parents could ill afford. A friend advised that since the landlord had some affiliation with the Chassidus of Ger, the kollel fellow should travel to Yerushalayim to discuss his predicament with the Gerrer Rebbe. Despite the fact that the young man had no involvement with Ger whatsoever, he accepted the advice and made the journey, trying his luck with the Rebbe. Arriving in Yerushalayim, he went directly to the home of the Gerrer Rebbe, Harav Pinchas Menachem Alter, and awaited his turn. As always, the line was long and after a couple of hours, he was ready to leave in frustration. He did, however, persevere and was ushered into the Rebbe's study. It was the first time in his life that the man had ever been face to face with a chassidic leader and it was only natural that he was quite nervous and apprehensive. His anxiety, though, did not last for long, for immediately upon his entrance the Rebbe welcomed him with a broad, friendly smile, thereby conveying the message: I am so happy to see you. The Rebbe began by asking some general questions. Then he turned to specifics regarding the young man's learning, his family and his financial situation. Feeling at ease, the young man was able to articulate his specific problem — his predicament regarding the apartment in Tzefas — in an orderly fashion. The Rebbe expressed great empathy for his difficulty, offering much needed encouragement to withstand the challenge, and blessed him with success. Several days passed and the first of the month arrived. As usual, the landlord came to collect the rent and the young man paid the amount he had paid previously. No one mentioned the impending move. The following month the same experience recurred with neither of them referring to the move. With the pressure easing, inertia followed; the young man and his family felt some sense of calm. For the most part, the apartment issue was forgotten. A long time later, while paying his rent, the young man reminded himself of the crisis he had faced earlier. As a matter of curiosity he asked the landlord what in essence had taken place that made the entire issue disappear. "Oh, its simple," he said straightforwardly. "Every month I receive a check from Rabbi Alter to make up the difference in rent. You really don't have to worry, since the checks arrive in a timely, almost automatic fashion."

*Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rabbi Shimon Yanofsky asked Shloime Gross to help a talmid chachum with his daughter's wedding expenses. Shlomie asked, "How much do you need to raise?". "Shlomie," Rabbi Yanofsky responded, "you know what it costs to make a wedding today." "But tell me what your goal is," Shlomie responded. "How much do you need?" "It makes no difference, Shlomie. Give

me whatever you want to give." This give and take continued until Shlomie withdrew his checkbook, signed a check, handed it to his friend, and said, "You fill in the amount."

*Shloime!, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 171*

❖ Why are there so many kollelim nowadays?" wealthy Mr. Tauber asked Harav Aaron Leib Steinman. "There were never that many back in the good old days." "I'd like to ask you a question," responded the Torah giant. "Why are there so many wealthy Jews nowadays? It never used to be like that. The answer is that there are so many wealthy Jews because there are so many kollelim that need to be supported. If there were less kollelim, there'd be less wealthy Jews."

*Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ The wellsprings of warmth and empathy that welled up from deep within the Bobover Rebbe (Rav Shlomo Halberstam) were not reserved for his chassidim alone. In fact, the lonelier and more forlorn the visitor, the greater the bounty of affection that was showered upon him. When meshulachim would arrive from Eretz Yisrael, their rounds inevitably included the bustling Bobover beis medrash, and often, they would take advantage of the open-door policy and visit the Bobover Rebbe. The Gemara speaks about being mefayes, placating an ani, a poor individual. The Rav turned it into an art. "An Eretz Yisraeldik Yid," he would exclaim delightedly, echoing the cry he had heard as a child on those momentous occasions when a Yid from Eretz Yisrael would arrive in Galicia. The guest would be seated, and given refreshments, and most importantly, listened to. The Rav would study the letters of recommendation that he carried, and would comment effusively. "A kollel yungerman, how wonderful, di beste sechoirah!" he would exclaim, or, "elef kinder, 11 children. You should have tremendous nachas." The weary eyes of the visitor would brighten as he recalled his home, his children, and his friends at the kollel. The visitor would revel in the reception. The hundreds of people who had barely glanced at the letters, Who had hardly even turned their heads in his direction, were forgotten, for this gentle, perceptive man, a man who carried the burdens of thousands of Yidden on his shoulders, had plenty of time.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Once a wealthy tourist visiting from America offered a large donation to the Ponevezh yeshivah as a tribute to his parents. In the course of his discussion with the Rav, the Ponevezher Rav (Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman), the gentleman remembered that his father had learned in Slobodka in his youth, at which point Rabbi Kahaneman suggested that it would be more fitting for him to make his contribution to the Slobodka yeshivah (also located in Bnai Brak).

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 158*

❖ A talmid chacham was planning to leave our Kollel because of financial need. An error landed thirty thousand dollars in his bank account. His question to Rav Pam "Do I return it? If I may keep the money, I would remain in Kollel next year!" Rabbi Pam instructed him to return the money.

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The following story is another example of Rav Mordechai Schwab's extreme sensitivity to meshulachim. His first cousin's son would come annually to collect for the yeshiva at which he taught. One year, this young man came to the house, but Rav Mordechai was not home. The Rebbetzin suggested that he come back at lunchtime. When he came back at lunchtime, again Rav Mordechai was not home. The Rebbetzin suggested he come in the evening. This time, he found Rav Mordechai at home. The Rebbetzin mentioned that this was the third time this young man came. Rav Mordechai said, "In that case, he deserves three donations, one for each of his efforts." Rav Mordechai proceeded to write out three checks, each for one hundred dollars. This young man later went to Rav Mordechai's brother, also for a donation for the yeshiva, and related the story. Rav Mordechai's brother was so impressed that he too gave a three-hundred-dollar donation.

*From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press*

❖ Raising money for the yeshivah entailed enormous self-sacrifice' As we have already seen and shall yet explore, it also involved bizyonos and degradations... but, often enough, the sweet smell of success after a particularly trying episode of mesirus nefesh. Like the time he arrived for an appointment with a philanthropist whose office was located on the eighteenth floor. "Eighteen" wasn't the lucky number that day, for the elevator service was out of operation. As the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel's escorts were figuring out what to do and weighing the wisdom of asking the gvir to leave work and come down to meet them in the lobby, Reb Nosson Zvi had already hit upon the solution: he was hobbling to the stairwell. Naturally the escorts tried to inject a little reasoning into what was seemingly a brash, unwise and dangerous decision — but to no avail. "This isn't a good idea," one of them muttered, expressing the perfectly obvious. Because of the Rosh Yeshivah's ailment, he had a choppy style of locomotion that wasn't even remotely suited for the steps — certainly not eighteen flights of them. Reb Nosson Zvi understood all of this, but he also understood that a little more than a tenth of a mile up lay a potential treasure — the possibility to acquire vitally needed funds for the yeshivah. This was going to require mesirus nefesh, but that was the way the Rosh Yeshivah operated. "Convenience" was a concept thoroughly foreign to him. Truth be told, eighteen flights would be a daunting task for many without physical disabilities, and surely no small number of individuals faced with the same dilemma would seek to reschedule the appointment. But if you are reading this book (the evidence suggests you are); you will probably not fall off your seat in surprise to hear what happened next. Each step was a battle; each flight a war. The feat took 45 stressful, strenuous, arduous minutes. And it was as mentally stressful as it was physically draining. By the time Reb Nosson made it to the destination, the mind over matter factor had long since been eroded and the Rosh Yeshivah emerged from the door and collapsed in the waiting room onto the luxurious pile carpet (thank God for that). The office staff fretted as to whom to call: 911, a doctor, or EMS? But the gvir himself, who was horrified as anyone by the Rosh Yeshivah sprawled out on the floor, instinctively knew what to do to revive the tzaddik. Without any hesitation he removed his checkbook and entered a sum that he had not even considered heretofore. It (along with some water) did the trick.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 251*

❖ Rav Shlomo Rothenberg once received a phone call from Mr. Blum, who was in search of a yeshivah for his son. "Please accept my son," he pleaded. "No yeshivah wants to take him because I can't afford to pay tuition." Rav Shlomo was quick to reassure the father. "Don't worry-we will be glad to have your son come learn in our yeshivah." A few very productive years later, the boy said his goodbyes to Yeshivah Zichron Mayir and moved on to a new setting. Soon after, Mr. Blum approached Rav Shlomo and asked him to sign a letter that would enable him to receive financial aid from the government. As Rav Shlomo read through the letter, he noticed that it stated that Mr. Blum's son was currently studying in Yeshivah Zichron Mayir. "I'm sorry," he apologized, "but I can't sign a letter that says that your son is learning in our yeshivah when he really is not. But tell me, how much money will you lose if I don't agree to sign?" "Five hundred dollars," Mr. Blum responded. A few days later, Mr. Blum was shocked to find an envelope in his mailbox containing a $500 check from none other than Rav Shlomo himself. Such was the beauty of his ways. He himself wouldn't budge from the emes... but why should someone else have to lose out?!

*From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ But the similarities between father and son went much deeper than humor. The stories of sacrifice on behalf of others that are told about Rav Yitzchak Greenblatt are hard to parallel except, - perhaps, by those told about Rav Nota Greenblatt. A classic example involves Rav Yitzchak's dream of being buried in Eretz Yisrael; for years, he saved to buy a burial plot. He had finally accrued the necessary funds when he was informed that the great tzaddik, Rav Binyamin Zilber of Bnei Brak, desperately needed to buy a new apartment for his growing family. Rav Yitzchak gave the money he had set aside for his own burial plot to Rav Binyamin, telling him to use it for a new apartment. Today, Rav - Yitzchak is buried in Queens, his grave an enduring testament to a man who cared more about others than about himself. Rav Efraim Greenblatt, author of the multi-volume set of novellae, Rivevos Efraim, and a nephew of Rav Nota, recounted a similar

experience. Rav Efraim once went to visit his grandfather, Rav Yitzchak, when he was in the hospital with advanced cancer of the throat. Rav Yitzchak pointed to a letter placed on his bedside table. "There's a Yid in Bnei Brak who doesn't have enough money for an apartment," he told his grandson. "He needs $12,000. I wrote a letter on his behalf. Go to the RCA [Rabbinical Council of America] and they will give you the addresses of all the rabbis in America. Send this letter to them and, when the money comes in, send it to the Yid in Bnei Brak."

*From Rav Nota, by R' Shmuel Botnick, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The dreadful financial situation of Lithuanian Jewry led to struggles over territory between fundraisers from Volozhin, who were well-established across Russia, and fundraisers from the newly established yeshivah, Yeshivas Slabodka in Kovno. It is said that on one of Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk's trips on behalf of Volozhin, he arrived at a certain location where he met another meshulach, a man sent from Yeshivas Slabodka. The other fundraiser, not recognizing Reb Chaim, began speaking disparagingly and falsely about Yeshivas Volozhin while praising the new yeshivah, Yeshivas Slabodka. When he heard the man's words, Reb Chaim responded calmly that the man was misusing the donations he had collected on behalf of Yeshivas Slabodka. Bewildered, the other fundraiser couldn't hide his surprise. If he had been accused of slandering Yeshivas Volozhin, that might have been true—but to call him a thief who misappropriated public money? Was this not an exaggeration? What was the connection between the two? Reb Chaim explained himself: "Here on earth, every yeshivah has its own separate account, but in Shamayim, there are no distinctions like 'Volozhin,' 'Telz,' or 'Slabodka.' There is a single joint account, and one is judged according to the effect he had on that account. Did his actions increase Torah learning, or chas v'shalom, did they decrease it? You surely receive a certain commission for the work you do on behalf of Yeshivas Slabodka; that is stolen money in your pocket. You may be working to build Torah in Kovno, but at the same time, you are trying to destroy Torah in Volozhin. You are building with one hand while destroying with the other. How, then, do you have the right to take payment for your work when you are nullifying your own accomplishments?"

*From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim*

## C. TO HAVE GOOD FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-32**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages instructed us to identify and cleave to the upright path in life (Pirkei Avos 2:9). Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai emphasized that cultivating a generous, virtuous heart (lev tov) is paramount, which encompasses being and acquiring a loyal, virtuous friend (chaver tov) and a constructive neighbor (shachen tov).

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Shragie Freedman once told the following story: Over the past few years, Jackson, New Jersey, has seen many frum families looking for affordable homes near Lakewood. Like in many nearby towns, the sudden growth brought tension between some longtime residents and the new Jewish families moving in. Chezky was one of those new arrivals. He had been searching for a home for his family in a quiet, pleasant neighborhood, and when a house went up for sale on a beautiful block, he grabbed the opportunity. Before long, the deal was closed, and his family excitedly prepared to move in. But Chezky knew that not everyone in Jackson was happy about the changes taking place. He did not want to begin with suspicion or distance. He wanted to make a kiddush Hashem from the very first day. So on moving day, while boxes were still being carried inside, Chezky took several small platters of chocolates and began knocking on his neighbors' doors. "Hi, I'm Chezky," he said warmly. "We just moved in, and I wanted to introduce myself. I know you have lived here for many

years, and we have no intention of disturbing your quality of life. If there is ever anything we do that bothers you, please let us know." The neighbors were surprised. Some had expected friction. Instead, a new neighbor was standing there with chocolates, respect, and a genuine smile. Chezky did not stop there. From time to time, he brought over another small treat. He exchanged greetings, asked how they were doing, and made friendly conversation. His wife did the same. Slowly, the walls came down. What could have been cold suspicion became warmth. Over time, Chezky and his wife developed real relationships of friendship and mutual respect with the families around them. About a year later, Chezky heard that one of his neighbors, a man named John, was planning to sell his home. It was a large, attractive house in a prime location. Chezky immediately thought of his cousin Berel, who wanted to move to the neighborhood. Chezky knocked on John's door. "I heard you may be selling your house," he said. "I have a cousin who would love to live here. It would be so nice for our families to be near each other. Would you keep him in mind?" John smiled. "Of course. When we're ready, I'll let you know." A month later, John called. "Because we like you so much," he said, "I want to give your cousin the first chance to see the house before it goes on the market." Berel came the next day. He loved the house and offered the full asking price. But almost right away, another offer came in, $30,000 higher. Berel assumed it was over. Who gives up $30,000? He was shocked when John's agent called and told him that John had accepted his offer. Later, Chezky met John and could not hold back his question. "That was very kind of you," Chezky said. "But why did you do it? You gave up a huge amount of money." John shrugged peacefully. "I appreciate having you as a neighbor," he said. "I wanted you to be comfortable and have your family nearby. Life is not all about money." John was right. Life is not all about money. For a Jew, life is about something much greater. It is about living in a way that brings honor to Hashem. A platter of chocolates, a warm greeting, a little thoughtfulness, and a sincere desire to respect another person can change a whole neighborhood.

*Table Talk, Edition 500 (Parshas Matos), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ The Baltimore community is still reeling from the news of the sudden passing of Rabbi Moshe Hauer. My friend Ovadia told me the following story: Ovadia had just moved to Baltimore from France in order to find a better chinuch opportunity for his son. He came with his family, arriving around Elul time. He didn't really know anyone yet and was living near Shaarei Zion. On Erev Rosh Hashanah, not knowing where to daven, he decided to go to Shaarei Zion. The gabbai gave him a seat, which happened to be right next to Rabbi Hauer. Ovadia had no idea that Rabbi Hauer had any connection to Shaarei Zion. They exchanged greetings and spoke briefly. Later, on Chol HaMoed Sukkos, Ovadia bumped into Rabbi Hauer again. He said "Shalom Aleichem," and they spoke more, about what Ovadia was doing in Baltimore, and how his family was settling in. We know that on Shmini Atzeres, Rabbi Hauer passed away. Afterward, Ovadia went to be menachem avel. When Rebbetzin Hauer asked his name, Ovadia said, "You don't know me, but I just met your husband." Mrs. Hauer responded, "Of course I know you. Your name is [so-and-so]. You live in [this place], and your children are in [this school]." She began listing a number of details about him. Ovadia was shocked. "How do you know all this?" he asked. She replied, "My husband just texted me about you, that there's a new family from France who moved to Baltimore, and we have to reach out to them." That was Rabbi Hauer. Despite having countless responsibilities with leading the OU, and not even being the rav of that shul, he noticed a new person in town, and one of the last things he did was text his wife to make sure they welcomed a newcomer to the community.

*Table Talk, Edition 465 (Parshas Lech Lecha), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

## D. TO ACQUIRE A GOOD FRIEND TO STUDY AND CONFIDE IN

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38–7**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What should one do with his good friend?

▪ How does one acquire a friend?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Shlomo HaMelech declared: 'Two are better than one' (Koheles 4:9). From here our Sages taught that a person must acquire a dedicated companion for himself, with whom to study Scripture and Mishnah, share meals, and confide his innermost thoughts (Avos D'Rabbi Nasan 8:3). The primary vehicle for acquiring a true friend is through pleasant speech and gentle graciousness. As a wise sage remarked: 'I marvel at one who expends great wealth to purchase servants, yet fails to acquire noble, free-spirited companions through pleasant words.'

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ One day Rabbi Yochanan was bathing in the Jordan River. Reish Lakish (then a leader of gladiators/brigands) saw him and leaped across the Jordan after him. Rabbi Yochanan looked at his mighty leap and said: 'Your strength belongs in the Torah!' Reish Lakish replied: 'Your beauty belongs to women!' Rabbi Yochanan said to him: 'If you repent and return to Torah, I will give you my sister in marriage, who is even more beautiful than I am.' Reish Lakish accepted the offer upon himself. Immediately, when he wanted to leap back across the river to fetch his weapons and clothes, his physical strength was sapped by the yoke of Torah and he could no longer make the jump! Rabbi Yochanan taught him Scripture and Mishnah and made him into a great Torah giant. Years later, a halachic dispute arose in the Study Hall: From what moment do a sword, knife, dagger, spear, hand-sickle, and harvesting-sickle become susceptible to ritual impurity? Rabbi Yochanan ruled: 'From the moment one tempers them in the furnace.' Reish Lakish ruled: 'From the moment one polishes and sharpens them in water.' In the heat of debate, Rabbi Yochanan remarked: 'A brigand knows his brigandry trade!' Cut to the heart, Reish Lakish replied: 'And how have you benefited me? Out there they called me Master (Chief), and here they call me Master (Rabbi)!' Rabbi Yochanan answered: 'I benefited you by bringing you under the wings of the Divine Presence!' Yet both scholars were deeply pained; Reish Lakish fell gravely ill and passed away, and Rabbi Yochanan mourned inconsolably for the study partner who used to raise twenty-four sharp objections to every statement and clarify the halachah.

*Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 84a*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Eliyahu was down on his luck. For years, he would pay a weekly visit to the home of the Gerrer Rosh Yeshivah (the Pnei Menachem, Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter of Gur) on Rechov Yosef Ben Mattisyahu. Not only would the Rosh Yeshivah supply him with food for his body, but perhaps even more importantly, he gave him food for his broken soul. Always a good word, a word of encouragement and praise that nourished Eliyahu's parched spirit, giving him the strength to continue despite his difficult life. During one of Eliyahu's visits, the Rosh Yeshivah realized that he seemed to be in great pain. The Rosh Yeshivah urged him to unburden himself. Brokenhearted, Eliyahu explained that his son, who was learning in a Litvishe yeshivah, was struggling and not progressing in his learning. The Pnei Menachem advised Eliyahu to have a yungerman learn with his son. "But," Eliyahu protested, "what can I do? I have no money to pay a yungerman to learn with him!" "If that is the case," the illustrious Rosh Yeshivah suggested, "tell him to come to my house. I will learn with him." Thus began a period of time when this young Litvishe bachur would come to the Pnei Menachem's house, where the Rosh Yeshivah would teach him Gemara, opening his mind and having a transformative impact. It was with tremendous pride that Eliyahu informed his son's Rosh Yeshivah that his son was learning b'chavrusa with the venerated Rosh Yeshivah of

Yeshivas Sfas Emes. The bachur's Rosh Yeshivah was a bit skeptical, and the next time he bumped into the Pnei Menachem at a meeting of Roshei Yeshivah, he asked if it was true. When the Pnei Menachem answered affirmatively, the Rosh Yeshivah exclaimed, "Now I understand why he underwent such a marked improvement!"

*From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ After Reb Avraham Dovid returned to his home from Boston on December 10, 2019 he asked Rabbi Henoch Rubin, his Gemara chavrusah, to please switch their seder from Gemara to Ohr Hachaim. Reb Henoch told him that he really preferred to stick to Gemara. Reb Henoch spoke to Mrs. Wiesz, suggesting that she find someone else to learn Ohr Hachaim with her husband. She pleaded with him to try it till after Shabbos, maybe it will work out. Two days later at the Weisz residence, where they have a small chaburah Thursday nights where they talk in learning, sing and enjoy themselves, Reb Henoch walked in looking like a ghost. He told Reb Avraham Dovid that he was ready to learn with him Ohr Hachaim. "What is happening in the world so that you should get your wish is incomprehensible!" He related to everyone in attendance about the accidental phone call he just received. Reb Aryeh Schechter zt"l was a great tzadik in Eretz Yisroel, who cared about all Jews. He reached out to many Jews who were not connected to Torah in a very loving and meaningful way. He always taught the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh. At an advanced stage of pancreatic cancer he realized that his time to leave this world was approaching. In an effort to say good-bye to his dear friends he called a very close friend of his, Rabbi Itcha (Yitzchok) Rubin, the father of Reb Henoch. However, he accidentally dialed the wrong number and called Reb Henoch instead of Reb Itcha. Reb Henoch answered the phone and upon hearing Rav Aryeh he asked how he was feeling. Reb Aryeh told him that was expecting to leave this world soon and had intended to call his father. However, once he was on the phone with Reb Henoch, he shared with him how he just finished learning one more piece of the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh with his family members. He told him how grateful he was to Hashem to have had the opportunity to learn with his family a piece from the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh so soon before his departure. "Do you hear, Henoch, the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh is so sweet, it is so holy, yes, it is sweet and it is holy." A few hours later Reb Aryeh passed on. Reb Henoch turned to Avraham Dovid "I understood the message and have come back to learn with you. I am looking forward to the seder. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh is so sweet and so holy."

*Table Talk, Edition 209, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ Many yeshivos recently started the new zman. Many schools will once again be starting. At the beginning of a new zman, there is what is called a chavrusa tumult. This is when there is a frantic search for a suitable learning partner for the new session. When Rebbetzin Leah Trenk was newly married to Rabbi Dovid Trenk, she first heard the term "chavrusa tumult," and she asked her husband to explain it'. Rabbi Trenk described the scene, the intense negotiations between potential chavrusos and match-makers, every person looking for the partner best for him -- whether in intellect, diligence, knowledge, or personality. "And what about you, what sort of chavrusa do you look for?" she asked her new husband. "Oh, I have my own routine during chavrusa tumult," Reb Dovid said. "I wait until the end of the day and I see who didn't get any chavrusa, the one with whom no one chose to learn. Then, I go to that person and make him my chavrusa. That's who I want to learn with!"

*From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The line of women waiting to receive advice and berachos from Rebbetzin Kanievsky was longer than usual one day, stretching out the door and down the steps. Rabbi Dov Weintraub was learning with Rav Chaim in the sefarim room. They locked the door to prevent being interrupted, and soon the beautiful sound of their learning emanated from the room. All of a sudden, a mentally disturbed woman standing outside the cheder hasefarim began pounding on the door. "Can't you lower your voices when you learn?" she shouted. "You're giving me a headache!" Rav Chaim could have simply told the woman that he was studying in his own house, and she was just a guest. Instead, he called out, "Selichah al hahafraah, sorry for disturbing you." He then turned to his chavrusa and said, "Let's lower our voices. If you note that either of us gets too

loud again, we'll move to the Lederman Shul to learn. I don't want to disturb this poor woman." This was by far not the only such experience. His student Rabbi Moshe Smotni recounted the times, more than thirty years before Rav Chaim's petirah, when Rav Chaim and Rabbi Moshe would walk home after davening and see the long lines of women outside the Kanievsky home, waiting to speak to the Rebbetzin. With no way to bypass the crowd that was filling the stairs, Rav Chaim told Rabbi Moshe softly, "Let's go back to the shul; I can learn there." There were times he had to remain in shul for several hours because of the large crowds seeking to speak with the Rebbetzin.

*From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll*

❖ Levi Mecklowitz, a tenth grader was very frustrated with his Gemara learning. He wanted to leave yeshivah but his chavrusa, Naftali Gross didn't let him give up. Naftali kept encouraging him and tried to help him with his learning. One day Levi came to school late again, and his rebbe reprimanded him for coming late. Levi and Naftali were learning Bava Kama. Leima Masnisim delo keben nanas. Let's say that the Mishna is not going according to Ben Nanas. Frustrated with school and learning Levi got up, and shouted this is stupid. What possible difference could there be if the Mishna goes according to Ben Nanas. Levi slammed his Gemara and ran out. He never came to yeshivah again. Fifty years later, Naftali Gross was a beloved rebbi being honored at his yeshivah's annual dinner. After he delivered an inspiring address, hundreds of talmidim crowded around Rabbi Gross to wish him mazel tov on his well-deserved honor. It was clear what a profound impact Rabbi Gross had made on his students and on Klal Yisrael. As he was speaking warmly with a former student, a waiter approached his table and asked, "Meat or chicken?" "Chicken, please," Rabbi Gross replied. Looking up into the waiter's face, Rabbi Gross noticed that the man's eyes were filled with tears. Suddenly, he gasped in recognition: "Levi?!" "Yes, it's me," said Levi, his face weathered and worn. With tears streaming down his cheeks, Levi whispered, "Naftali, tonight I finally understand what difference it makes whether the Mishnah goes according to Ben Nanas or not."

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 127*

❖ Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel at times learned with more than 70 chavrusas each week. One of Rav Nosson Tzvi's sons, related the following story: "Abba learned Torah continuously. I remember a day before Shavuos when everybody goes to rest because it is customary to learn throughout the night on Shavuos. Abba said he was unable to go rest because it was a day before Kabalos Hatorah. 'How can I rest on such a day?' Subsequently, he sat and learned throughout the night and of course, as a result he became fatigued the next day, but again he repeated, 'How can I go to bed on this day when it is the day of Kabalos Hatorah. I cannot rest on this memorable day.' On Motza'ei Shavuos, when he finally went to retire for the night, them was a knock on the door, and lo and behold it was another avreich who asked to learn with Abba zt"l. The member of the family who answered the door told the young man that the Rosh Yeshivah was extremely tired and it would be difficult for him to learn then. When Abba zt"l heard that he said, 'We never send a chavrusa away. He let him in and they sat and learned until it was almost dawn.'

*Rav Nosson Tzvi, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A frequent flyer. Mendel Sender was regularly upgraded to first class. A couple of hours into one of his flights, Mendel went back into the coach section to speak to one of the stewards and noticed that Hagaon Harav Shmuel Birnbaum, zt"l, was on the flight. He felt terrible. How could he sit there in first class while the Rosh Yeshivah was cramped like a sardine in coach? Without a second thought, he approached Reb Shmuel and offered to switch places with him. "I don't need a seat in first class," Reb Shmuel said, "I need a chavrusa. Ask the goy next to me to switch seats with you and you sit down here and we'll learn."

*Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Later in life, Reb Dovid Feinstein developed a close connection with Rav Zalman Leib Teitelbaum of Satmar. The Satmar Rebbe wanted very much to arrange to learn b'chavrusa with the Rosh Yeshivah, and suggested different time slots. Reb Dovid could not find a time that was open, but what the Satmar Rebbe found most extraordinary and repeated to his

own chassidim was Reb Dovid's reply when he asked about learning on Thursday nights. Reb Dovid explained that he could not, because that was when he went shopping for Shabbos, in order to help the Rebbetzin!

*From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One of Rav Tendler's chavrusas related the following story: Rav Tendler was once learning with someone in his office, and another person knocked insistently at the locked door. After a long period of ignoring the continuous knocking, his chavrusa at the time asked him if he would respond to it. Rabbi Tendler answered that if it were truly an emergency, they would knock down the door."

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 285*

❖ The Ponevezher Rav's (Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman's) longtime associate in Britain, Yaakov Levinson, arranged a key appointment between the Rav and a renowned gvir in London. Putting this meeting together was by no means a facile endeavor, and Levinson worked tirelessly to coordinate it. Just prior to the long-awaited encounter, the Rav learned that Levinson had a regular learning session scheduled for the same time that the meeting was to take place. He therefore insisted that Levinson not accompany him, even if it meant canceling the appointment. This was real insight for Yaakov Levinson. Up until then he had thought that the Ponevezher Rav would do anything for the sake of the yeshivah. He then learned that the Rav would do anything — even sacrifice the yeshivah's interests — for the sake of learning Torah. Even for one single individual.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 160*

❖ Even when learning alone in his lodgings, Reb Elchonon Wasserman would place another copy of the same tractate on the table. IF anyone came into the room and tarried after attending to his business, Reb Elchonon would immediately suggest that the visitor join him in studying, saying: "since 'two are better than one' we can study together if you wish.

*Reb Elchonon, By Rabbi Aharon Sorasky, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Shoey Balsam was in tenth grade, and was an average learner. He worked very hard though. One day his Rebbi, Rabbi Neuwirth was going to give a comprehensive test on three blat of Gemara. Rabbi Neuwirth knew that if Shoey worked hard he would be able to get a good grade. However Shoey chose a chavrusa with one of the weakest boys in the class. Close to the test, Rabbi Neuwirth called Shoey over and told him that he was surprised that he chose that chavrusa. If he chose a better one he would likely be able to do much better. Shoey said when he was in eighth grade, he was the weakest in the class. One day the best boy offered to learn with him. Because he learned with me I did much better than I would normally have. It was the first time I tasted success and that changed the trajectory of my learning. I made a vow to myself that if there was a weaker boy in the class that I can help, then I would help him no matter what the cost. A good grade on a test is a small price to pay to help another boy.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 136*

❖ Reb Daniel Beren and his family had recently moved to San Diego, California, from Baltimore. Slowly but surely, they were all adjusting to life in a new city that did not have a large religious population. One of the things that was very important to R' Daniel was to find a chavrusa to learn with, and he was pleased when he was able to do so. Each evening, R' Daniel and his chavrusa would go to Congregation Beth Jacob, a shul near their homes, where they could learn in the shul's library. One Thursday evening, as R' Daniel and his chavrusa arrived at the shul, they found that chairs were being set up in the library for a shul event. The two then began looking around the shul for another room in which to learn. They found an empty room adjoining the small Beis medrash, where they quickly sat down to learn. Coming from the Beis Hamedrash was the voice of the Rav of the shul, Rav Avrohom Bogopolsky, who was delivering his weekly Thursday night Chumash shiur. Every few minutes, R' Daniel and his chavrusa stopped to listen to Rav Bogopolsky's shiur. His powerful voice and exuberance in the presentation of his shiur were amazing. He certainly had a way of captivating his audience! After about

an hour, Rav Bogopolsky's shiur was finished. As Rav Bogopolsky walked out of the Beis Hamedrash and passed through the room where R' Daniel and his chavrusa were learning, both young men stood up and walked over to him. They told him that they had eavesdropped on his shiur and had really enjoyed it. Rav Bogopolsky asked them to please be honest with him and tell him if they thought that he sounded like he was delivering an exciting shiur. Did they feel that he was putting his "heart and soul" into the presentation of the shiur? "Of course," R' Daniel replied. "It was a powerful shiur!" "Really?" Rav Bogopolsky asked a second time. "Are you sure? Did it sound like I was putting in all my energy into giving the shiur?" The two men were puzzled. They couldn't understand why Rav Bogopolsky was asking them so many times about the way the shiur came across. Once again, R' Daniel said. "It sounded like a wonderful, well-prepared shiur. Do you mind if we ask why it is so important for you to know what we thought of it?" Rav Bogopolsky smiled and answered. "Only one person attended tonight's shiur. Although I was giving the shiur to him alone, I wanted him to feel the excitement in the contents of the shiur. I wanted to make sure that I presented the shiur to him in the same way that I would have given it had the room been filled to capacity." For Rav Bogopolsky, speaking to one person was just as important as speaking to a hundred people. He put his personal kavod aside as he strove to make that one man feel special.

*For Goodness' Sake, By Rabbi Boruch Brull, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

## E. NOT TO ASSOCIATE WITH OR SUPPORT EVIL PEOPLE

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 24-47**

*As the Torah says, "Do not follow the majority for evil" (Shemos 23:2, Parshas Mishpatim)*

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Torah commands: 'You shall not follow a multitude to do evil' (Shemos 23:2). We are cautioned by this verse never to strengthen the hands of wicked individuals, nor to forge friendships or partnerships with those who practice wickedness.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Thirteen years ago (1921) in Ponevezh, Lithuania, the maskilim attempted to establish their kind of school, but the Rav, Rabbi Shlomo Joseph Kahaneman, [who later escaped the Holocaust and built the magnificent Ponevezh Torah complex in Bnei Brak] opposed them. Thanks to his opposition he brought upon himself the wrath of powerful elements of the city. He asked the sainted Chofetz Chaim's advice on how to react. The Chofetz Chaim answered, "I will give you practical advice. During a revolution when there are two opposing sides, the mass of the population may wish to remain neutral, knowing that it has nothing to gain from either side. But the warring factions will not permit neutrality: They force everyone to choose sides. Then, if someone asks which side to join, what should he be advised? He is told to decide which side is stronger and join it! For you, the answer is the same. If you accede to your powerful opposition, they will be on your side, but G-d will be against you. But if you do G-d's will, G-d will be on your side and the opposition will be against you. Now — decide which side is stronger and join it."

*Reb Elchonon, By Rabbi Aharon Sorasky, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## F. NOT TO HAVE BAD FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-33**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

We are commanded to distance ourselves completely from any corrupt path (Pirkei Avos 2:9). Our Sages explain that this demands avoiding a corrupt heart (lev ra), which includes guarding oneself against becoming or associating with a corrupt companion (chaver ra) or a harmful neighbor (shachen ra).

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 5)**

Negative companions are extraordinarily dangerous because they sabotage watchfulness (zehirus). Even when a person inwardly desires to improve, the fear of mockery or the social pressure of cynical peers will paralyze him from taking action. Associating with those who minimize spiritual growth gradually erodes one's own ethical standards.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 14)**

Spending excessive time in the company of those whose lives revolve around materialism and social prestige makes it exceedingly difficult to maintain spiritual clarity.

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Once, when the subject of the closing of the Volozhin Yeshivah was raised, The Brisker Rav, R. Yitzchok Ze'ev haLevi zt"l, responded, "The yeshivah closed because it needed to close. He didn't explain himself, and those present were amazed at the statement. They all knew that whenever the subject had mentioned in his presence, it was obvious from his response that the closing of the yeshivah had been an overwhelming loss to him — comparable in its own way to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. What could The Brisker Rav have meant when he said "needed" to happen. The Brisker Rav, explained. It was told that at the time of the laying of the cornerstone of building of the yeshivah, my ancestor, R. Chaim of Volozhin, began weeping. He cried so much that they commented that would be no need for water to make cement for the building; tears would suffice. What made him weep so, at the very moment when he should have been filled with joy that his dream of building a yeshivah was being fulfilled? He saw that very moment as an opportunity to pray from the depths of his heart for the success of the yeshivah. The glorious legacy of the yeshivah is well known. The many students who blossomed there; the many who went on to open their own centers of Torah learning; many others who took the initiative to build yeshivos because they had the example of the Volozhin Yeshivah. The growth of Torah in Lithuania and in the surrounding countries was due to the inspiration provided by the yeshivah; without it, God forbid, Torah might have been all but forgotten. Therefore, it was certainly fitting, that tears be shed in prayer for the continued existence of the yeshivah. But, even more so, there was a need to pray that the yeshivah be closed if the need arose. Over the years Klal Yisrael underwent many changes. The Haskalah (Enlightenment Movement), which began in Germany, slowly spread to the rest of Europe. Followers of its philosophies were found even in the yeshivos, and not even the Volozhin Yeshivah remained immune. Several talmidim, who had become proponents of the Haskalah, threatened to bring ruin to the yeshivah from within. This was extremely upsetting to the Netziv, whose only ambition was to continue the tradition started by R. Chaim of Volozhin. Thus, it was better that the yeshivah close than become rotten from the inside. As hard as it had been to maintain the yeshivah, it was even more difficult to close it. Intense prayers were necessary for the successful opening and continued

existence of the yeshivah, but it was even more appropriate to pray that the yeshivah have the merit to close if need be. Who knows, perhaps the tears of R. Chaim of Volozhin were for that very purpose — a prayer that the yeshivah would have the siyata DiShemaya (Divine assistance) to be closed if necessary.

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 24*

❖ A few years after I was born, my Dad met a stranger who was new to our small Texas town. From the beginning, Dad was fascinated with this enchanting newcomer and soon invited him to live with our family. The stranger was quickly accepted and was around from then on. As I grew up, I never questioned his place in my family. In my young mind, he had a special niche. My parents were complementary instructors: Mom taught me good from evil, and Dad taught me to obey. But the stranger... he was our storyteller. He would keep us spellbound for hours on end with adventures, mysteries and comedies. If I wanted to know anything about politics, history or science, he always knew the answers about the past, understood the present and even seemed able to predict the future! He took my family to the first major league ball game. He made me laugh, and he made me cry. The stranger never stopped talking, but Dad didn't seem to mind. Sometimes, Mom would get up quietly while the rest of us were shushing each other to listen to what he had to say, and she would go to the kitchen for peace and quiet. (I wonder now if she ever prayed for the stranger to leave.) Dad ruled our household with certain moral convictions, but the stranger never felt obligated to honor them. Profanity, for example, was not allowed in our home... Not from us, our friends or any visitors. Our longtime visitor, however, got away with four-letter words that burned my ears and made my dad squirm and my mother blush. My Dad didn't permit the liberal use of alcohol. But the stranger encouraged us to try it on a regular basis. He made cigarettes look cool, cigars manly and pipes distinguished. He talked freely (much too freely!) about sex. His comments were sometimes blatant, sometimes suggestive, and generally embarrassing. I now know that my early concepts about relationships were influenced strongly by the stranger. Time after time, he opposed the values of my parents, yet he was seldom rebuked... And NEVER asked to leave. More than fifty years have passed since the stranger moved in with our family. He has blended right in and is not nearly as fascinating as he was at first. Still, if you could walk into my parents' den today, you would still find him sitting over in his corner, waiting for someone to listen to him talk and watch him draw his pictures. His name? We just call him, "TV." He has a younger sister now. We call her "Computer."

*Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology*

## G. NOT TO BE FRIENDS WITH AN ANGRY PERSON

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-18**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Prophet admonishes: 'Desist from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for of what account is he?' (Yeshayahu 2:22). The Zohar explains that one who succumbs to habitual rage drives away his holy neshamah and tears his spiritual soul apart in his anger. In place of the sacred soul settles an alien, impure spirit, transforming his anger into an altar for idolatry. It is therefore strictly forbidden to associate in friendship with such a person (Mishlei 22:24).

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Simchah Zelig Riger was the posek of Brisk, during the time of Rav Chaim Brisker. Although Rav Simchah Zelig was rigid in ruling as the Torah demands, he was soft in his relationships with people. His good-heartedness and his tolerance of others were immeasurable. Rav Velvel Aidelman, a native of Brisk, recalled: "I had the merit to live together

with Rav Simchah Zelig for a period of several weeks. It was at the end of the summer vacation. His family had gone on vacation to one of the resort towns, and he stayed behind. To comply with the Halachah that states that a person should not live alone, he asked me to come and stay with him until his family came home. I agreed to his request. One day during that period, when Rav Simchah Zelig was on his way home from shul and I was walking behind him, he was approached by a peculiar person. The man asked if he was permitted to marry a Jewish woman and if he would indeed merit to get married. Rav Simchah Zelig smiled broadly and warmly, answering softly, 'Ya mein kind, ya. [Yes, my child, yes].' The man did not leave him alone; he walked with him another few steps and asked the question again. Rav Simchah Zelig did not lose patience with him. His face shone with a beautiful radiance, and he said again as if this was the first time, 'Ya mein kind, ya.' It seemed that the answer had registered in the man's head for he turned around to go, but after a few steps, he came back to ask his 'difficult' question. 'Rebbe, will I merit to marry a kosher Jewish woman?' Rav Simchah Zelig, his face glowing, repeated his answer. The same scene repeated itself several more times. They finally reached the stairwell that led to Rav Simchah Zelig's house, and I went in before them, hearing behind me the continuation of their strange conversation. We reached the door and the fellow finally appeared satisfied. I took this opportunity to usher Rav Simchah Zelig into the house and close the door quickly. But my efforts failed. After a few minutes, there came a knock at the door. I was perplexed. But when I asked Rav Simchah Zelig whether I should lock the door, he told me immediately, 'No, let him come in and ask.' I didn't understand. Was there no limit to the amount of patience one had to show this man? 'How much longer?' I asked tersely. But Rav Simchah Zelig, as if he had all the time in the world, answered, 'A man should always be pliable like a reed!' There is no way to describe how extraordinarily patient he was. The man came inside and continued to bother him while Rav Simchah Zelig washed his hands and ate his meal. After Birkas HaMazon, Rav Simchah Zelig stood up to go to his bed and rest a bit, but the man kept asking his timeless question, 'Rebbe, will I merit marrying a Jewish woman?' Every time he answered him with love and with the same sparkle in his eye, as if this question was the only thing in the world that occupied him. After the man finally left, I went to the home of Rav Simchah Zelig's son-in-law to ask how to deal with the man. 'This didn't start today,' explained the son-in-law. 'He's been at it already for several weeks, but my father-in-law won't let us do anything about it.'"

*From Reb Chaim Brisker, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim*

## H. NOT TO GAZE AT AN EVIL PERSON

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-7**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to gaze upon the countenance of an unrepentant wicked person (Megillah 28a). One who gazes at the face of the wicked causes his eyesight to grow dim, as Scripture states: 'And it came to pass that when Yitzchak was old, his eyes grew dim from seeing' (Bereishis 27:1) — which Chazal attribute to having gazed upon his wicked son Eisav.

## I. NOT TO WISH "SHALOM" TO AN EVIL PERSON

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-37**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What should one do if this will cause bad feelings?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is forbidden to initiate a greeting of 'Shalom' to a wicked person. However, if one must extend a greeting to preserve communal peace (darchei shalom), one may utter the word 'Shalom' while directing his intention toward his Torah teacher or toward Hashem, whose holy Name is Peace, as it is written: 'And you shall say thus: To life! May you be in peace' (Shmuel I 25:6). When David dispatched his men to the wicked Naval, he instructed them to intend the greeting of peace for Hashem rather than for Naval.

## J. TO DISLIKE A PURPOSEFUL, SPITEFUL SINNER WHO REFUSES TO CHANGE

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-24**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Our Sages taught (Pesachim 113b) that if one witnesses a person commit a sin and admonishes him privately and gently, yet the transgressor spitefully refuses to repent, it is a mitzvah to despise the evil in that person, as Scripture states: 'The fear of Hashem is to hate evil' (Mishlei 8:13). This is the 'enemy' to whom the Torah refers when commanding assistance: 'If you see the donkey of your enemy collapsed under its burden' (Shemos 23:5). In all other circumstances, however, harboring personal hatred over mundane or material matters is strictly forbidden.

## K. TO CURSE AN EVIL PERSON WHENEVER YOU MENTION HIS NAME

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 37-2**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Whoever mentions the name of a notorious, wicked person and fails to curse his name violates an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh), as Scripture states: 'The name of the wicked shall rot' (Mishlei 10:7; Yoma 38b).

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- Discuss how this is the source for saying "Yemach Shemo Vezichro" when we mention the name of very evil people like Hitler or Stalin.

## L. NOT TO INGRATIATE YOURSELF TO GENTILES

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 20**

*As the Torah says, nor shall you seek their favor (Devarim 7:2, Parshas Va'eschanan)*

**QUESTIONS ADDRESSED BY THE HALACHAH**

- Is it ok to admire a non-Jewish celebrity?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

Under the prohibition of lo sechanem (Devarim 7:2), one must not give a gratuitous gift (matnas chinam) to an idolater unless a prior acquaintance already exists, nor speak in praise of him or laud his actions in a manner that validates idolatrous culture.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

## HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

We don't learn from books alone. We learn just as much from the people that we associate with and spend time with. It is therefore imperative that we spend as much time as we can with people that can teach us how to live both through their words, as well as their actions. This association is another way to learn the divine wisdom that helps us to emulate Hashem.

We want to associate with peers who encourage us to strive for the lofty goals of perfection of character, and we don't want to associate too closely with people who denigrate that goal, or who give priority to more mundane goals.

Regarding our relations to the nations around us, we face a dialectical challenge. On one hand we are supposed to influence the nations around us by means of our example and behavior. On the other hand, an association that becomes too close will over time lead our small nation towards becoming too acculturated and assimilated into our host cultures.

A common metaphor that is used compares our situation to fire and water. We Jewish nation is compared to fire and the nations to water. Our historic mission is to warm the water around us, to bring it closer to Hashem and to morality. The sociological challenge we face is that when the fire becomes immersed in the water, rather than heat the water, the water extinguishes the fire.

If we become too immersed in the culture around us, rather than inspire the world, we will lose our own integrity. Indeed, how does one heat the water? By using a pot. A pot allows the fire to come close to the water without the fire becoming extinguished.

When we apply this metaphor to our social position among the nations, we learn that in order for us to survive as a nation as well as succeed in inspiring humanity, we need to maintain a separate and distinct entity, symbolized by the pot. But at the same time, we do need to be close enough and warm enough to the nations around us in order to make a Kiddush Hashem, and fulfill our role as a light to the nations.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

**RAMBAM**

If one admires, praises, and tries to ingratiate himself to gentiles, he may become attached to them and learn and emulate their lifestyle.

**SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 426)**

This mitzvah will help one to avoid trying to do things to seek and gain gentile approval, and will help prevent him from copying their ways.

**SFAS EMES**

• In Parshas Vayeishev, Scripture describes the harrowing journey of Yosef HaTzaddik, who was sold as a slave into Egypt: 'And Hashem was with Yosef, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.' Our Sages note that even while sweeping floors and managing domestic chores in Potiphar's mansion, the divine presence rested upon Yosef so visibly that his pagan master acknowledged Hashem's favor. The Sfas Emes explains that a slave is defined not by physical chains, but by internal psychology. A person who derives his self-worth from the approval, praise, and smiles of powerful masters is a slave in the deepest sense, even if he wears expensive clothing. Yosef understood that Potiphar was merely an instrument in the hands of divine providence. He served Potiphar with impeccable professional honesty, yet his soul remained completely detached from Egyptian decadence. We can be courteous, reliable, and exemplary citizens in the workplace without groveling for secular validation. By anchoring our identity in Hashem alone, we maintain absolute inner freedom wherever providence places us (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeishev 5642).

• In Parshas Vayishlach, the Torah captures the profound ideological divergence between the twin brothers during their dramatic reunion. The Sfas Emes examines how fawning over worldly conquerors endorses the spiritual pathology of Esav. The Sfas Emes explains that the secular mindset of Esav is built upon rapacious accumulation, military swagger, and ostentatious display. Esav measures life by numbers—how much land he conquers, how much wealth he hoards, and how many soldiers bow before his throne. Because this appetite is physical and finite, it is bottomless; a materialist is never satisfied, perpetually suffering from internal lack. True wealth is not measured by the size of our bank accounts or the applause of high society. When we cultivate gratitude for what Hashem provides, we possess everything and stand tall above the vanity of the world (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5634).

• In Parshas Va'etchanan, Moshe Rabbeinu explains why the Almighty entered into an eternal covenant with Israel: 'Not because you were more numerous than any people did Hashem set His love upon you and choose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples.' Our Sages in Maseches Chullin interpret this verse as an exquisite praise of Jewish character: Hashem said to Israel, 'I desire you because even when I bestow greatness upon you, you diminish yourselves before Me.' Avraham called himself dust and ashes, Moshe and Aharon proclaimed 'what are we,' and David called himself a worm. The Sfas Emes explains that the nations of the world build their empires upon raw physical power, massive populations, and intimidating military displays. Israel, however, was engineered to operate on an entirely different spiritual frequency. Our strength derives not from physical size, but from self-nullification before the Creator. We do not need to rely on the shifting sympathies of worldly leaders to secure our future. By deepening our humility and loyalty to Hashem, we dwell in the shelter of the Most High, protected by His eternal love (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5638).

• The Midrash on Parshas Yisro quotes the stirring prophetic declaration of Jeremiah: 'Hashem, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction, to You the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say: Surely our fathers inherited falsehood, vanity in which there is no profit.' Our Sages teach that at Mount Sinai, Hashem offered the Torah to all seventy nations, but only Israel stepped forward to declare, 'We will do and we

will hear.' Why did Jeremiah emphasize that in the ultimate future, the nations of the world will come to recognize their own errors and seek guidance from Israel? The Sfas Emes explains that the Jewish people were chosen at Sinai to serve as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. When a person flatters the wicked, his behavior demonstrates that he does not understand the majesty of his own birthright. We were not placed in this world to blend into the crowd or seek popularity. By standing tall as proud, faithful servants of the Almighty, we fulfill our royal mission to be a radiant moral guide for humanity (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Yisro 5632).

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- What is the intent behind this prohibition?
- Discuss the tension between trying to be a role model for the nations, and avoiding becoming too close and becoming acculturated. Discuss the analogy of the Jewish people being like fire and the nations like water. In order to heat the water you need a pot or else the water will extinguish the fire.
- Discuss what this mitzvah can teach us about watching television and movies.

# 11. Not to participate in gentile festivities or emulate their customs

## A. NOT TO EAT AT A GENTILE WEDDING

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 15**

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Would this be permitted if one brings his own kosher food?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

It is strictly forbidden to dine at a wedding banquet held by a gentile for his son or daughter (Shemos 34:15). This prohibition applies even if the Jew eats exclusively his own strictly kosher food and his own Jewish servant stands and attends to him, because participating in the festivities fosters intimate fellowship that can lead to intermarriage or idolatrous compromise (Avodah Zarah 8a).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

## B. NOT TO EAT HOMEMADE BREAD BAKED BY A GENTILE TO PROTECT FROM INTERMARRIAGE

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-7**

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Is there anything a Jew can do to be permitted to eat bread made by a non-Jew?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is rabbinically forbidden to eat bread baked exclusively by a non-Jew (pas akum), an enactment decreed by Chazal to prevent social intimacy that could lead to intermarriage. The bread remains forbidden unless a Jew participates in the baking process, at least to the extent of throwing a piece of wood into the fire or stoking the oven to ignite the flame.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ It was taught in a Braisa that Rabbi Yishmael says: 'How can Jews living outside the Land of Israel inadvertently transgress the prohibition of idolatrous feasts even while eating kosher food? When a gentile makes a wedding banquet for his son and invites all the Jews in his town—even though the Jewish guests eat their own kosher food and drink their own kosher wine, with their own Jewish attendant standing and serving them—Scripture regards them as though they ate from sacrifices to idols, as it is written (Shemos 34:15): "And he will invite you, and you will eat of his sacrifice"—from the very moment of accepting the invitation!' And regarding the protective decree on bread (Pat Akum): When Rav Dimi came from the Land of Israel, he recounted: 'Once Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (Rebbi) went out to the field, and a gentile brought before him a fine oven-baked loaf made from a full se'ah of flour. Rebbi exclaimed: "How lovely is this loaf! Why did the Sages see fit to forbid it?" The Gemara interjects in astonishment: "Why did the Sages see fit to forbid it?! Because of intermarriage (mishum chasnus)!" Rather, Rebbi meant to ask: "Why did the Sages see fit to forbid it even out in an open field (where social dining does not occur)?" The people who overheard Rebbi thought that he had permitted the bread—but that was not so; Rebbi never permitted the bread!'

*Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 8a & 35b*

## C. NOT TO EAT ELEGANT FOOD COOKED BY A GENTILE

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-8**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Prestigious food cooked by a non-Jew (bishul akum) — specifically foods that cannot be eaten raw and are fit to be served upon a royal banquet table (oleh al shulchan melachim) — is rabbinically forbidden to prevent social assimilation and intermarriage. Even a simple food such as an egg cooked by a non-Jew in the presence of a Jew is prohibited, and according to strict halachic rulings, it remains forbidden even if a Jew merely ignited the flame without placing the food upon the fire.

**SFAS EMES**

• Our Sages enacted the prohibition of bishul akum—forbidding the consumption of prominent, table-worthy foods cooked entirely by a non-Jew, even when every ingredient is strictly kosher (Avodah Zarah 35b, Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 113). In Parashas Acharei Mos (5659), the Sfas Emes explains that the Sages saw with holy spirit how shared banquets blur the spiritual boundary between Israel and the nations, and erected a protective fence around the kitchen and dining table (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5659).

• In Parashas Shemini (5637), on Rashi's comment 'Zos ha-chayah—lefi she-Bnei Yisrael deveikim ba-chayim', the Sfas Emes teaches that food does far more than nourish the physical body; it carries the spiritual imprint of the hands and intention that prepared it for the table. When a Jew participates in lighting the fire or cooking the

meal (bishul Yisrael), he infuses the preparation of the food with covenantal holiness (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5637).

• In Parashas Vayikra (5646), commenting on the Midrash 'Barchu Hashem mal'achav', the Sfas Emes explains that the Torah's laws of the table elevate human beings to the level of ministering angels by turning ordinary meals into acts of divine service. Requiring Jewish involvement in cooking significant foods ensures that our dining table remains a miniature altar (shulchan domeh le-mizbei'ach) (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Vayikra 5646).

• In Parashas Shoftim (5650), on the verse 'Tamim tih'yeh im Hashem Elokecha', the Sfas Emes writes that wholehearted integrity (temimus) with Hashem requires guarding against subtle social pressures that pull a Jew away from his heritage. The rabbinic boundary of bishul akum protects the social and spiritual integrity of the Jewish family (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5650).

• In Parshas Balak, the Midrash states that Hashem left the nations with no excuse to complain, 'You distanced us.' The Sfas Emes explains that at the beginning of Creation, Hashem's kingship rested equally over all creatures. Afterward, however, the Jewish people separated themselves from pagan corruption and rose upward to cleave to Hashem—and by standing still, the nations automatically became distant. Keeping the boundaries of holiness does not push anyone away; it simply elevates Israel to cling to the Creator. In Parashas Balak (5640), on the prophecy 'Hen am levadad yishkon' ('Behold, it is a people that shall dwell alone,' Bamidbar 23:9), the Sfas Emes explains that Israel's distinctness at the table is not rooted in arrogance or hostility toward others; it is the necessary vessel for preserving our mission as a kingdom of priests. When a Jew kindles the flame or places the pot on the fire, he stamps the meal with the seal of Sinai (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Balak 5640).

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ In the beginning of his internment in the concentration camp, the Klausenberger Rebbe decided he would drink plain milk, as long as nothing had been mixed into it, even though it hadn't been milked under the supervision of a Jew. Later he changed his mind and stopped drinking this milk. This change of heart resulted one time when his stomach swelled, a symptom of starvation. The Rebbe heard those near him whispering that his end was near. Immediately, he said to himself, If I am going to die anyway, why should I drink milk that was not watched by a Jew? He stopped drinking the milk. Several days later, the Rebbe's health returned and the swelling of his stomach disappeared." One of the Rebbe's fellow inmates recalled how the Rebbe would not even take a sip of coffee from the camp kitchen, except on very rare occasions when he was assured that the water had been heated in a special cauldron and that a Jew had added some coals to the fire under the cauldron so that it would not be bishul akum.

*The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press*

## D. NOT TO DRINK UNCOOKED WINE TOUCHED BY A GENTILE

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-10**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Uncooked kosher wine that has been poured or touched by a non-Jew is rabbinically forbidden for consumption (stam yeinam), an enactment instituted by Chazal as a protective safeguard to prevent social intimacy that could lead to intermarriage or idolatrous libations.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ An incident occurred involving Boethus ben Zonin, who was transporting a cargo of dried figs aboard a ship when a barrel of forbidden gentile wine broke open and spilled over the figs. He brought the case before the Sages, and they ruled the entire cargo of dried figs permitted for consumption, because vinegar-like wine that spills onto sweet dried figs spoils their taste rather than enhancing it.

*Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 5:2*

## E. TO BE SEPARATE FROM THE GENTILES BY NOT EMULATING GENTILE CUSTOMS

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 21**

*As the Torah says, and in their statutes you shall not walk (Vayikra 18:3, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

▪ In which ways is one not supposed to emulate the gentiles?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

A Jew must remain distinct from other nations and avoid emulating their distinctive dress or adopting their characteristic hairstyles, as Scripture commands: 'And you shall not walk in their statutes' (Vayikra 18:3; 20:23).

Accordingly, one must not shave the hair on the sides of the head while leaving a central crest in the middle (blorit), nor shave the front of the head from ear to ear while leaving long growth behind in the manner of idolatrous customs. Whoever adopts any of these styles or similar practices violates this prohibition.

However, if an individual is an official close to the governing authorities and needs to wear their style of attire to represent the Jewish community effectively, he is permitted to wear their clothing and groom his hair according to their standard (Baba Kama 83a).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

We don't learn from books alone. We learn just as much from the people that we associate with and spend time with. It is therefore imperative that we spend as much time as we can with people that can teach us how to live both through their words, as well as their actions. This association is another way to learn the divine wisdom, that helps us to emulate Hashem.

We want to associate with peers who encourage us to strive for the lofty goals of perfection of character, and we don't want to associate too closely with people who denigrate that goal, or who give priority to more mundane goals.

Regarding our relations to the nations around us, we face a dialectical challenge. On one hand we are supposed to influence the nations around us by means of our example and behavior. On the other hand, an association that becomes too close will over time lead our small nation towards becoming too acculturated and assimilated into our host cultures.

A common metaphor that is used compares our situation to fire and water. We Jewish nation is compared to fire and the nations to water. Our historic mission is to warm the water around us, to bring it closer to Hashem and to morality. The sociological challenge we face is that when the fire becomes immersed in the water, rather than heat the water, the water extinguishes the fire.

If we become too immersed in the culture around us, rather than inspire the world, we will lose our own integrity. Indeed, how does one heat the water? By using a pot. A pot allows the fire to come close to the water without the fire becoming extinguished.

When we apply this metaphor to our social position among the nations, we learn that in order for us to survive as a nation as well as succeed in inspiring humanity, we need to maintain a separate and distinct entity, symbolized by the pot. But at the same time, we do need to be close enough and warm enough to the nations around us in order to make a Kiddush Hashem, and fulfill our role as a light to the nations.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 262)

Wearing styles of clothing that are specific to gentiles and adopting their customs shows respect and admiration for their culture. We want to avoid showing respect to their modes of life. (They are supposed to learn from us, not the other way around).

### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Shemini, following the tragic passing of Nadav and Avihu, the Torah delineates the laws of kosher animals, birds, and fish. The Sfas Emes explains that raw gold extracted from the ground is heavily contaminated with dirt, gravel, and base metals. To transform that coarse ore into a gleaming royal crown, it must be placed into a smelting furnace and subjected to intense refining fire, burning away every trace of dross. Human nature in this physical world is similarly coarse, driven by animal impulses, selfish lusts, and worldly distractions. Our unique clothing, dietary disciplines, and moral standards are not arbitrary social walls. They are the loving polish that removes worldly coarseness and allows our souls to shine with heavenly brilliance (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5634).

• At the conclusion of the dietary laws in Parshas Shemini, the Torah makes an extraordinary connection to the Exodus: 'For I am Hashem who brings you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.' Our Sages in the Gemara remark on the unique grammatical word hama'aleh (who brings you up): the Almighty declared, 'Even if I had taken Israel out of Egypt for this sole purpose—that they do not defile themselves with creepy crawly creatures—it would have been sufficient.' Why would the monumental historical event of the Exodus be reduced to the prohibition of eating insects and avoiding coarse foreign behaviors? The Sfas Emes explains that Egyptian slavery went far beyond physical bondage under brick and mortar; it was a profound spiritual degradation. The senses of the Jewish people had become dulled, unable to distinguish between genuine beauty and repulsive decay. We were redeemed from the degradation of Egypt to live as dignified aristocrats of the spirit. By rejecting coarse cultural trends, we celebrate the true freedom of living in the light of the divine presence (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5647).

• In Parshas Shemini, Scripture introduces the dietary boundaries with the phrase: 'This is the living thing (zos hachayah) that you may eat among all the beasts that are on the earth.' Rashi, citing the Midrash, notes the unusual phrase zos hachayah, interpreting it as an allusion to life itself: because Israel cleaves to the living God, they are designated as 'living,' and therefore they must consume only foods that sustain spiritual vitality. The Sfas Emes explains that what a person consumes—both through his mouth and through his eyes and ears—becomes the literal substance of his consciousness. Every biological creature is sustained by nutrients that match its nature; a cow cannot eat meat, and an eagle cannot thrive on grass. The Jewish soul is an offshoot of the living God; its natural sustenance is holiness, truth, and spiritual purity. We must be vigilant about what we allow to enter our minds and homes. By choosing distinct, holy environments, we guard our spiritual vitality and stay firmly attached to the living God (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5637).

• In Parshas Shoftim, the Torah issues an absolute warning against cultural assimilation: 'When you come into the land that Hashem your God gives you, you shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations.' The Torah follows this warning by listing pagan divination, child sacrifice, necromancy, and superstition, concluding with the famous imperative: 'You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your God.' Why does the Torah categorize pagan cultural practices as 'abominations' rather than ordinary mistaken beliefs? The Sfas Emes explains that pagan culture arose from observing the fractured, diverse forces of the physical world. Because ancient peoples saw wind, rain, fire, and earthquakes acting independently, they believed each natural force was governed by a separate deity. Their customs, theater, and social rituals mirrored this fractured perspective, celebrating conflict, chaotic passions, and moral relativism. The Torah of Sinai, however, reveals the absolute, indivisible oneness of the Creator. We do not have to be pulled in dozens of directions by passing trends. By anchoring our lives in the unified wisdom of the Torah, we experience authentic inner peace and undivided devotion (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5650).

• Commenting on the Midrashic image “like a rose among the thorns” (ke-shoshanah bein ha-chochim), the Sfas Emes explains that just as Israel remains distinct below from the customs of the nations, so too Above they merit a direct Divine governance that transcends all ministering angels. In the exact measure of Israel's holy separation below—refusing to imitate the ways of Egypt and Canaan—Hashem's providence shines uniquely upon them from Above. Performing the mitzvos with wholehearted attachment binds the soul to the living waters of the Torah, whereas imitating the empty habits of the surrounding nations severs a person from that supernal source. Earthly distinctiveness is therefore constructive rather than merely defensive: the rose among the thorns blooms precisely because it guards its unique form (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5659).

## RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Many people believe that the reason for anti-Semitism is because we are so different than the rest of the nations. Discuss the proofs that this is not true
- Discuss the importance of being different from the rest of the nations
- Discuss the Rama in Yorah Deah that says this is the source not to dress in an immodest manner

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The group huddled together in the bunker in the Hungarian countryside, hardly daring to breathe, worried that the Nazis would hear the sounds of life in the underground hideout. Day after day, these Jews lived a wretched existence, surviving on the scraps of food provided by the kindly farmer who had provided them with refuge. There Wasn't much to

do during the endless days spent in hiding, especially for the group of girls, upon whom the mitzvah of Talmud Torah is not obligatory: The farmer would pass along any Hungarian novels that he could obtain, and the girls would eagerly devour each new book. One of the more illustrious members of that bunker was the great Rav and activist, Rav Michoel Ber Weissmandel, who despite his busy schedule, involved as he was in connecting the various world leaders and informing them about the atrocities being committed, was bothered by this pursuit of the Yiddishe meidelach. Purim came, as did so many other holidays in that dark dank bunker, and it was difficult to feel cheerful. The girls however, perhaps, inspired by a memory of the joyous holidays in happier times, passed around a raisin from hand to hand, calling it mishloach manos. Rav Weissmandel watched, tears glistening in his eyes, and addressed them. "Teire meidelach, you have such a deep-felt desire to give mishloach manos, to give a real, generous gift that will be appreciated, yet you have nothing to give. "But there is something, there is a mishloach manos that you can give, one that is so precious, so valuable, and will make its recipient so happy. "You will all, im yirtzeh Hashem, be wives and mothers one day, the pillars of your homes. A Yiddishe mameh must be prepared to give over our beliefs and dreams to her children, to influence her home and surroundings with purity and temimus, with sincerity and eidelkeit. "The Hungarian novels fill your heads with the baseness and impurity of a world that is not ours. I know it's difficult. I know that the days are long and boring, but we will soon be out of here.' The rav's voice cracked. "Give Him, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, a mishloach manos that he will cherish. Say that you will stop reading those books." From that underground hole. a splendid mishloach manos was sent forth.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ When the children were small, Mrs. Gross took their younger daughter Tzipora to the doctor. When they returned home, Tzipora was given a treat for her good behavior. Her sister Adina, all of six years old, said, "Mommy, you're doing like Yaakov (Avinu) when he gave Yosef the kesones pasim (special tunic) and made his brothers jealous of him!" Shlomie was so proud that his daughter had absorbed this lesson she had learned at school, and had applied it, that he called her principal, Rabbi Gelman, to share the nachas with him. On the night of bedikas chametz, the Gross children would hide a piece of bread in every room. Once, Shlomie searched a room and announced that he had not found any bread. His young daughter responded, "Tatty, I didn't put any chametz there because there already is a big piece of chametz — the television!" Her teachers had taught her that television is an abomination and should be disposed of like chametz. Another parent might have been upset at his daughter's way of lecturing him, but Shlomie was proud of her. And eventually, he and his wife got rid of the television.

*Shloime!, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 279*

❖ A man once commented to Rav Dov Landau, "It's hard to be a Jew." Rav Dov was clearly displeased with the remark. He shifted the man's thinking with a single sentence. "On the contrary," he said. "It's much harder to be a goy."

*From At His Table, Published by Tfutza Publications*

# 12. Not to love one who persuades to idolatry

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 24**

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

As the Torah commands regarding the idolatrous enticer (meisis): 'You shall not yield to him' (Devarim 13:9, Parshas Re'eh) — which Chazal interpret to mean that one must not incline toward him in love or affection.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

We should associate with peers who encourage us to strive for the lofty goals of perfection of character, and we don't want to associate too closely with people who denigrate that goal, or who try to pull us away from these goals. This is why we are not to befriend one who tried to convince us to leave the Torah and instead adopt a foreign form of worship.

# 13. Not to relinquish our dislike for the persuader

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 25**

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

As the Torah commands regarding the idolatrous enticer (meisis): 'Neither shall you listen to him' (Devarim 13:9, Parshas Re'eh) — which Chazal interpret to mean that one must never relinquish his hatred for him nor forgive his treacherous incitement.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

We should associate with peers who encourage us to strive for the lofty goals of perfection of character, and we don't want to associate too closely with people who denigrate that goal, or who try to pull us away from these goals. This is why we are not to befriend one who tried to convince us to leave the Torah and instead adopt a foreign form of worship.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ Proklos the son of a philosopher asked Rabban Gamliel in Acco while he was bathing in the Bathhouse of Aphrodite: 'It is written in your Torah: Nothing of the banned idolatrous thing shall cling to your hand (Devarim 13:18)—why then are you bathing in the Bathhouse of Aphrodite?' Rabban Gamliel answered him: 'One may not reply to a Torah question inside a bathhouse!' Only after he stepped outside did Rabban Gamliel say to him: 'I did not come into her boundary; she came into my boundary! Nobody says: The public bathhouse was built as an ornament for Aphrodite; rather, people say: Aphrodite was placed as an ornament for the bathhouse! Furthermore, even if you were given a fortune, you would never enter before your idol naked or stand before it over a drainpipe—yet this statue stands right over the drainpipe where everyone relieves themselves before it! The Torah forbade only what is treated as a god, whereas that which is treated with contempt like this is nothing at all.'

*Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 3:4*



SEDER FIVE • SECTION ONE: EMULATING HASHEM

# CHUKIM: KEDUSHAH & SELF-MASTERY

*Mitzvos of Self-Mastery, Dietary Sanctity, and Bodily Elevation*

### OVERVIEW

The next category of commandments is the category called Chukim. The word Chok is usually understood as a mitzvah that is superrational, a mitzvah that transcends human understanding. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch takes this one step further. He explains that these are mitzvos that are usually superrational because they all relate to the inner nature of our physical and spiritual selves, and all have the common denominator of helping us to achieve a state of Holiness, kedushah. All of the chukim are mitzvos of Kedushah.

This leads us to the fundamental and central issue of holiness. What is the definition of holiness? How does a holy person act? Before you answer that question, ask yourself, what ever definition you give to the term holiness, how does that apply to the Almighty? What does it mean that the Almighty is holy? It's not a simple question.

## THE HORSE AND ITS RIDERS

To answer that, let us now discuss the anatomy of the human psyche. As every child can sense, we all have three parts to our psyche. The child calls it the little angel on his shoulder, the little devil, and the third is the real "him", his consciousness, the part of him which decides to listen to either side. Dr. Sigmund Freud famously elaborated on this same idea. He labeled this tripartite structure as the Id, Ego and Superego. The Id is what we would call the little devil, the superego is our conscience, our little angel, and the ego is our mind, our consciousness. The Torah refers to these three as our yetzer hara, evil desire, yetzer tov, good desire and sechel consciousness, (or nefesh tachtona). The following is a picturesque and more descriptive demonstration of the Torah's perspective on the human psyche.

We are described as having three parts, a horse with two spiritual riders. The "horse" is our body, with all of its physical and animal drives. Our body without its neshamah is simply a sophisticated ape. It's merely an animal, and a cunning one to boot. The horse's job is to be a vehicle for its spiritual riders.

On top of the horse are two spiritual riders, the neshamah, and the sechel. As we mentioned before, the neshamah is a piece of the Almighty Himself. It gives man the qualities of G-dliness. The neshamah is the man's adviser, or conscience. Its purpose is to urge man to resemble the Almighty.

The other spiritual rider is the man's sechel. This is the consciousness, or what Freud called the Ego. This is the part of us that holds the reins of the horse and makes the decision to either listen to the neshamah or to the horse.

We therefore observe Man locked in a battle between two opposing forces, the horse and the neshamah. The horse is simply an animal. It just wants to satisfy its sensual pleasures. It wants to eat, to reproduce, and gratify itself. The horse is primarily motivated by self-interest, and the desire to take. In contrast, the neshamah on its own (being a piece of G-d Himself) simply wants us to be like the Almighty, to be wise, kind and just. The neshamah is motivated by "other-interest" and the desire to give. It is up to the sechel, the ego, to choose which side to listen to. Does one take the horse by the reins, and steer it to do the will of the neshamah, or does one let the reins loose, and let the horse drag its riders to gratify its demands. The more the sechel chooses to listen to the neshamah, the more G-dly it gets, and hence the closer it comes to the Almighty. The more one lets the horse take control, the less G-dly one becomes, and drifts further from the Almighty. That is the reason why the Almighty gave us a piece of himself. To enable us to direct and guide ourselves to behave like Him, and so come close to Him.

## HOLDING THE REINS

Let us now discuss the importance of discipline, of being the master of the horse and having a tight grip on its reigns. Imagine that you were sitting on a bus and you were tired. An elderly woman walks on the bus and has to stand because there are no seats available for her. You instinctively know that she surely needs the seat a lot more than you do. What do you do? Now I am sure that you would get up to give her the seat, but as we know, unfortunately a lot of other people wouldn't. Why is that so? Why doesn't anyone else get up? Isn't their neshamah, their conscience, screaming that the G-dly thing to do would be to help her? We all know that the answer is, that although their neshamah was telling them to get up, their "horse" was more powerful. They acted with self interest. They weren't in charge of the horse. They didn't have a tight grip on their horse's reins.

Here is another example. Imagine that you were speaking with a group of friends. As you are standing with your friends, someone comes over to you, insults you and publicly embarrasses you. How do you react? How should you react? Many people would explode with anger and do whatever they could to repay the insult. Yet we all realize that is clearly not the G-dly thing to do. Clearly, the neshamah would not tell us to do that. It only happens if we allow our horse to take charge. But if we would be the master of our horse, then we would grab the horse by the reins and tell it, that although we would like to take revenge, we are going to react in a peaceful and thoughtful way because that is the urging of the neshamah, and the G-dly thing to do. We see from both of these illustrations that when the horse is in charge, we act selfishly and violently. When we are the master of the horse, however, we are positioned to act G-dly.

## HOLINESS

Now that we understand the existential struggle that we have between our positive and negative impulses, we can now understand what the word Kadosh, Holiness means.

The word holy literally means parush, separate. In G-d's terms, being holy, separate, means that He is transcendental. That means that He transcends, and is separate from the physical. He doesn't have any physical limitations. He has no body, He can't die, and He can't get sick. It means that He totally transcends the physical because He created it and He is the master of it.

In human terms holiness means the same thing. A person who is holy is someone who transcends the physical and is entirely spiritual. "Wait a minute", you may ask, "How can any person transcend the physical if we live in an entirely physical world?" Excellent question.

The answer is, that believe it or not, physical things can be entirely spiritual. It simply depends on how it is being used. I can eat an apple in two ways. I can either eat it to gratify my senses, which is purely physical. Or I can eat the apple with the intention of keeping my body healthy, and keeping it a fit tool to use to come close to the Almighty. Believe it or not, when a person eats with this second motivation, his eating is purely spiritual. He is using a physical object to achieve a spiritual purpose. Someone who is holy is someone who is the master of his physical side, the master of his horse, and uses the physical things of the world exclusively for a spiritual purpose. Holiness is being the master of our horse and directing it to the spiritual. To be holy is to have self control, to hold the reins tight, in order to direct the physical to the spiritual. "Holy" means to manifest the desires and direction of the neshamah, instead of the direction of the horse.

In our example of the bus, the holy person is the one who gets up to help someone despite the fact that his horse is very tired. He grabs the horse by its reins and directs it to do what is right. He is the master of his horse, and he channels it for a spiritual purpose, he channels it to follow the advice of the neshamah.

The same is true in our example of the person who was disgraced in front of his friends. Although his horse's reaction is to take revenge, if he would be holy and the master of his physical side, then he would master his horse's urges and direct it to do the bidding of the neshamah which in this case urges him to react peacefully.

Most modern cultures and religions encourage their adherents to practice altruism and respect for others. But the reason why they often fail to eliminate immoral behavior is because they often stumble over this hurdle. It is not enough to tell be people to act selflessly. One has to address the internal dynamic that makes people selfish and impulsive. That is what the Torah hopes to address with the concept of Kedushah. That is why Kedushah, holiness, is the foundation of G-dliness.

Now that we have a deeper understanding of the meaning of kedushah, we can now understand the deep purpose of the Chukim. This category of commandments is really the foundation of the entire Torah. It's a very beautiful ideal to try to be like the Almighty. But if our physical side is too powerful, that ideal can not be reached. If we are slaves to our horse we cannot become G-dly, and to the contrary, the world becomes brutal in its original sense; like a brute. Such a world becomes dark, selfish, and animalistic. Mastery and subordination of the horse to the neshamah is absolutely imperative in order to achieve the ideal of G-dliness. The example we gave earlier was getting up for an old lady. If our horse is too powerful, we won't be able to get up for her and do what our neshamah encourages us to do. If our horse is too powerful we won't be able to restrain ourselves from taking revenge for an insult. If our horse is too powerful we won't be able to get up in time for davening (Prayers), or we won't be able to control ourselves from saying that juicy piece of gossip. Therefore, because being the master of our horse is the basis of the entire Torah, the Torah gives us mitzvos of kedushah that allow us to master the horse, and transform it into a subservient and obedient horse, in order to properly channel its energies to fulfill the will of the Almighty.

Additionally, aside from the mitzvos of kedushah giving us the strength to control our negative impulses, and listen with fidelity to the voice of our conscience, this category of mitzvos helps us to directly resemble Hashem. Just as Hashem is Kadosh, the master over all material, because He is its creator, so are we to be the master over our material selves. Just as Hashem has total control, self control, and manifests his goodness, so should we. So with this category of mitzvos we are emulating the Almighty by being holy like Him. We are emulating the Almighty's holiness, as Hashem commands in the Torah, "Kedoshim Tihu Ki Kadosh Ani, You should be Holy because I am Holy".

The two most basic examples of the mitzvos of this category are the mitzvos that pertain to eating kosher food and the laws of sexual morality. Let us now explore them.

## KOSHER

When we were born most of us weighed between six and eight pounds and we were not much taller than a foot and a half long. For arguments sake, let's guess that there were about 40 trillion molecules of carbon in your body when you were an infant. Now as adults we weigh at least 100 pounds and are more than five feet tall. Again, for arguments sake, let's guess that there are about 500 trillion molecules of carbon in an adult body. Obviously, we have grown a tremendous amount since the time that we were an infant. Where did our additional molecular mass come from? Did

it come from the air? Where did all of those extra molecules in our body come from? We all understand that the additional molecular mass in our bodies comes from the food that we eat. As we eat, our bodies assimilate the organic material in the food, allowing our cells to use that organic material to replicate and produce more cells. In essence our bodies are truly products of what we eat. Our hormones, our brain and ultimately our thought process, are products of the food that we ingest.

The Almighty tells us that the ideal relationship between the horse and the neshamah is one in which the neshamah is in control and the horse is a subservient and obedient tool for the neshamah. The Almighty says that because our horse is composed of the food that it ingests, we should only eat food that will keep the horse in a passive and obedient state towards the neshamah. We should only eat food that will keep the horse tahor, pure and translucent. As the Almighty tells us in the Torah, "You should be my holy people, so don't eat a treifah (an example of non-kosher food)." The Almighty created every single creature, and He knows the inner nature of each creature. He therefore knows which foods will keep us tahor and which ones will make our bodies tamei. There are several categories of food. The first category of food is plants. Every single edible plant is kosher. The Almighty says that the passive and neutral quality of plants will give the horse that same passive and neutral quality when it's ingested and assimilated into the horse. A horse composed of plant particles will remain tahor. The other extreme are carnivorous animals. Every single carnivorous animal is tamei, not kosher. The Almighty says that if one were to ingest a carnivore, such as a lion or a bear, then the dominant and recalcitrant quality of the carnivore would be absorbed by his or her horse, and give that aggressive and dominant quality to the horse. If your horse has those qualities, it will make your horse much harder to subdue. Your yetzer hara will be much more powerful, because your body has tumah, it is blocked off from the influence of the neshamah. It will be a state in which the horse is in control and you have lost control of the reins.

If a person would like to eat meat, it is certainly permitted. However, only those animals which have signs that reveal them as being kosher animals can be eaten. Those signs are indications that the quality of the animal is such that when it is ingested it will keep the horse in a pure and submissive state. The signs that an animal is kosher are rumination and split hooves. Those signs reveal the animal as being tahor. Its inner nature will keep the body in a tahor state if it is ingested.

Now, we humans can't explain the reason why this animal is kosher and why this one is not. We can't explain why the inner nature of a cow is more tahor than a pig. But the Almighty, who knows the inner nature of each animal, has told us that aside from the animals that have the signs of being kosher, all others will make our horse tamei. The mitzvos in the category of Chukim are often incomprehensible to us. But once we have the confidence that these directives come from the Creator and Designer of the universe who has intimate knowledge of inner nature of this animal, then we can feel comfortable to take His word for it.

In short, the role of the laws of kashrus is to keep our horse tahor. To keep our horse in a neutral, passive and submissive state towards the neshamah, so that we can master our horse and direct it to be a tool of holiness and service to Hashem.

G-dliness. If we lose control of our horse, then as we have described earlier, it is very difficult to be G-dly, because our horse is self centered and its innate desires run counter to the Almighty's. Many of the mitzvos in this section deal with the details of the laws of Kashrus.

## SEXUAL MORALITY

The next major category among the laws of kedushah are the mitzvos that pertain to sexuality. The Almighty created the sexual drive for a very holy and noble purpose. That purpose is to unite a husband and wife in an intimate and close relationship. Within the context of that loving relationship, they are to jointly raise children together. When sexuality is used for this purpose - namely to create an intimate marriage and to raise children - then sexuality is extremely holy and noble. It is a spiritual act. Despite the fact that it uses physical means, because its purpose is a spiritual one, The Torah considers sexuality to be a holy and spiritual activity.

However, sexuality is like nuclear energy. It is an incredibly powerful force. When nuclear energy is utilized properly it brings incredible blessing. The sun provides its wondrous blessing using nuclear energy. Nuclear power can produce essential electricity. We all know however, that nuclear energy can also wreak incredible devastation when it is misused.

The same is true of sexuality. Although when it is used properly for its true purpose it is a very holy and wonderful thing, when it is misused outside of its proper framework, its energy is seen as incredibly destructive. When sexuality is used outside the context of marital intimacy, it becomes lowered to a mere lustful and impulsive physical act. It is simply the gratification and charging of the horse's primal urges. When that happens over time, the misused sexual energy makes the horse incredibly powerful, and it then becomes very hard to subdue it and control it. The horse is then in a state of tumah, blocked from the control and influence of the neshamah. We can all easily understand that a person who is involved with arayos, forbidden sexuality, will have a much harder time getting up for davening in the morning, because he is used to gratifying his horses desires. In our scenario of the bus, we can all relate that a person who is tamei from arayos, will be much less likely to get up than someone who is kadosh, someone who is the master of his horse. In our scenario of someone getting embarrassed in front of his friends, we can all relate that someone who is tamei from arayos will more likely respond angrily, because he is not in control of his horse. In short, a person who has become tamei from arayos will have a much more difficult time mastering his horse whenever he has any serious internal struggle between his horse and his neshamah. With this in mind, we can now more readily appreciate the foundational role of sexual morality, and the kedushah it can create. Many of the mitzvos in this section will deal with the details of the laws of sexual morality.

In the category of chukim we also have mitzvos such as not removing the sideburns, not removing a beard with a razor, and not wearing clothing made of a mixture of wool and linen. All of these commandments relate to the inner essence of our physical and spiritual selves to allow us to access greater influence of kedushah. It is because they relate to our inner essence that we have a difficult time rationally understanding their purpose. As we will see however, many commentaries do give symbolic interpretations to these mitzvos for us to understand on a rational level.

## TO BE HOLY

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask us to emulate Hashem by mastering and controlling our material impulses*

# 1. To be holy, to be the master of your physical drives and direct them exclusively to fulfill Hashem's will

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 20–13 Divrei Kivushin of Sefer Chareidim 113**

*As the Torah says, "You shall be holy" (Vayikra 20:7 Parshas Kedoshim)*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

The Ramban expounds that this commandment corresponds to the teaching of Chazal: "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you" (Yevamos 20a). The Torah first delineates forbidden foods, and then commands, "Sanctify yourselves and be holy" (Vayikra 11:44), teaching that a person must not say: "It suffices that I abstain from forbidden foods; therefore, with permitted foods, I may indulge freely as a glutton for meat and a drunkard with wine, turning every day into an endless feast pursuing worldly pleasures." To prevent this, Scripture commands, "You shall be holy" (Vayikra 19:2), instructing us to sanctify ourselves by exercising restraint, drinking wine only sparingly — just as the Torah designates a nazir as holy because he abstains from wine (Bamidbar 6:5). One should be mindful of the catastrophic consequences of intoxication recorded in the Torah regarding Noach and Lot (Bereishis 9:20–25, 19:30–38). Furthermore, the Gemara notes that excessive wine consumption can even lead to bloodshed (Sanhedrin 70a–b). A person must likewise guard against overeating, vulgar speech (nivul peh), and unnecessary idle chatter, even when the words themselves are not vulgar.

Likewise, after enumerating the prohibitions of illicit relations (arayos), the Torah commands: "You shall be holy" (Vayikra 19:2). This teaches that a person must not say: "Since I have separated from forbidden relations, I may indulge unchecked lust with my wife, engaging in intimacy excessively or marrying numerous wives for mere physical gratification." Therefore, the Torah commands, "You shall be holy" — a comprehensive charge to exercise sanctified restraint within the realm of the permitted, setting boundaries even in marital intimacy, engaging in it solely for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah and preserving holiness.

This explains why the Torah often repeats the names of righteous tzaddikim — such as "Noach, Noach" (Bereishis 6:9) and "Avraham, Avraham" (Bereishis 22:11) — to signify that they never conflated their physical bodies with their spiritual souls throughout their lives. They established the soul as the primary master and subordinated the body entirely beneath it, just as a horse is subordinate to its rider. The soul must govern and direct the physical vehicle of the body, channeling all its energy toward fulfilling the soul's divine mission to serve Hashem.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Just as Hashem is holy — He is perfect and transcends all physical impulses and limitations, so should we be holy. We want to emulate Hashem by being the master of our impulses and not let them control us. We want to control and channel our physical impulses and manifest the desires neshamah. The mitzvos in this category make us kadosh like Hashem.

Additionally, kedushah and the self control and discipline that it brings, is the basis of all of the other mitzvos, and leads to all of the other mitzvos by putting the neshamah in charge. Not only are we emulating Hashem by being kadosh, but this leads to all of the other mitzvos.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTERS 13 & 15)

There are three progressive levels: the biblical prohibitions of the Torah, the protective fences established by the Sages, and the sanctuary of Kedushah — which means sanctifying oneself even in that which is technically permitted (Kadesh atzmecha b'mutar lach). When a person refrains from permissible excess, he elevates the entire physical creation, just as the four species of the lulav and esrog are elevated through their sacred use.

#### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 26)

At the pinnacle of Kedushah, a person does not merely separate from the world; he sanctifies his engagement with it. Even his eating, sleeping, and mundane activities become holy acts that elevate physical creation into an offering to the Divine.

#### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Kedoshim, the classic commentators grapple with the scope of the commandment to be holy. The Sfas Emes examines the spiritual mechanics of elevating permissible bodily activities. The Sfas Emes explains that forbidden things are like poison; they cannot be elevated into holiness, and therefore the Torah erects absolute prohibitions around them. Permissible things, by contrast, are like raw building materials waiting to be sanctified. When an individual sits down to a delicious meal and consumes it with coarse gluttony, treating the food as an end in itself, he drags the divine sparks of the food down into his lower animal nature. We do not need to flee to a desert monastery to achieve holiness. By infusing our daily meals, sleep, and physical interactions with holy intention, we elevate everyday life into an ongoing sanctuary of divine service (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5643).

• The Midrash Rabbah on Parshas Kedoshim presents a startling comparison between mortal human beings and heavenly angels. The Sfas Emes explains that angels are purely spiritual beings who possess no physical bodies, no biological appetites, and no evil inclination. An angel does not have to battle lust, greed, or anger; obeying the divine will is as effortless and natural for an angel as breathing is for a human being. Therefore, their holiness is static, predictable, and devoid of moral heroism. Our temptations and struggles are not proof of spiritual failure; they are the very arena of our greatness. Every victory of self-restraint elevates our souls higher than the angels and brings immense joy to our heavenly Father (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5641).

• Parshas Kedoshim opens with the supreme mandate of Jewish ethics: 'Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your God, am holy.' Rashi, citing Toras Kohanim, explains the essential definition of holiness: 'Be separate from sexual immorality and from sin, for wherever you find a fence against immorality, you find holiness.' Why is human holiness defined primarily through boundaries, self-restraint, and withdrawal from base physical desires? The Sfas Emes explains that before Hashem created the universe, His infinite light filled all of reality. To make room for the existence of heaven, earth, and human consciousness, the Almighty performed an act of tzimtzum—deliberate withdrawal and self-restraint. Creation exists solely because Hashem chose to conceal His overwhelming light. Therefore, the supreme divine attribute revealed in creation is not boundless expansion, but holy restraint. Restraint is not a negative, joyless deprivation; it is the ultimate expression of human dignity and divine imitation. By mastering our physical impulses, we create a sacred palace within ourselves where the divine presence joyfully abides (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5631).

• In Parshas Terumah, the Torah commands: 'And they shall make for Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.' The classic commentators immediately notice the plural phrasing: Scripture does not say 'that I may dwell within it' (the physical Tabernacle), but 'that I may dwell within them'—inside the heart of every single individual. In his discourse on Parshas Kedoshim (5638), the Sfas Emes explains that the architecture of the Tabernacle corresponded precisely to the anatomy of a human being. The Holy of Holies, containing the Ark and the Tablets of the Covenant, corresponds to the human brain and intellect, where the words of Torah are stored. The Golden Menorah corresponds to the illuminated soul and the eyes; the Golden Altar of Incense corresponds to the heart and sacred desires; and the Outer Copper Altar, where physical meat was consumed by fire, corresponds to the stomach and digestive organs. Our physical form is not a sinful prison to be despised; it is a sacred Temple to be maintained in dignity and purity. By sanctifying our physical actions, we make our lives a radiant home for the Shechinah (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5638).

• The Midrash on Parshas Kedoshim returns to the profound words, 'You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your God, am holy,' emphasizing that divine holiness is intrinsic and effortless, whereas human holiness is forged exclusively through exertion and struggle. Why did the Almighty design human beings so that spiritual elevation requires friction, resistance, and difficult self-denial? The Sfas Emes explains that there are two forms of light in the universe. There is the direct, unearned light that shines effortlessly from above, like the sun shining upon a passive earth. While bright, this light produces no transformation within the earth itself. The second, infinitely more precious light is the light produced through friction—like a flint stone struck against iron, generating a spark from within cold, dark rock. Our difficulties are not obstacles to our spiritual life; they are the flint stones of our elevation. By embracing the struggle and mastering our physical impulses, we generate a glorious light that illuminates all of creation (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5650).

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ Bandits once stole the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair at night and hid her in their cave for three days, yet for three full days the donkey refused to taste a single bite of the bandits' untithed fodder! Terrified that the donkey would starve to death and make their hideout stink, the bandits released her — and she trotted straight back to her master's gate and brayed! Rabbi Pinchas told his students: 'Open the gate for that poor creature who hasn't eaten for three days!' When they poured barley before her, she still refused to eat until Rabbi Pinchas asked if they had separated even the rabbinic Demai tithe — explaining that she did not need the leniency the Sages granted for animal feed! And in the very next episode, two

poor men once left two se'ah of barley in storage with Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair and disappeared for years. Instead of letting their barley rot, Rabbi Pinchas planted it, harvested it, and replanted the yield year after year until it filled entire granaries — and when the two poor men finally returned for their two small sacks, he told them: 'Go bring a whole caravan of camels and donkeys to carry home all your barley!'

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Demai 1:3 (21d–22a)*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rabbi Sherer's ability to frame issues for secular politicians and bureaucrats paid frequent benefits to the Orthodox community. Under New York law, each yeshivah must fill out a questionnaire in order to be eligible for certain state funding. One of the questions that yeshivos were required to answer was whether they provide AIDS education. Initially, the decision was taken by yeshivah principals to answer the question affirmatively on the grounds that the strict code of morality stressed by yeshivos is itself the best preventive for diseases like AIDS. Subsequently, however, the State Education Department developed a mandatory AIDS curriculum. Now the question being asked the yeshivos was whether they were teaching the specific AIDS curriculum of the State, and that question could no longer be answered in the affirmative. Rabbi Sherer immediately began lobbying the State Regents. Bringing with him to Albany copies of Mesilas Yesharim and Orchos Tzaddikim, he argued that the teaching of Torah constitutes the best preventive for AIDS, an argument buttressed by the virtual non-existence of the disease in the Orthodox community. To the amazement of all those following the issue, Rabbi Sherer succeeded in convincing the State Board of Education that the Torah education in yeshivos and seminaries should be considered the functional equivalent of the AIDS curriculum developed by the state, and even obtained a written ruling to that effect. The next time that Rabbi Sherer had occasion to visit the Vizhnitzer Rebbe of Monsey, the latter stood up, walked around the table and kissed him in gratitude for his success in Albany?

*Rabbi Sherer, By Rabbi Yonasan Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 301*

❖ This week a dear friend of mine, Eugene Levin, passed away. He was a simple honest Jew. He was a very great person but that is what simple honest Jews are - great! His daughter related the following story which occurred when Eugene was 19 years old. He was serving in the Soviet Army for two years following his graduation from high school. The day was over, and the boys had free time to chill. As most young men will do in the former Soviet Union, all of Eugene's friends enjoyed a couple of bottles of Vodka. Eugene did not drink. Shortly after the whole group was drunk, they received orders from a commanding officer that some difficult work needed to be done on top of a tall crane. The work was too difficult for Eugene so he could not offer to go. However, a friend of his who was quite inebriated volunteered to do it. His friend prepared himself for the trip up to the top of the crane and Eugene watched in horror. He understood that this may not end well. Climbing up a crane is hard by itself, but when the fellow is drunk it becomes dangerous. His friend began the climb and Eugene followed shortly behind. The fellow succeeded in getting to the top and corrected the problem. But as the friend began to head back he looked down and realized how high up he was. He froze. "Eugene, I cannot go back down. I am stuck." Eugene had him maneuver into a position that he was able to mount onto Eugene's back and the two of them returned to the bottom safely, Eugene on his feet and the friend on his back.

*Told By R' Paysach Diskind*

❖ A talmid who had no Internet access asked the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Dovid Feinstein, whether or not it would be permitted to ask his friend, who did have Internet, to order something for him from an online store. Reb Dovid replied that it depended on whether or not the friend had a filter on his computer. The talmid nodded, certain that the Rosh Yeshivah meant to say that if there was a filter on that computer, he could ask, and if the computer was unfiltered, he had best not ask his friend to log on at all. The Rosh Yeshivah explained what he meant. "If he has a filter, you should not ask him to do you a favor, because a person who has a filter clearly aspires to kedushah, and wants to be elevated. He likely has

Internet access because it is necessary for his parnassah, or some such reason, but it is not fair to make him spend an extra moment online. But someone who has no filter has no such ambitions, so in that case, if he is online anyhow, let him at least do a favor for another Yid!"

*From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Over the course of his life, the Alter of Kelm (Reb Simcha Zissel Ziv) developed countless stratagems to increase his self-control. He never expressed anger, for instance, without first putting on a special garment set aside for that purpose. After he once detected within himself a strong physical desire for fruit soup, he never again ate it. He ate only small, bony fish so that he would be forced to eat deliberately and not like a glutton."

*Rav Dessler, By Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 40*

❖ Since the pursuit of physical pleasure is an expression of self-love, the Alter of Kelm (Reb Simcha Zissel Ziv) taught, any involvement in physicality removes one from G-d. Kelm developed a regimen for fighting against desire known as "shviras haratzon — - breaking the will." Kelm talmidim made a practice, for instance, of never opening a letter on the day it was received no matter how intensely anticipated it was."

*Rav Dessler, By Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 71*

❖ Rav Dovid Hersch Mayer A student of Rav Wachtfogel told of the time that he saw the rav coming to the beis medrash looking very upset. His face was actually flushed red. The student went over anxiously and asked what was the matter. The Rav responded that he had suffered a durchfall—a spiritual setback—that day: "Ich bin durchgifallen in kaas—I had a setback in avoiding anger." Everyone has what they consider a setback, explained Rav Mayer in his passionate way: A deal that fell through a loss on the market and they will get very upset too. But the rav was distressed about a momentary flaw in the ultimate perfection of character. A durchfall in kaas. A setback in anger.

*The Living Mishnas Reb Aharon, By Rabbi Yitzchak Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim*

❖ In the Nitrah yeshivah, Yom Kippur just ended. One bachur, who seemed unusually sad, turned to R' Yonah Forst and said how do we know if our Yom Kippur was successful. He said let me tell you a story. When I was younger I was on a cattle car to Treblinka. I saw tall blond man with handsome features in the cattle car. I spoke to him and he told me that he was a German who converted to Judaism. I asked how he converted to Judaism despite the many years of anti-Semitism coming from Germany. He said that one night he was walking in his hometown in Germany when he walked past a shul. He heard them praying and singing. Then everyone walked out, in their white clothes and glowing faces to do Kiddush levanah. They all looked and sounded like angels. I asked them what they were doing and they said it was Yom Kippur, they just finished neilah, and were now making Kiddush levana. I promised myself that I would become a part of this holy nation. I started to convert. The war started and my family encouraged, me to join them to save myself. But I refused to leave my people. That is why I am privileged to be here with you and all of these pure souls. A few hours later he arrived at Treblinka and was killed with his fellow Jews. Rav Forst turned to the bachur and said if only you had any idea of the glow of kedushah that comes out of a yid after Yom Kippur, and with nostalgic tears he gave the bachur a kiss.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 184*

## A. NOT TO OVERINDULGE IN FOOD AND DRINK

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 26-29**

*As it says, "do not walk in the ways of the nations (Vayikra 20:23, Parshas Kedoshim)"*

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Creator has commanded us not to walk in the customs of the gentiles nor pursue the hedonistic cravings of the heart, as written in Parshas Kedoshim: "You shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I cast out before you" (Vayikra 20:23). It is the customary way of the nations to abandon themselves to gluttony and unrestrained physical indulgence. From this principle, Chazal derived the scriptural admonition against gluttony and drunkenness that serves as the root warning for the rebellious son (ben soreir u'moreh; Sanhedrin 68b).

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTERS 13 & 15)

Overeating dulls the mind and diminishes a person's sense of spiritual accountability, while excess alcohol easily leads to immorality. Maintaining a disciplined diet is an exceptional strategy to master physical impulses. One should remember that physical pleasure is fleeting and largely an illusion of the imagination (medumeh). Crucially, the transition away from excess must be undertaken gradually, not abruptly.

### SFAS EMES

• The Talmud in Maseches Berachos and Maseches Menachos records a remarkable teaching of Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish: as long as the Holy Temple stood, the Altar atoned for Israel, but now that the Temple is destroyed, a person's dining table atones for him. The Sfas Emes examines the spiritual architecture of the Jewish home. The Sfas Emes explains that on the Temple Altar, physical animals were slaughtered, salted, and consumed by divine fire falling from heaven, elevating the animal kingdom into the realm of pure spirit. In our homes, our dining table is that exact altar. The food placed upon the table represents the sacrifice; the human mouth is the fire that consumes the offering; and the words of Torah and blessings spoken at the table represent the priestly hymns. When we sit around the dinner table, we are standing before the King of kings. By eating with mindfulness and sharing words of Torah, our tables radiate the peace and atonement of the Holy Temple (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5642).

• In Parshas Re'eh, the Torah addresses the human desire for culinary pleasure: 'When Hashem your God expands your border as He promised you, and you say: I will eat meat, because your soul longs to eat meat, you may eat meat according to all the desire of your soul.' The Talmud in Maseches Chullin derives from this verse an essential moral principle: the Torah teaches proper conduct, that a person should not eat meat unless his borders are expanded, meaning he possesses the financial and spiritual capacity to elevate the experience. The Sfas Emes explains that within every piece of physical food lies a hidden spark of divine vitality that fell into material creation. However, this extraction process requires spiritual mastery. If an individual sits down to a meal with ravenous gluttony, thinking only of sensory gratification, his soul is overwhelmed by the coarse animal nature of the food. Eating is not mere biological refueling or hedonistic amusement; it is a sacred encounter with divine sparks. By eating with restraint and gratitude, we nourish our souls and elevate physical reality (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5631).

• In Parshas Beha'alosecha, the Torah records one of the most tragic episodes of the desert wanderings: the rebellion at Kivros HaTa'avah (the Graves of Craving). The mixed multitude wept, complaining: 'Who will feed us meat?' The Sfas Emes examines the tragic spiritual pathology of obsessive culinary appetite. The Sfas Emes

explains that the generation of the desert lived under the direct, miraculous canopy of divine providence. They ate the holy manna, which was spiritual bread descending directly from heaven, perfectly absorbed by the body without any digestive waste. The manna tasted like whatever food a person desired, provided that the desire was pure. Endless indulgence in heavy culinary pleasures does not bring happiness; it buries the soul in physical lethargy. By choosing simplicity and moderation, we keep our spirits soaring free and connected to heaven (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Beha'alosecha 5634).

• King Solomon writes in Proverbs, 'The righteous person eats to the satisfaction of his soul, but the belly of the wicked shall suffer want.' The classic commentators note the deliberate contrast in King Solomon's words: the righteous person focuses on his soul (nefesh), while the wicked person focuses on his belly (beten). The Sfas Emes explains that hunger is far more than a biological signal in the stomach; it is an inner spiritual yearning of the soul seeking connection with the Creator. Because physical matter is finite and decaying, using food to satisfy a spiritual hunger is like drinking salt water to quench thirst; the more one drinks, the thirstier one becomes. We do not need lavish feasts or endless treats to feel genuinely happy and fulfilled. By eating for the sake of the soul, we experience deep satisfaction and preserve our vitality for meaningful living (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5634).

• In Parshas Acharei Mos, the Torah emphasizes the ultimate value of divine commandments: 'You shall observe My statutes and My judgments, which a man shall do and live by them; I am Hashem.' The Talmud in Maseches Yoma derives from this verse the famous principle that saving a human life overrides the Shabbos: 'live by them, and not die by them.' Yet on an inward spiritual plane, the phrase 'and live by them' demands careful contemplation. Does the Torah merely intend that the mitzvos will grant us biological survival, or is Scripture instructing us on the true nature of human vitality? The Sfas Emes cites a luminous teaching from his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, that redefines the source of human vitality. The Chiddushei HaRim explains that the verse commands a person to place the primary vitality of his soul inside the Torah and its mitzvos. What we put into our minds determines where our life-force resides. When we consistently turn to Torah for inspiration and wisdom, we experience an authentic, enduring vitality that physical pleasures can never replicate (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5636).

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

There is a concept of not eating in public in the "shuk". How about eating in a restaurant on an outside table, in front of everyone. How about eating on a bus?

**Answer:** Based on the Rambam (Hilchos Eidus 11:5) and Hagahos Ya'avetz (Kiddushin 40b) — which specify that the severe Talmudic censure of eating in the marketplace ('ha-ochel ba-shuk domeh l'kelev') applies to one who walks while eating in the public street ('she-holchin v'ochlin ba-shuk') — Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that sitting at an outdoor restaurant table or eating while seated on an intercity bus does not fall under the category of 'walking and eating in the street.' Nevertheless, based on Rambam (Hilchos De'os 5:2), a Torah scholar (talmid chacham) should avoid eating at an exposed sidewalk table in front of passersby.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Berachos, p. 302*

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ One time the Sages needed to raise a large charity donation for the community. They sent Rabbi Akiva and another Sage with him first to the home of a well-known wealthy householder. Just as they approached his doorway to enter, they overheard his young attendant asking him: "What shall we buy in the market for your meal today?" The householder answered: "Buy chicory greens — and not fresh ones from today's harvest, but leftover ones from yesterday's, which are wilted and cheap!" Hearing that he ate wilted, yesterday's greens, the Sages assumed he had either lost his wealth or was too stingy to donate, so they quietly turned around and left him alone. Only after they had gone through the entire town and given everyone else the merit of donating did they finally come back to him. He asked them: "Why did you not come to me first today, as you have always been accustomed to do?" They answered honestly: "We did come to your door first! But we heard the voice of your attendant asking you, 'What shall we buy for you today?' and you told him, 'Chicory greens — not from today's harvest, but from yesterday's, which are wilted and cheap!'" The man said to them: "What is between me and my attendant — how frugally I choose to eat at my own private table — you know; but do you know what is between me and my Creator?! Even so, go to my house and tell my wife, and she will give you a full bushel (modius) of gold dinars for charity!" The Sages went and told his wife. She asked them: "How did my husband tell you to measure out the bushel of gold dinars — a heaping measure overflowing the rim, or a leveled-off measure?" They answered her: "He simply told us 'a bushel,' without specifying." She said to them: "Then I am giving it to you as a heaping measure! If my husband meant a heaping measure, then it is just as he said; and if he meant a leveled measure, you may still keep the overflow, and I will deduct the extra gold from my own marriage dowry!" When her husband heard what she had done, he was so moved by her generosity that he doubled the amount of her marriage contract (kesubah).

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 4:9 (31b)*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Reb Leizer Geltzhaler once entered a take-out establishment near the yeshivah and watched as a group of bachurim ordered their food. Later, he addressed them. "I also enjoy eating and appreciate good food. But to say 'give me this frankfurter, not that one' is going too far. Eat the Frankfurter and enjoy it, but don't become a frankfurter.

*Reb Laizer, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ Reb Mendel Kaplan explained to us how difficult it is to "eat correctly. " The easiest thing to do is to learn; davening is harder than learning and hardest of all is eating. If someone is truly great, he will be able to give his eating as much sanctity as his Torah study.

*Reb Mendel, By Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## B. TO KEEP FAR FROM IMMORALITY

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 15-1**

*As it says, "do not come close to forbidden relations (Vayikra 18:6, Parshas Acharei Mos)"*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is strictly forbidden to deliberately inhale the perfume of an ervah (a woman forbidden to him by the laws of illicit relations). This prohibition partakes of both a positive commandment and a negative prohibition, for Chazal expounded that the prohibition: "None of you shall approach any who are near of kin to him, to uncover

their nakedness" (Vayikra 18:6), forbids any affectionate intimacy leading toward immorality, such as embracing, kissing, or physical touching (Rambam, Hilchos Issurei Biah 21:1). Furthermore, the Seventh Commandment, "Do not commit adultery" (Lo sin'af; Shemos 20:13), is homiletically expounded by Chazal as an injunction against deriving sensual pleasure through the sense of smell: "Lo sehaneh l'af — do not benefit your nose" (Vayikra Rabbah 24:6). Rashi likewise notes in Parshas Kedoshim (on Vayikra 19:2) that the command to be holy requires a person to maintain a vigilant distance from all forms of sexual immorality and inappropriate intimacy.

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss how Torah wants us to elevate the physical not simply to deny it.
- Discuss how this is one of the origins of the mitzvah of tzniyus, modesty.
- Discuss the idea of modesty.
- Discuss the benefits that tzniyus offers.

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once some redeemed captive women came to the house of R' Amram Chassidah in Nehardea. When the beauty of one was revealed to R' Amram, he was tempted and he set up a very heavy ladder to ascend to the upper chamber in which the women were lodged. When he had climbed up halfway, he stopped and cried out, "There is a fire in the house of R' Amram!" and he refrained from sinning. The sages said to him, "We have shamed you!" He responded, "Better that you shame Amram in this world than that you should be ashamed of him in the next world." He then banished his temptation from himself, and it left him in the form of a fiery column. He said to it, "You are fire and I am flesh, yet I am better (i.e., more powerful) than you."

*Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 81a*

❖ Kimchis had seven sons, including those of Yishmael, Yosef, and Yeshevav, all of whom served as Kohanim Gedolim ("High Priests"). When the sages asked her what she did to merit this, she answered that "the walls of my house never saw my hair exposed..."

*Talmud Bavli, Yoma 47a*

❖ Rav Kahana was very handsome (Bava Metzia 84a) and he sold baskets in the marketplace to earn a living. On one occasion a Roman woman tried to entice him to sin. He asked for time to dress himself up, and he managed to escape from her by jumping off the roof. Elijah the prophet caught him as he jumped off, and told him that he caused him to travel four hundred parsi (a great distance) to rescue him. R' Kahana explained that the whole episode occurred because of his poverty; since he was poor he was forced to work in the marketplace. Elijah then gave him a vessel filled with golden coins.

*Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 40a*

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Before Pesach 2009, a group of forty young women from a seminary in Tzfas visited Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky. The girls, who were raised in somewhat observant homes, were not modestly attired, but the Rebbetzin sensed they were striving to grow in mitzvah observance. In her smart and sincere way, the Rebbetzin began telling the girls stories about tznius, and concluded by requesting that they go shopping as a group to buy a modest outfit for each of them. The girls couldn't turn down the Rebbetzin's request. The next week, on Motza'ei Shabbos, March 21, the forty young women boarded the same bus that had taken them several days earlier to Rebbetzin Kanievsky in Bnei Brak, and went to the Lev HaMifratz mall in Haifa. What no one knew at the time was that sophisticated Arab terrorists had parked a white Subaru, containing

close to 250 pounds of high-grade explosives, near the supporting columns of the mall. With Hashem's help, the bomb malfunctioned, and smoke issuing from the vehicle alerted bystanders, who called the police. Sappers soon arrived, and were able to neutralize the device. At an emergency Cabinet meeting the next morning, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stated: "A major terror attack was averted because the detonation mechanism of this huge explosive failed. Had the bomb detonated, the entire Lev HaMifratz mall would have been in danger of collapsing." While the prime minister was unsure why the device had failed, the Rebbetzin and the forty seminary students from Tzfas were confident that it was the girls' kabbalah to strengthen their commitment to tznius and shop for modest clothing that very Motza'ei Shabbos that caused the huge miracle. Dressed as true Imos Yisrael, they returned to the Rebbetzin's house on Monday, two days after being saved from near catastrophe, to celebrate the miracle. They informed her that although it was not quite Erev Pesach, they did biur chametz early that year and threw out their immodest clothing. One of the girls had shredded a non-tzniusdik outfit, and presented it to the Rebbetzin as a gift in a small plastic bag. Several of the young women became full-fledged baalos teshuvah after this episode. At least one is married to an avreich learning in kollel. Many others who heard of the miracle at the Lev HaMifratz mall also resolved to dress modestly. Thus, the tznius of countless women was strengthened as a result of the resolve of forty girls who went shopping at the Lev HaMifratz mall to purchase modest clothing, as requested by Rebbetzin Kanievsky.

*Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

## C. NOT TO BE A SLAVE TO YOUR IMPULSES AND DESIRES

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-13**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the reason why one's heart should not be a slave to materialism?

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

King Shlomo exhorted: "Above all that you guard, protect your heart, for from it flow the springs of life" (Mishlei 4:23). The Ralbag expounds that the snare referenced here is the entrapment of bodily lust and base desires. For the heart — which represents the intellect and the seat of consciousness — is the vessel through which one attains eternal life in Olam HaBa; how, then, could a person debase it by burdening it with the fleeting vanities of this transient world? A parable illustrates this: if an artisan possesses a master servant capable of delicately piercing and stringing precious pearls, would he foolishly dispatch him to guard a cucumber patch for a few copper coins?

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)

One must realize that worldly desires can never be satiated through indulgence: "Ein adam meis v'chetzi ta'avaso b'yado" — no man departs this world with even half of his physical desires fulfilled. The more one feeds physical desire, the hungrier it becomes.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Lev Simcha explained that not giving in to one's natural desires can cause a similar reaction in the Heavens and can change harsh decrees. A man who was childless after many years of marriage came to the Lev Simcha for a brachah The Lev Simcha advised him to stop smoking. "When you break things [i.e., change habits] here," he explained, "it's possible to break things [harsh decrees] up there as Well. " With great effort, the chassid succeeded in breaking his habit, and not long afterward his prayers for a child were answered.

*From The Summit: Rav Simchah Bunim Alter (The Lev Simchah), by Simcha Leib Grossbard, published by Yeshurun Publications*

## D. NOT TO PURSUE THE MATERIAL PLEASURES OF THE WORLD

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 156**

*As the Torah says, that you shall not follow after your heart and your own eyes (Bamidbar 15:39, Parshas Shelach).*

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Included within this prohibition is the injunction against scheming and actively plotting to pursue the material delights and physical cravings of this world.

It is supremely vital for a person to remain vigilant against unwholesome and impure thoughts, for the mastery of one's thoughts is the cornerstone upon which all spiritual service depends. A person must sanctify and purify his mind with all his strength. If permitted physical pleasure comes his way, his intention must be solely to fortify his physical constitution so that he possesses the strength to stand in the palace of the Divine King, the Sovereign of the universe, blessed is He, ensuring that his body does not falter or grow frail in the service of the Creator.

If a person violates this and entertains reprehensible thoughts concerning fundamentals of faith (heresy), fantasies of immorality, or premeditated schemes to pursue material lusts, he commits a grievous transgression that threatens his portion in Olam HaBa, as it defiles all 248 limbs and 365 sinews of both his physical body and his spiritual soul. A person must therefore exercise immense vigilance in this regard.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Hashem sent our neshamah down to this world in order for us to perfect our character and perfect the world, and so come close to Hashem We were not brought into the world in order to pursue materialism. If we focus our lives on spiritual pursuits, then we can become spiritual and G-dly like Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 387)

Thoughts lead to action. If we can control what we think about, we will have greater self control.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 1)**

One of the true purposes of material pleasure is to provide peace of mind (nachas ruach) and emotional serenity (yishuv hadaas), giving a person the physical comfort necessary to focus wholeheartedly on avodas Hashem. Hashem desires that we experience pleasure as a means to focus on serving Him. Physical pleasure is an important vehicle, but it must never become the ultimate goal.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTERS, VOL. 9, P. 10)**

Excessive attachment to material comforts inevitably breeds self-rationalization. A person who seeks maximum physical pleasure and avoids exertion will instinctively manufacture lenient halachic justifications (kulos) simply to protect his comfortable lifestyle.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)**

The unbridled pursuit of wealth distracts a person from prayer, Torah study, and mitzvos. Furthermore, an accumulation of possessions brings an accumulation of anxiety, depleting the mental energy and peace of mind needed for spiritual growth.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 13)**

Wearing overly luxurious and ostentatious clothing fosters arrogance, social envy, financial strain, and illicit desires. Simplicity in dress preserves inner dignity and modesty.

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: 'Every single day a heavenly voice (Bat Kol) goes forth from Mount Horeb, proclaiming: "Woe to mankind for the slighting of the Torah!"... And it says (Shemos 32:16): "The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved (charus) upon the tablets." Do not read charus (engraved), but rather cheirus (freedom)—for you have no truly free person except one who engages in the study of Torah.' Rabbi Yose ben Kisma said: 'Once I was walking along the road when a certain man met me. He greeted me with peace, and I returned his greeting. He asked me: "Rabbi, from what place are you?" I replied: "I am from a great city of sages and scribes." He said to me: "Rabbi, would you be willing to live with us in our place? I will give you a million golden dinars, along with precious stones and pearls!" I replied to him: "My son, even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones, and pearls in the entire world, I would dwell nowhere except in a place of Torah! Furthermore, at the hour of a person's passing from the world, neither silver nor gold nor precious stones and pearls accompany him—only Torah and good deeds alone, as it is written (Proverbs 6:22): 'When you walk, it shall lead you; when you lie down, it shall watch over you; and when you awake, it shall converse with you.'"'

*Mishnah, Avos 6:2 & 6:9 (Kinyan Torah)*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Once, Rav Yaakov Galinsky went to the house of a friend whose father was a chazzan. When he crossed the threshold, his eyes nearly popped out. What wealth and luxury! The place was like a palace. At the Shabbos meal, he couldn't help but notice the stark difference between this home and Shabbos in Novardok. In Novardok, they sang about enjoying Shabbos delicacies such as fatted geese, quail, and fish, but here they actually ate them. What a seudah it was! It occurred to him that he might do well to become a chazzan. He'd been blessed with a nice voice, so why shouldn't he make use of it to learn

without financial pressures? “Maybe I can become a chazzan like you,” he said to his friend’s father. “What do you think?” “Anything but that!” the man answered. Yaakov was puzzled. “You have a nice home, nicely furnished, good food. Why shouldn’t I want the same? You can sit and learn Torah all week long, sing on Shabbos, and bring in a nice income.” “True, but think about it for a minute,” the chazzan said. “When you stand and daven, you’re hoping that your prayers will ascend to heaven and find favor with Hashem. But when I stand and daven I’m hoping to please the congregation. Is that any kind of a life?” R’ Yaakov took the man’s words to heart. He wouldn’t be a chazzan. And poverty would continue to rule.

*From Rav Yaakov Galinsky, By Rebetzin G. Lehrer*

❖ There was once a businessman who was sitting by the beach in a small Brazilian village. As he sat, he saw a Brazilian fisherman rowing a small boat towards the shore having caught quite few big fish. The businessman was impressed and asked the fisherman, "How long does it take you to catch so many fish?" The fisherman replied, "Oh, just a short while." "Then why don't you stay longer at sea and catch even more?" The businessman was astonished. "This is enough to feed my whole family," the fisherman said. The businessman then asked, "So, what do you do for the rest of the day?" The fisherman replied, "Well, I usually wake up early in the morning, go out to sea and catch a few fish, then go back and play with my kids. In the afternoon, I take a nap with my wife, and evening comes, I join my buddies in the village for a drink — we play guitar, sing and dance throughout the night." The businessman offered a suggestion to the fisherman. "I am a PhD in business management. I could help you to become a more successful person. From now on, you should spend more time at sea and try to catch as many fish as possible. When you have saved enough money, you could buy a bigger boat and catch even more fish. Soon you will be able to afford to buy more boats, set up your own company, your own production plant for canned food and distribution network. By then, you will have moved out of this village and to Sao Paulo, where you can set up HQ to manage your other branches." The fisherman continues, "And after that?" The businessman laughs heartily, "After that, you can live like a king in your own house, and when the time is right, you can go public and float your shares in the Stock Exchange, and you will be rich." The fisherman asks, "And after that?" The businessman says, "After that, you can finally retire, you can move to a house by the fishing village, wake up early in the morning, catch a few fish, then return home to play with kids, have a nice afternoon nap, and when evening comes, you can join your buddies for a drink, play the guitar, sing and dance throughout the night!" The fisherman was puzzled, "Isn't that what I am doing now?"

*Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology*

❖ At the request of a close family member, Rav Tendler made a special run of chalav Yisrael ice cream as a one-time project. Others heard about this, and asked that he start mass-producing ice cream for the public. Rav Tendler felt that he should not do this, since his aim was to supply the community with chalav Yisrael as a halachic stringency. Ice cream is simply taavah and didn't fit into the Milk Fund's mission. Rabbi Moshe Heinemann advised Rav Tendler that if he didn't supply the ice cream, people would not be careful to use chalav Yisrael in any other products either. Rav Tendler accepted this argument. Although Rav Tendler agreed to produce the ice cream, he printed, "See Tosafos Kesubos daf kuf daled amud aleph," on the containers, which states, "Rather than pray that Torah should penetrate your innards, pray that food and drink should not penetrate your innards." He had to eventually drop those words, since people were apprehensive, taking them to mean, "Kosher - but!" Nevertheless, he was careful to print only the word kosher, not mehadrin, since taavah cannot be mehadrin.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 296*

❖ R' David HaNaggid drew a beautiful parable which is printed in the sefer Midrash David: The inhabitants of a certain land had a custom: Every year they would go out to the main road which led to their country, and when they spotted a stranger approaching, they would crown him as their king. This newly appointed king would then decide all the matters of the land. At the year's end, they would remove him from his throne and expel him from the country. Stripped of his royalty, he would leave just as he had come. The people would then go out to the main road once again and find themselves a brand

new king. This scenario repeated itself year after year. On one occasion, a pauper happened to be treading the main road. While he lacked money, he possessed great wisdom and an amazing breadth of knowledge. Suddenly, he saw a massive parade, joyful and exuberant, heading his way. Before he even had a moment to grasp the cause behind the excitement, he was adorned in regal garments and a royal crown was placed upon his head. He was brought directly to the royal palace in the capital city, where he was inaugurated for the coming year with an elaborate ceremony. Thinking about the strange events that had taken place, the king summoned one of his ministers, who offered him a detailed explanation of the land's custom. "Amazing," thought the king. "It seems that after a year, I will once again be a destitute pauper. How interesting..." What did he do? Over the course of the year, the king dispatched to his old home as much money, jewelry, merchandise, and items of great worth, as he was able to. When the year drew to a close, the people entered his room and brought him his old pauper's clothing. They then expelled him from the country with a warning never to return. The man returned home where the massive treasure which he had so exerted himself to amass was awaiting him. From that treasure the man was able to support himself and his family, providing them with a life of wealth and luxury for years to come. Man, said R' David HaNaggid, comes to this world for but a limited length of time. There are times when he is totally immersed in the pleasures and trivialities of this world and does not pay heed to the time that is quickly passing. Eventually, his years pass by and he arrives in the World to Come empty-handed, having nothing to show for his stay in this world. This is not the case, however, with the wise man who possesses a great deal of foresight. In this world, he toils in order to send ahead a treasure of mitzvos and good deeds, which will stand in his merit on the day of accounting. Praiseworthy is he and praiseworthy is his portion!

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ In the days before Reb Yissachar Dov (the Sava Kaddisha) of Radoshitz became known as a rebbe, he was so poor that he often fasted because he simply had no bread to eat. One year he had eaten nothing for a few days before Yom Kippur, and even after the fast was over he had nothing better than meager rations of bread and water. Nor could he afford to prepare anything at all for the oncoming festival of Sukkos. After the evening service on the first night of the festival he remained in the synagogue, for he knew that at home there was nothing to eat. But he did not know that on the eve of the festival his wife had sold some modest item of jewelry that she had found among her possessions, and with the proceeds had bought braided challos and candles and potatoes. When he decided that most people had by now finished eating in their sukkah and had probably returned to their houses, he left the synagogue and went home. Entering his sukkah, he was overjoyed to see candles and challos on the table. He washed his hands, recited Kiddush, and sat down to eat. By this stage he was well-nigh starving, so he ate the potatoes which his wife served him with a ravenous appetite. While, he was eating a thought flashed through his, mind. "Berl," he said to himself, "you're not sitting in the sukkah: you're sitting in your plate!" And he stopped eating.

*A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 145*

❖ Rabbi Mordechai Finkelman, a presenter on Torah Anytime, shared the following story. Shortly after their marriage the Finkelmans rented an upstairs apartment in Brooklyn. The owner, a 70 year old fellow and his wife, lived on the first floor. It used to be a large house but he split it to accommodate a rental to bring in some more income. His landlord lived very simply, drove an older car, spent his free time studying Torah and was a very happy person. During a conversation with his landlord, Rabbi Finkelman learned that he worked for the Postal Service. In his curiosity Reb Mordechai asked him why he still works; "I know that the Post Office has a good pension plan for their workers". His landlord told him that he has not been working there long enough. "Oh! What did you do before working for the Post Office?" His landlord responded "I used to be a wealthy diamond merchant until one day. On that fateful day I came to work to discover that my partner emptied the safe and took off with all the diamonds and jewelry. Besides having lost my entire inventory I also lost a number of diamonds and pieces of jewelry which I took on consignment for which I now was in debt. That was when I

decided to start from scratch and took a job at the Post Office." Reb Mordechai was mortified. "I feel so bad for you! How do you and your wife carry yourselves with such a happy disposition?" His landlord responded, "You feel bad for me?! I did nothing wrong. Baruch Hashem I have what I need. I feel bad for my partner, look what he will have to deal with!"

*Written By R' Paysach Diskind*

❖ Meir Perlmuter tells about the time, around 1990, that Rav Tendler came to yeshivah with a recently purchased used car. A few days later he was back to his old station wagon. 'When questioned, Rav Tendler admitted that he had thought he had a handle on gashmius, but when he realized that he was having too much enjoyment from the new car, he returned it.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 100*

❖ Regarding the furnishings in Rav Aharon Kotler's apartments they were of course the epitome of simplicity and austerity. The rabbi was the leader of the generation the greatest Jewish leader of his time. The entire Jewish world in America and Israel was led by him. Yet his apartment was furnished with old chairs that didn't match. There was an old worn-out couch in another room. It is a pity we can no longer see his apartment it would have been a lesson for generations said Rabbi Chaim Epstein. Why didn't he buy new furniture? He said, "As long as there is even one Jew in the world who doesn't have food to eat I can't live that way."

*The Living Mishnas Reb Aharon, By Rabbi Yitzchak Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim*

❖ Soon after his arrival in Jerusalem, R' Avraham Shaag satisfied his longing to own land in Eretz Yisrael by buying a strip of land in Jerusalem just outside of the Jaffa Gate. Not long afterwards, when the surge in immigration and the city's expanding commercial activity began causing real estate values to soar, R' Avraham called an agent to sell his property. A puzzled R' Yissachar Ber asked his father why he was selling when the property's value was increasing daily? The tzuddik replied, "It is precisely for that reason. I am afraid that my grandchildren will become wealthy and it is a well — known fact that the dangers of wealth far outweigh the dangers of poverty!" Shortly after R' Avraham's Shaag's death, the value of his particular property skyrocketed. It was on this land that Jerusalem's major business district was built." '.

*Guardian of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Sonnenfeld, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 70*

❖ When a person returns home after a long journey with his knees shaking from fatigue and weakness, he is quite certain that the cause of his weakness lies in the pangs of hunger that gripped him during his trip, for it has been quite a while since he has last had something to eat. His family members, therefore, waste little time and serve him something to eat. After eating his fill but still feeling weak, the person assumes that this weakness can be attributed to the fact that he did not drink a sufficient amount of water during his journey. If his weakness and fatigue persist after he has had his share to drink, he begins to suspect that perhaps he has contracted an illness of sorts. When an individual craves a particular item, said the Dubno Maggid, he it money or the like, and he still feels the craving burning inside of him even after he has managed to earn a significant amount, it is an indication that the money is not the reason for his craving. Rather, it is due to another cause entirely — the yetzer hara — which kindles the flame of desire within him!

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Once a wealthy man came to the home of the Chofetz Chaim. He looked at the simple home and asked where is all of your furniture. The Chofetz Chaim smiled and said to him, Where is your furniture, if I may ask? The man said my furniture is home of course. It would be absurd of me to carry it around. I'm not going to be here forever. I'm only here temporarily. The Chofetz Chaim gave a warm smile, and the man realized that he had answered his own question.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 162*

❖ "What is this?" exclaimed Baron Rothschild. "The Chofetz Chaim has returned most of the money which I sent him!" After hearing of the fame of the Chofetz Chaim and his works, Baron Shimon Zeev Rothschild of Frankfort had instructed his charity secretary to order all of the Chofetz Chaim's seforim and to send fifty marks as payment, But the Chofetz Chaim never accepted gifts and calculated the price of each Sefer according to an exact evaluation of his work including proofreading, packing and shipping. He therefore deducted fourteen marks as the price for the Seforim and returned the rest of the money with a letter. "Since I don't accept gifts," wrote the Chofetz Chaim, "I am returning the extra money. But if you so wish you can offer it as a contribution to our Yeshivah. The Baron was so astounded by this reaction that he ordered his secretary to multiply me sum considerably and send a generous contribution to the Yeshivah of Radin. He thereafter became a steady supporter of the Yeshivah and each year sent five thousand marks to the Chofetz Chaim for distribution among Torah scholars. But when he died his heirs stopped this practice and everyone was disappointed that such noble generosity had come to an end. The Chofetz Chaim, however, understood the reason, "People wonder why such a friend of Torah and Torah scholars as Reb Shimon Zeev Rothschild did not leave at least a million marks for Yeshivos. They fail to realize that such generosity is prevented by Heaven. Our Merciful G-d wants every Jew to have the opportunity of buying a share in Torah. If a millionaire who appreciates Torah would be free to do as he wishes he would purchase the entire merit of Torah support with his vast fortune. "How then would the poor cobbler or tailor have a chance to merit anything?"

*Who Wants Life?, By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*

❖ A married man who studied in the Chofetz Chaim's yeshivah in Radin, an extremely diligent scholar, suffered from dire poverty. Every so often, he would turn to the Chofetz Chaim and complain about his predicament: "Rebbe" he would say, "it Hashem would shower me with wealth, I would give generously to tzedakah" Shortly thereafter the man started a small business and was blessed with success. In a short time, he actually became an extraordinarily wealthy individual. Unfortunately, he forgot all about the promise that he had made to the Chofetz Chaim, and not only did he not give tzedakah, but he became a full-fledged miser as well. Several years later, the Chofetz Chaim happened to visit the wealthy man's city, and his former student came out to welcome him. "Rebbe," said the wealthy man, "I have been stricken with the trait of miserliness. It is as if my hand is sealed shut with both lock and bolt, and I am unable to give any tzedakah at all. What should I do?" "What did you expect?" said the Chofetz Chaim. "Did you really think that you could amass hordes of wealth, and your Yetzer Hara — which persuades you to close your hand to the needy — would remain exactly as it was when you were poor?"

*Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Torah writes, And G-d blessed Abraham with all" (Bereishis 24:1). R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev said, "This means that G-d blessed not only Abraham but all those about him as well. If Abraham alone had prospered while those about him did not prosper, Abraham would not have felt this to be a blessing." A chassid who was destitute importuned his Rebbe to bless him to become prosperous. The Rebbe said, "I will bless you, but first you must carry out what I instruct you. Then you may return for the blessing." The Rebbe gave the chassid some money. "You are to buy the finest delicacies. You must eat them in the presence of your family, but you may not allow your children to partake of them. Then come to me for the desired blessing." The chassid did as instructed. When he set the delicacies on the table, the children were full of glee. They had little to eat that day. However, as the Rebbe had instructed, the father could not share the food with them. When the father began eating and saw the distress of his hungry children who craved the food, he was unable to swallow. He had to force himself to eat, and virtually choked with each bite. When he returned, the Rebbe said, "I will bless you with wealth. But as you prosper, remember that you will be enjoying your wealth while others are destitute. What kind of pleasure can you have from your wealth? It will be like eating delicacies in the presence of your hungry children." The man indeed became wealthy and gave lavishly to charity. He never ate at home. He would take his food to the soup kitchen and share it

with the poor. He always remembered how he had felt when he had eaten while others were hungry. R' Levi Yitzchok said, "The Patriarch Abraham would not have considered his wealth to be a blessing if others did not prosper. True happiness must be unselfish."

*Rebbes and Chassidim, By Rabbi Abraham J. Twersky, p. 183*

❖ Reb Yeshaya Asher Zelig Margulies, one of the mekubalim of Yerushalayim, once shared a story about a Jew who came to Reb Shayele Kerestir to complain about his difficult financial situation. Reb Shayele listened to the litany of problems and suggested a particular business in which the fellow might engage. Along with advice, Reb Shayee dispensed warm blessings for success. A year later, the same Jew returned to inform the Rebbe that he had succeeded. He thanked Reb Shayele for the guidance and encouragement. But he faced a new problem. Along with success had come a steady stream of requests for help. Suddenly, distant relatives and old friends were appearing on his doorstep, eager to reignite their friendship. He felt beholden to all of them, yet the expense of satisfying their expectations was mounting. Reb Shayele was deeply pained that a Jew who had faced poverty such a short time earlier could have forgotten its taste so quickly. He requested a pen and piece of paper from the gabbai and turned back to the visitor. "Who are the distinguished Jews in your hometown?" the Rebbe asked. The petitioner listed off some of the prominent personalities, and Reb Shayele wrote the name of each one. "Now," the Rebbe reflected, "since you don't want to share your wealth, we will find another person who is more willing!" The visitor gasped, realizing the import of the Rebbe's words. He immediately protested, insisting that he regretted his words and that he would be generous with anyone who asked for help. "Why does one seek parnasah if not to assist other Yidden?" the Rebbe wondered. As the Jew continued to plead for a second chance, Reb Shayele prepared slips of paper with various names he had written on them. "I will include your name in the draw. If your regret is genuine, then you will win the lottery and preserve your wealth; if not, someone else will be given the opportunity." Reb Shayele withdrew a slip of paper as the Jew stood there and wept; the name selected was that of the visitor. He had been given a reprieve. "You've learned your lesson the Rebbe told him. "Be kind and generous in the future. That's the purpose of your wealth.

*From Reb Shayaleh, By Rabbi Yisrael Besser*

❖ Rav Moshe Feinstein's modest salary as Rosh Yeshivah was sufficient to provide for his family. In fact, their needs were so simple that R' Moshe and his rebbetzin were able to use a significant portion of his salary to contribute generously to tzedakah. So large were R' Moshe's contributions in proportion to his income that the Internal Revenue Service questioned his income tax return regularly. Virtually every year, he, his accountant, or a member of the yeshivah staff would appear at an IRS audit to show proof of R' Moshe's contributions.

*5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ As mentioned above, the Brisker Rav's father-in-law R. Dovid Mintz, contributed a substantial sum to the dowry of the young couple. Along with this gift, The Brisker Rav received a number of valuable sefarim, including an original copy of the Shulchan Aruch, published in the lifetime of the author, and other ancient manuscripts of great monetary value. Apart from this, R. Meshulam Auerbach signed over ownership of an apartment building in Warsaw to The Brisker Rav so that he would be able to live off the income generated by renting the apartments. But all this wealth was lost: The tenants of the apartment building in Warsaw were pious Jews who were very poor. These people did not have the money to pay city taxes, and over the years their debt to the city had accumulated to a very large sum. Finally, the government submitted a request to the owner of the building, The Brisker Rav, to reveal the names of his tenants, but he would not do so, flatly refusing to turn over the money of his fellow Jews to the government. As a result, possession of the building was taken in lieu of the back taxes. The dowry money, too, was lost in a bitter episode, and so all the wealth was gone. During the period when he

lost the apartment building, The Brisker Rav spent much time studying "Sha'ar Habitachon" in the sefer Chovos HaLevavos. He remarked then, The world thinks that a wealthy man is someone with a block of apartments in Warsaw but the truth is that a rich man is someone who has Sha'ar Habitachon in Chovos HaLevavos!

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 130*

❖ When R' Chaim Sonnenfeld was a very poor Yeshivah student in Pressburg, he dreamt that he saw the winning numbers the bi-weekly government lottery. When he awoke in the morning, he clearly recalled the numbers. He now had to decide whether or not to invest in a lottery ticket. On the one hand, he certainly could make good use of the lottery winnings by purchasing food that would give him more strength to learn. On the other hand, perhaps the dream was meaningless; by purchasing a lottery ticket, he would be wasting some of the few coins in possession. He decided that it was correct not to risk the coins on what might be a meaningless dream. However, out of curiosity, he sought to discover the outcome of the lottery — "and he was astonished to learn that he had dreamt the winning numbers! He would tell this story in his later years he would say with a broad smile, "You must think that I was upset with my decision. Not at all! I gave the whole incident not a second thought returned to my learning completely at ease."

*Five Great Leaders, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Someone wanted to give money to Rav Chaim Kanievsky's mother - Rebbetzin Elyashiv for a new apartment for Rav Kanievsky. She said she can't take the money. Up until now people say if the Kanievsky's are able manage with 14 children in that apartment, so can they. If the Kanievsky's get a new nice apartment thousands of people will not be comfortable anymore with their conditions and it would not be fair to them.

*Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ His end was drawing near. Mr. Wolf Lazerson, one of the richest Jews in the country, was on his deathbed with all his children surrounding him. "There are two last requests that I'd like to make," he said in a weak voice. "The first is that you don't open my will until the end of the shloshim. The second is that you bury me with my socks on." "But Dad," his son Yechiel Aryeh protested, "halachah doesn't allow such a thing." "I don't care," Wolf said. "That's what I want." No amount of explaining helped. He insisted on having socks on and that was that. His children were very disturbed by their father's insisting on something which he himself knew was contrary to halachah. When he was niftar a few days later, his children consulted a poseik, who told them Mr. Lazerson's wish would have to be ignored, and so he was buried without the socks. At the shloshim, they opened his will. "My dear children," they read. "I left you a lot of money and a large estate. I wanted you to realize before dividing it up that in the end you can't take any of it with you - not even your socks. Love. Dad."

*Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Abraham Axelrod, the late deputy-mayor of Jerusalem, once related: I chanced to be standing once near Rav Aryeh during a funeral at the Sanhedria cemetery. After the grave was filled he said to me with a smile "Many times people have tried to persuade me to move to larger, more comfortable living quarters; and I have refused. "Come and see (he continued). After his long life on earth is over, a man is brought from his home — here. For me the move, the transition will not be hard, because between my room and here the contrast is not so very sharp. But when a man has grown accustomed to living comfortably in a splendid home, how hard it will be for him at the end of his days to move his 'residence' to this small bit of space..."

*A Tzadik in Our Times, By Simcha Raz, Published by Feldheim*

## E. NOT TO BE IMPULSIVE

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-3**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Scripture warns: "Do not rush hastily to quarrel" (Mishlei 25:8). Our Sages have likewise taught: "Patience, patience is worth four hundred zuz" (Shabbos 31a), and common wisdom reminds us that "the fruit of haste is regret."

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ The disciples of Rabbi Nechunya ben HaKanah asked him: "In the merit of what practices have you attained such a long life?" He answered them: "In all my days, I have never derived personal honor from the disgrace of my fellow; I have never gone up to my bed at night holding a grievance or curse against my fellow on my heart (lo aletah al mittati killat chaveri); and I have always been generous and yielding with my money."

*Talmud Bavli, Megillah 28a*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Segal was as calm, cool, and collected as ever. If he showed anger, it was in his usual calculated fashion. A bachur stuffed the keyhole of the door to the rebbeim's room with toothpicks and covered it with glue. When the rebbeim came for Shacharis, they could not open the door and had to Wait for someone to climb into the room from the ground-floor window outside and open the door for them. This caused them to be very late for davening. Rabbi Segal was very upset, but completely controlled. After Minchah, he asked the chazzan to lead everyone in a kapitel Tehillim. Then he told the following story: "The Chofetz Chaim knew of a man who evicted a widow from her home in the middle of the winter because she was behind on the rent. Many years later, this landlord was bitten by a dog. He became very sick and died, When the Chofetz Chaim heard what had happened to the landlord, he said, 'I have waited many years to see what terrible punishment this man would get for his cruel behavior to a poor widow" Rabbi Segal paused, "Do you know why we said Tehillim just now? I am davening that nothing bad should happen to the bachur who showed such a lack of kavod hatorah today." Rabbi Segal conveyed enormous pain. Yet there was not a single sign of his personal pain.

*From Rabbi Chaim Segal: Building Bnei Torah in America, by Devorah Gliksman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One time, while in New York, Rabbi Dessler went to visit Rabbi Avrohom Joffen, the Novordhok Rosh Yeshivah, together with Rabbi Naftali Friedler. As they went through the subway turnstile, Rabbi Friedler heard the subway pulling into the station below and started to run. Rabbi Dessler, however, held him fast. "If it's not this train, it will be the next one," he said. "Never do anything in this world with behirus (hurriedly)."

*Rav Dessler, By Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 223*

❖ In Kelm, it was customary that a letter or package that arrived in the mail was not opened until the following day, in order to discourage acting hastily and provide training in remaining calm. While a bachur in Kelm, Reb Yerucham once received a very important letter concerning a proposed marriage match. Though its contents were extremely important to him, he refrained from opening it until the next day.

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

## DEDICATING FOOD FOR A SPIRITUAL PURPOSE

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask us to emulate Hashem's holiness by dedicating our food and eating for a spiritual purpose*

# 2. To sanctify your hands before a meal

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-3**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

There is a rabbinic mitzvah (netilas yadayim) to wash and sanctify one's hands before partaking of a meal containing bread.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

This mitzvah helps to elevate the physical activities of eating by reminding us to eat for holy purposes like having strength to do mitzvos and not simply to satisfy our taste buds. This mindset makes us more Kadosh like Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

**RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH**

Chazal wanted us to treat all of our food as if it was terumah. (The sanctified food of the kohanim that required the purification of hands before it can be eaten) This teaches us to sanctify the act of eating and treat it holy.

**SFAS EMES**

• In Parshas Tzav and Parshas Shemini, the Torah describes the seven-day consecration of the priests: 'For seven days shall he fill your hands — That you may serve Me.' Before any Cohen could step forward to perform the sacrificial service in the Tabernacle, he was strictly required to wash his hands and feet from the copper Laver (Kiyor). The Sfas Emes explains that when Hashem gave the Torah at Sinai, He declared our collective national mission: 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' This title was not an empty poetic metaphor; it was a practical behavioral blueprint. While the descendants of Aharon were chosen to serve in the central physical Temple in Jerusalem, every Jewish home was designed to function as an embassy of that Temple. We are doing far more than cleaning our fingers; we are donning our priestly vestments. By washing with reverence, we step into our eternal heritage as a kingdom of priests (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5631).

• In Parshas Shemini, Scripture describes Aharon concluding the inaugural sacrifices: 'And Aharon lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offerings.' The Zohar in Parshas Yisro offers an astonishing mystical observation regarding the extremities of the human body. In his discourse on Parshas Naso (5634), the Sfas Emes explains that spiritual

danger is always greatest at the borders. In a well-guarded country, the capital city is secure, but the border frontiers are vulnerable to bandits and enemy incursions. In the geography of the human body, the heart and brain are internal, protected by bone and muscle, but the fingers reach outward into the cold, chaotic world. Ensuring that the water covers the entirety of the hand down to the fingertips is not an empty technicality; it is the thorough cleansing of our spiritual borders. Through mindful washing, we maintain the pristine purity of our soul's outer frontiers (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5634).

• In Parshas Toldos, the blind patriarch Yitzchak reaches out to touch his son, uttering the foundational prophetic diagnosis of Jewish history: 'The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Esav.' Our Sages establish that throughout history, the primary strength of Yaakov lies in his voice—the power of prayer, Torah study, and spiritual articulation. The Sfas Emes explains that human hands have a dangerous biological tendency to slip into the predatory mode of Esav. Left unrefined, the hand naturally reaches out to grab, conquer, hoard, and exploit. When an individual sits down to eat driven solely by animal hunger, his hands function as Esav's claws, seizing food to feed his selfish ego. Yaakov's mission was to demonstrate that physical blessing could be received with holiness. We do not live by the law of the jungle, where the strong seize whatever they desire. By washing our hands, we tame our predatory instincts and conduct ourselves with the gentle, holy dignity of Yaakov Avinu (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Toldos 5634).

• In Parshas Vayechi, when Yaakov Avinu blesses his grandsons Menashe and Ephraim, Scripture notes: 'And Yisrael stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Menashe's head, guiding his hands knowingly (sikel es yadav).' The Midrash and the commentators connect Yaakov's deliberate positioning of his hands to King David's verse in Psalms: 'Lift up your hands in holiness, and bless Hashem.' Our Sages in Maseches Chullin and Berachos establish the rabbinic obligation of netilas yadayim —washing the hands with a vessel before consuming bread. The Sfas Emes examines how sanctifying the hands transforms human engagement with the physical world. The Sfas Emes explains that the human hands are the primary instruments of physical action, commerce, and worldly labor. Inevitably, the hands absorb the energetic dust of materialism, associating the physical grasp with possessiveness, competition, and worldly distraction. Before we reach out to consume the physical bounty of creation, we pause and sanctify our tools. By washing our hands, we elevate our bodily actions and turn every meal into an encounter with holiness (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayechi 5645).

• The Sfas Emes expounds the pasuk in the portion of Challah — "When you eat of the bread of the land, you shall set aside an offering" — and sets it against the meraglim who precede it. Their complaint was really a distress at descending a level: the wilderness generation stood in the aspect of Moshe, who brought them Torah and manna (mann), bread from heaven, while the Land means bread from the earth (lechem min ha-aretz). The verse answers that precisely in eating earthly bread, more terumah can be lifted — for it is precious before Him when the lowly is raised to Him, which is the very reason man descended from the upper world into this one. And therefore, he adds, one must speak divrei Torah at the table — binding the bodily eating to its true nourishment. The washing is the threshold: the hands are lifted from the earthly into the holy before they bring the bread to the mouth (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5641).

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ Our Sages taught: It once happened that Rabbi Akiva was imprisoned in the Roman prison house, and Rabbi Yehoshua HaGarsi attended to him. Every day they permitted him to bring in a measured ration of water. One day the prison guard stopped Rabbi Yehoshua HaGarsi at the gate and said to him: 'Today you have too much water! Are you perhaps planning to soften the prison wall and tunnel out?' And the guard poured out half of the water, leaving him only half. When Rabbi Yehoshua HaGarsi came in to Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Akiva asked for water to wash his hands before eating bread. Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: 'Master, there is barely enough water for you to drink—how can there be enough to wash your hands?' Rabbi Akiva replied: 'What can I do, when for neglecting the words of the Sages one is liable to spiritual death? It is better that I die my own death through thirst than that I transgress the enactment of my colleagues!' They related that he refused to taste a morsel of bread until Rabbi Yehoshua brought him water and he washed his hands. When the Sages heard of this, they marveled: 'If he was so steadfast in his old age and in prison, how much more so in his youth—and if he was so careful in a prison house, how much more so when free!'

*Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 21b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ A Rav once approached The Brisker Rav with serious complaints about a certain Torah institution for children. The school was not being run well and he was concerned that the children were not being educated properly. He went so far as to suggest that it be closed down. The Brisker Rav's response surprised him: "Do the children wash their hands in the morning according to halachah?" he asked. "I didn't mean to say that they did not," answered the Rav. That much, he said, he assumed they did teach the children. The Brisker Rav was delighted to hear this, "If so, then that is reason enough to keep the school going. The children wash their hands properly every morning! "Now," he continued, "let's see if there's a way we can improve things there in other areas.

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 205*

❖ Rebbetzin Malka the wife of Rav Shlomo of Belz had a custom to personally distribute kasha — buckwheat groats — to the Hasidim during meals on Shabbos. Her motive was undoubtedly spiritual, and indeed, holy power may be "transmitted" through food. Once, when she was serving the kasha, she saw a young man who ate it hurriedly, in a gluttonous manner unbefitting a Hasid. The Rebbetzin called him over and said to him. "Do you know how many prayers were sent into heaven on behalf of this food? At seed time. The seeds were praying that they be received into the earth and sprout. Then they pray that if heaven decrees a blight to afflict the sprouts. They be spared. Later, at threshing time. When many grains are simply lost and others carried off by the wind. They pray that nothing be lost. Still later, the grains pray that they come into the possession of a Jew — who will elevate them by making a blessing when eating them. Then they pray that they will become a food to be eaten on Shabbos, for this will cause their fixing — their tikkun — and elevation. But if, after all this, one eats in a lowly way, one spoils everything. For a grain of kasha can only receive a fixing when eaten in a way befitting a human being!

*Jewish Tales of Holy Women, By Yitzhak Buxbaum, Published by Jossey-Bass*

# 3. To sanctify all new vessels in a Mikvah before their use

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-61**

*As the Torah says, all that has not been passed through fire, you shall pass through water, (Bamidbar 31:23, Parshas Mattos)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Would a vessel need tevilla if it was manufactured by Jews?
- Would a vessel used to store raw flour need tevilla?
- Would a wooden salad bowl need tevilla?
- Would a ceramic cup, covered with a glass glaze need tevilla?
- Can one dip a pot in the mikva if it was used for non-kosher food, and was not yet kashered?

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a mitzvah to immerse culinary vessels acquired from a gentile in the waters of a mikveh (tevilas keilim). If the vessels were used by gentiles only for cold foods, a thorough washing followed by ritual immersion in water suffices. However, if the vessels were used with heat or over direct fire, they must first be purged and kashered from their absorbed non-kosher taste (through boiling water or direct flames, according to their manner of use), and only afterward undergo tevilah.

The obligation of immersing vessels applies exclusively to utensils utilized for food preparation or dining (keilei seudah). Furthermore, this obligation applies only to vessels manufactured from metal or glass, or to those lined or coated with metal or glass.

This ritual immersion is required only when the vessels are acquired into permanent Jewish ownership, such as through purchase from a gentile. If, however, a vessel is merely borrowed or rented from a gentile, it does not require immersion.

Some authorities rule that if a vessel requires kashering from absorbed non-kosher food, immersion in a mikveh prior to kashering is ineffective. In such a sequence, the premature immersion resembles a male convert who immerses in a mikveh before undergoing circumcision (hatah), which remains invalid until the prerequisite purification is fulfilled.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

This mitzvah helps to elevate the physical activities of eating by reminding us to eat for holy purposes like having strength to do mitzvos and not simply to satisfy our taste buds. This mindset makes us more Kadosh like Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

We sanctify our food utensils in a Mikva before using them in order to sanctify the act of eating.

**SFAS EMES**

• In Parshas Matos, following the war against Midian, the Torah introduces the laws of kashering and purifying captured utensils: 'Everything that can pass through fire, you shall pass through fire and it shall be clean; nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of sprinkling (mei nidah).' The Talmud in Maseches Avodah Zarah derives from this verse that any vessel acquired from a gentile that is used for preparing or serving food must be immersed in a kosher mikvah before its first use. In his discourse on Parshas Emor (5652), the Sfas Emes explains that physical utensils are not spiritually neutral; they absorb the consciousness and spiritual domain of their owner. In the pagan world, a dining vessel exists exclusively for biological feeding and sensual gratification. It belongs to the domain of vanity and self-indulgence. In the Jewish nation, however, eating is an act of divine service, and the dining table is an altar of atonement. We are doing far more than following a ritual custom; we are actively converting physical tools for holy use. Through tevilas keilim, we elevate ordinary household utensils into instruments of divine service (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5652).

• The Mishnah at the conclusion of Maseches Yoma quotes the stirring declaration of Rabbi Akiva: 'Fortunate are you, Israel! Before Whom do you purify yourselves, and Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven!' The Sfas Emes examines the spiritual mechanics of nullification and rebirth. The Sfas Emes explains that water is the original element that preceded the creation of dry land. Before the dry land emerged, the world was an undivided ocean enveloped in the spirit of Hashem. Dry land represents differentiation, ego, property ownership, and human separation. Water, by contrast, represents the realm of total unity, self-nullification, and pure divine potential. No matter how contaminated or secular an object was in the past, divine waters have the power to renew it completely. By immersing our vessels, we celebrate the ongoing miracle of rebirth and purification (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5644).

• Parshas Masei opens with the comprehensive historical ledger of Jewish wandering: 'These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went forth out of the land of Egypt.' Our Sages and the holy Chassidic masters explain that Israel was led through forty-two distinct encampments in the desert to extract and elevate the hidden sparks of holiness scattered across the wilderness. The Sfas Emes explains that when Hashem created the world, holy sparks were dispersed throughout all nations and all physical substances. The nations of the world extracted raw minerals from the earth—gold, silver, copper, and iron—and crafted them into useful vessels. Unbeknownst to them, they were serving divine providence by preparing vessels that would ultimately belong to the people of the Torah. Taking a new set of dishes to the mikvah is not a mundane chore; it is an act of spiritual liberation. By immersing our utensils, we redeem the material world and prepare creation for the ultimate revelation of godliness (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Masei 5646).

• In the homilies of Shemini Atzeres, the Sfas Emes reflects upon the unique transition from the festival of Sukkot to the intimate celebration of the Eighth Day: 'On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall do no servile work.' The Midrash connects this final holiday to King David's prayer in Psalms: 'In return for my love they are my adversaries, but I am all prayer.' On Shemini Atzeres, we pray for rain, beseeching the Almighty to open the heavenly storehouses of life-giving water for the coming year. The Sfas Emes explains that physical matter, left to itself, is rigid, harsh, and judgmental. A metal pot or iron pan represents strict, unyielding judgment; if dropped on a stone floor, it rings with harshness. Water, by contrast, possesses no rigid shape of its own. It flows downward to the lowest places, yields to every container, quenches every thirst, and cleanses every

stain. The food we feed our children and guests is prepared in vessels sweetened by living waters of compassion. Through tevilas keilim, we ensure that our homes are filled with the gentle, enduring love of our Father in heaven (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5641).

• In Parshas Ki Sisa, the Torah interrupts the intricate instructions for building the Tabernacle with an absolute warning: 'Nevertheless, you shall keep My Shabbos days, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am Hashem who sanctifies you.' Our Sages in Maseches Shabbos derive from this placing side by side that the constructive labors used to build the Tabernacle define the thirty-nine prohibited categories of work on Shabbos. The Sfas Emes reveals the common thread uniting holy rest with the sanctification of tools. The Sfas Emes explains that human manufacturing is an act of imposing human ego and technological power upon nature. A metalsmith takes raw iron, melts it in a furnace, beats it with a hammer, and forces the metal to take the shape of a pot. Our tools and devices are not monuments to human greatness; they are gifts to be used for sacred purposes. By sanctifying our vessels, we infuse our material possessions with the serene holiness of Shabbos (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Ki Sisa 5633).

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

A young man who became fully Torah observant was living at home with his parents, who were secular and extremely wealthy. His parents were proud of their elegant lifestyle and maintained an expensive, designer set of fine porcelain, crystal, and metal culinary dishes. Wanting his parents to avoid the Torah prohibition of using unimmersed vessels (tevilas keilim), the son gently suggested taking their new pots and serving dishes to the mikvah. However, his parents adamantly refused, scoffing at the idea and claiming that a communal mikvah was unhygienic. Determined to save his parents from daily transgressions, the son waited for an evening when they were out attending a charity gala. He carefully packed up the entire collection of kitchen vessels into heavy crates and rushed them to the mikvah. Working in great haste so that he could immerse everything and return before his parents arrived home, a crate slipped from his hands, shattering several exquisitely expensive imported serving dishes. Shaken, the son realized he faced multiple serious questions: Was he permitted to take his parents' property to the mikvah without their knowledge? Must he pay his parents for the expensive dishes he broke? And is he obligated to confess what happened, knowing that admitting the truth will trigger enormous rage and cause them further emotional estrangement from Judaism? What do you think?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the son is exempt from paying for the broken dishes and appears not to be obligated to inform his parents. Every Jew bears collective spiritual responsibility (arvus) to prevent a fellow Jew—and all the more so one's own parents—from stumbling into sin. When the son acted to immerse their vessels, he was acting under the mandate of arvus, which carries the halachic status of acting with the authority of the court (b'reshus Beis Din). One who damages property while legitimately acting on behalf of Beis Din to rectify a religious violation is legally exempt from damages. Furthermore, since his parents are extremely wealthy and the monetary loss is trivial to them, while revealing the mishap would provoke immense fury, family strife, and resentment toward Torah, he does not have to disclose that he broke the dishes.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 384*

Chanah was visiting Miami, an area with a significant Jewish population, and went to the store, Burlington. In the clearance section, she found a box filled with pans and metal utensils. She wanted to purchase the box but noticed that the word "toiveled" was written in permanent marker on the box. It seemed that someone had bought the box, toiveled

it, and then returned it. Chanah wanted to know if she could rely on the text that said it was toiveled. On one hand, why would anyone write "toiveled" if they didn't actually do it? Perhaps she can buy it and not toivel it at all. But on the other hand, maybe someone toiveled it but didn't do it properly. In that case she should toivel it like any normal purchase. Another question was, if she would toivel it, should she toivel it with a berachah? Perhaps If she did make a berachah and it had already been toiveled, it would be a wasted berachah. So, there were three options: to toivel it like a regular vessel, to toivel without a berachah, or to simply rely on the words on the box, and not toivel at all. What do you think she should do?

**Answer:** Regarding the question of whether you can trust a box that has the words "toiveled" on it, Rav Tzvi Berkowitz answered as follows. The writing on the box has the same status as having heard it from a person. You have a right to assume that it was written by an adult. It is possible that the person who wrote it didn't do it themselves and asked a child to do it who is not believed or some other problem, but even if he were to hear from the person himself that it was toiveled he doesn't have to interrogate him. Therefore he has a right to believe that it was already toiveled. It certainly should not have a berachah. However, it would be better to toivel it to remove all questions since the item has a chezkas issur.

*— Source: Rav Tzvi Berkowitz / Table Talk*

A Jewish family living in China was preparing to celebrate their first Pesach. All of their chametz utensils had been put away, and they purchased new utensils specifically for Pesach. As they were about to begin the seder, the wife suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to toivel (immerse) all the new dishes, and there was no one nearby from whom they could borrow utensils. The husband then wondered how he could fulfill the mitzvah of the Four Cups. Could he drink the wine from vessels that had not been toiveled for the sake of the mitzvah?

**Answer:** Bedieved (after the fact), he may declare the cups ownerless, which exempts them from tevilah, and then use them for the mitzvah.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 446*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Klausenberger Rebbe, having been extremely careful to eat only kosher food during the period of his imprisonment, continued his strict adherence to kashrus despite his weak state. Survivor Baruch Ganz recalled, "I lived two barracks away from the Rebbe [in Feldafing]. Two days after liberation, the Rebbe returned to his barracks exhausted and drained from searching for the dead, and I was worried about what he would eat. I knew he had not eaten anything all day. "A young Jewish teenager entered the barracks and I saw him empty a can of preserves. I eagerly took the empty can, boiled water in it, and prepared a cup of tea for the Rebbe. Then I walked over to the Rebbe's barracks. "I found the Rebbe lying on a bag of straw on the cold floor. He was literally at the end of his strength. When he saw that I held the cup in my hand, he asked me, 'What did you bring?' " 'A cup of tea,' I answered. "I was sure that he would drink it quickly to rejuvenate himself. But the Rebbe asked me in his weak voice, 'What did you boil the water in?' "I told him the truth, that I had boiled the water in an empty can of preserves. Without any hesitation, he responded, 'If so, put it aside. I will not drink it.' He was concerned because the can had not been made kosher or immersed in a mikveh."

*The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press*

## ACHIEVING HOLINESS BY EATING KOSHER FOOD

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask us to emulate Hashem's holiness by eating foods that are kosher and thereby keep our bodies pure and subordinate towards to our neshamah.*

# 4. Not to eat non-kosher animals

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 93**

*As the Torah says, But these you shall not eat, etc. (Vayikra 11:4, Parshas Shemini)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What are the signs that an animal is kosher?
- Is there a minimum amount that one needs to eat to violate this prohibition?
- If one bites skin on his finger, can he swallow it? Is human flesh kosher?
- Can one drink the milk of a non-kosher animal?
- Are bees kosher? If not, why is it permitted to eat honey?
- If a person is not kosher, why is human milk?
- Can an adult drink human milk?
- If a non-Jew offers you milk that he says came from a cow that he milked in his backyard, can you drink it?
- What if he offers you cheese that he says came from a cow that he milked in his backyard?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

Any animal that fails to chew its cud (ma'aleh gerah) or does not have fully split hooves (shaussah shesa paros) is non-kosher and strictly forbidden for consumption.

If someone consumes an olive's volume (k'zayis) of meat from a non-kosher animal — whether of a domesticated species (behemah) or a wild, untamed species (chayah) — he violates this negative commandment.

The consumption of human flesh is forbidden under a prohibition derived from a positive commandment (issur aseh), as it is excluded from the scriptural directive: "These are the living creatures which you may eat" (Vayikra 11:2) — for whatever the Torah does not include within the enumerated permitted categories remains prohibited by virtue of that positive specification.

Any byproduct that derives from a forbidden species — such as milk yielded by non-kosher domesticated or wild animals — is strictly forbidden for consumption by biblical law (d'Oraisa), based on the principle: "Whatever emerges from the impure is itself impure" (Bechoros 5b).

However, honey produced by bees or wasps is permitted for consumption, because the bees merely collect nectar and store it, rather than generating it as a biological secretion of their own bodies.

Human milk is inherently permissible, but an adult is rabbinically forbidden to nurse directly from the breast.

Milk in the possession of a gentile that was milked without Jewish supervision (chalav akum) is rabbinically forbidden for consumption, out of concern that he may have adulterated it by mixing in milk from a non-kosher animal.

Cheese manufactured by a gentile (gevinas akum) is technically permitted according to the strict letter of biblical law, for there is no suspicion that it was produced from the milk of a non-kosher animal, given that non-kosher milk does not curdle into cheese. Nevertheless, Chazal enacted a binding decree prohibiting gentile cheese due to several halachic concerns (such as the historical use of rennet from non-kosher animal stomachs).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

## HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### RAMBAN

Keeping kosher keeps us spiritually pure. If we eat non-kosher food, that will block the neshamah from influencing us. Keeping kosher allows us to become holy.

### ABARBANEL

Eating non-kosher food will give us bad middos, bad character traits. It will also give us a spirit of tumah that banishes the spirit of kedushah from influencing us.

### RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:35)

The mitzvos of kashrus give us discipline by teaching us how to control our impulses.

Additionally, many of these foods may also be unhealthy for various reasons. Hashem, the Creator of nature and the Author of the laws of Kashrus is the greatest doctor and knows what we should avoid, even if we don't understand it.

### R' BECHER GATEWAY TO JUDAISM PAGE 300

The animals that are kosher, are animals that are gentle which we are encouraged to emulate. The non-kosher animals are animals that we want to avoid emulating.

Additionally, this mitzvah teaches us to have dignity and self respect by avoiding eating things that are disgusting like carcasses, sick animals, and bugs.

Finally, the laws of Kashrus create a distinction between the Jewish people and the rest of the world that prevents them from assimilating. This also creates an internal sense of unity among Jews.

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)**

While all transgressions create a spiritual obstruction of the heart (timtum halev), forbidden foods produce this effect far more intensely. Because food is physically digested and absorbed into a person's flesh and blood, forbidden sustenance physically incorporates spiritual impurity into the very fabric of one's body.

**SFAS EMES**

• The Torah gives us two mandatory signs for kosher land animals: "Any animal that has a split hoof, completely divided, and chews the cud, that you may eat" (Vayikra 11:3). Why are both physical signs necessary? The Sfas Emes teaches that divine wisdom is hidden inside all created things. But to release that spark of goodness requires two distinct keys: an outer key and an inner key. First, we must crack open the hard outer shell of physical self-absorption. That outer opening is represented by the split hoof (shosa'as shesa): The division in the hoof shows that the physical shell is not sealed shut against the light. That is chewing the cud (ma'aleh gerah): The animal brings its food back up to chew it again, hinting that its inner vitality can be elevated by our sacred deeds. Only when an animal possesses both—an open outer shell and an upward-reaching inner drive—can it nourish the Jewish soul (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5653).

• Parshas Shemini begins with a seemingly extra phrase: "Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, to say to them" (Vayikra 11:1). Why does the Torah add the words "to say to them"? The Sfas Emes explains that the Torah does not ask us to cultivate unnatural cravings. Rather, Hashem wants our primary motive for restraint to be our devotion to His command: “so that our restraint comes from honoring Hashem's command rather than mere personal distaste.” If we refrain from an unkosher food only because our stomach turns, our choice remains a biological reflex. That means we attach ourselves to the divine will hidden inside each command. By letting our Father's voice guide our fork, even our passive avoidance becomes an active act of holiness (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5631).

• In Parshas Shemini, the Midrash Vayikra Rabbah (13:3) cites King Shlomo's proverb: "Every word of Hashem is refined (tzerufah)" (Mishlei 30:5). Why does the Midrash connect this general purpose of all mitzvos specifically to the list of kosher animals? The Sfas Emes explains that creation is organized into four ascending tiers: inanimate dust (domem), plant life (tzome'ach), animal life (chai), and the speaking human being (medaber). In nature, soil nourishes plants, plants nourish animals, and animals nourish human beings. Each lower kingdom rises through the one above it. King Shlomo writes: "Remove the dross from the silver, and a vessel emerges for the silversmith" (Mishlei 25:4). By setting aside those species and eating only pure, herbivorous animals in holiness, we remove the inner dross from our character and become a clear vessel for Hashem's glory (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5656).

• In tractate Bava Metzia (61b), Hashem makes a striking declaration: even if I had taken Israel out of Egypt only so that they would not defile themselves with crawling creatures (sheratzim), that alone would have justified the Exodus! Why does the Torah weigh our daily diet against our entire national liberation? The Sfas Emes explains this through the Hebrew phrase ma'achalos asuros. The word asur means forbidden, but its root also means bound and imprisoned: When we consume forbidden food, we imprison our soul within the heavy walls of our

physical body. Egypt was called Mitzrayim because it was a place of narrow constriction (meitzar), where human beings were trapped by blind material forces. Hashem wants our mouths to open in spiritual expansiveness, not to swallow foods that drag us back into slavery. By guarding what enters our mouths, we protect the freedom we won at the Exodus every single day (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5652).

• In the Jerusalem Talmud (Berachos 5:2), our Sages explain why the prayer of Havdalah is recited inside the blessing for wisdom (Atah Chonein L'Adam Da'as): "If there is no da'as (inner discernment), from where could there be separation (havdalah)?" In Parshas Shemini, the Torah concludes the dietary laws with this exact command: "To distinguish between the impure and the pure" (Vayikra 11:47). The Sfas Emes explains that a young child or an animal grabs whatever looks tasty without a moment's thought. They possess no da'as, no pause between impulse and action. But a mature human being exercises discernment: When we sit down to eat and pause to ask, "Is this kosher? Was it prepared properly? Is it honest?", we exercise our highest human faculty. Kashrus trains us not to be slaves to our appetite. Every time we distinguish between the permitted and the forbidden, we sharpen our moral intelligence and strengthen our ability to choose good over evil (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5658).

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ R' Shimon ben Chalafta was once walking on the road. When he came upon two hungry lions who were looking for prey. A miracle occurred and two pieces of flesh came down from Heaven. The lions ate one piece of meat, and R' Shimon took the second piece to the beis midrash and asked if it was permissible for him to eat the meat. The sages responded, "An impure thing does not descend from Heaven."

*Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 59b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Gershon Libman was a talmid in the Navardok Yeshivah. He was captured by the Nazi's and was sent to Bergen Belson concentration camp. Of all of the inmates, the Nazi's noticed his proud spirit and devoted relationship to Hashem. His body was in Bergen Belsen, but his mind was still in Yeshivah. He would learn and daven when he worked. One day, in order to break him and see his reaction he was called into the commandant's office by two Nazi guards. When he walked into the Commandants office he was shocked. The contrast between the office and the rest of the labor camp was incredibly jarring. Here there were plush carpets, and beautiful curtains. Classical music played, and it was cool and comfortable. It was filled with ornate art, and the furniture was extremely expensive. The Commandants table was filled with delicious food, and covered with expensive wine and very delicate china and crystal. The Commandant was sitting at the table, with fork and knife in hand. In middle of the table was a beautifully roasted pig, garnished and looking delicious. Gershon looked closer and realized that the table cloth was none other than a talis. Reb Gershon was filled with revulsion. Instinctively without being able to think or resist he grabbed the tablecloth talis and pulled it close to him. The food, china, wine, fell all over the office, and all over the commandants face. Crying Reb Gershon began kissing the talis and apologizing to it for the indignity and disgrace it had to suffer. The commandant was shocked beyond words. He expected to break Reb Gershon but he didn't expect this. Reb Gershon fully expected to be executed for this. Filled with rage and sputtering incoherently, the commandant ordered the Nazi guards to beat him mercilessly. His body was battered, yet Reb Gershon survived—and to him, all that mattered was that he was able to uphold the respect of the Torah and Hashem.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 131*

❖ During Reb Aryeh Levin's enforced stay in Hadassah Hospital, the members of his family brought him tasty home-cooked dishes of fish and chicken to have for his Shabbos meals. In the course of the Shabbos, though, Reb Aryeh took the dishes and gave them to the patient in the bed next to his. "Here," said he, "eat this. It is very tasty. My daughters cooked it themselves." "Why don't you have it yourself?" I can eat the hospital food. The other asked. "Your daughters put in the effort for you. They brought this food here so that you should really enjoy your Shabbos meal" "Yes," said Reb Aryeh, "but just look. All around us there are many other patients; and when they see that I am not eating the food prepared in the hospital kitchen, they will think that quite certainly I don't trust the arrangements here for preparing strictly kosher food. They will imagine that I consider the hospital's food non-kosher, and that is why I have my family bring me this. And become of me those who have strict standards will leave their meal and go hungry. I don't want to cause them that distress.

*A Tzadik in Our Times, By Simcha Raz, Published by Feldheim*

## A. NOT TO EAT GENTILE CHEESE

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-5**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Chazal have rabbinically forbidden the consumption of cheese produced by a gentile (gevinas akum).

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Chida, Rav Chaim Yosef David Azulai was once traveling by boat on his way to England. On his boat there was a fellow in the cheese business who was also on his way to England with much cheese to sell. When this fellow discovered that the Chida was on board he approached him for a favor. "I would like you to write a letter of approbation that you know that my cheese meets all the requirements necessary to be kosher". Naturally, the Chida told him that he could never write such a letter as he did not know him nor did he know anything about the cheese he had with him. The businessman was not about to give up such an opportunity so he threatened the Chida that if he would not produce such a letter his wife would become a widow. The halachah does not require one to give up their life for this issue so the Chida decided to write the requested letter. In his letter he indicated that the cheese that this merchant is selling is absolutely kosher. However, before signing the letter he added a verse from Parshas Bo וככה תאכלו אתו מתניכם חגרים נעליכם ברגליכם ומקלכם בידכם שמות Which translates "and so you shall eat it with your belts tightened and your shoes on your feet and you walking sticks in your hand, the book of Shmos" The businessman was overjoyed, confident that he could now sell to the Jewish market. Upon arriving in London he went to the local Rov and presented him the letter from the Chida. After studying the letter for a moment he told the businessman to leave town quickly. The Rov understood what had happened. His students asked how he knew this. The Rov pointed out that first of all it is very strange that the Chida should write that it should be eaten in the same manner as the Pesach offering. Furthermore, he added, why did the Chida indicate that this verse is in the book of Shemos? Anyone who is worthy of honoring this letter knows where this verse is found. Shmos can also be understood as an acronym "study the Torah two times and the Unkelos once". The Rov continued "if you look at the Unkelos on that verse it reads חרציכון יהון אסירין' These Aramaic words have an alternate meaning "your cheeses are forbidden" Behold! Hashem protects His people by providing us wise leaders.

*From Parparos laTorah by Menachem Beker Shemos page 56*

## B. NOT TO EAT GENTILE MILK

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-6**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Is there anything that can be done to allow a Jew to drink milk produced on a non-Jewish dairy farm?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Chazal have rabbinically forbidden milk milked by a gentile (chalav akum) unless the milking process was witnessed and supervised by a Jew from inception to completion.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ An administrator of a Brooklyn yeshivah once related the following story: One year, the city sent us a new bus driver, a broad-shouldered fellow named "Richie." Richie quickly became the leader of all the drivers, and I realized that if I did not treat him royally, I would be in for trouble. One of my ways of keeping him happy was to give him a cup of coffee every afternoon before he drove the children home. One day, Richie said to me, "You know, you're not a holy rabbi." I asked Richie to explain what defined someone as a "holy rabbi," and why I did not fit into this category. This was his response: "I used to drive a bus for the girls' school on Ocean Parkway and Avenue O. The principal's name was Rabbi Manis Mandel, and every afternoon, he would offer me a cup of coffee just like you do. After a while, I began to notice something. When he prepared a cup of coffee for himself, he would use a special container of milk. "One day, I said to him, 'Rabbi, I also want special milk like you drink.' The rabbi laughed and said, 'Richie, the milk in your coffee is just as special as mine. You see, the milk we have in school is subsidized by the government. It's only for students and bus drivers like you. But as the dean of the school, I am personally not comfortable using it. That's why I bring milk from home for my coffee.' "Yes, Rabbi Mandel is a holy rabbi."

*From Rabbi Manis Mandel: A Legendary Mechanech and Tzadik by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ There were some Jews in Satmar who were lenient about eating dairy made by gentiles. The Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yoel Teitelbaum) put an end to this. "I'm sure everyone here keeps time-honored Jewish custom to eat milchigs on Shavuos. But I'm warning you: by eating gentile-made butter, you may not fulfill the custom. Gentile-made butter may actually be fleishigs, since it may contain treif fats."

*The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 51*

## C. A POSITIVE MITZVAH TO REFRAIN FROM EATING NON-KOSHER

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-12**

*As it says, "it you shall eat" (Vayikra 11:3, Parshas Shemini)*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

One who refrains from eating an impure animal not only avoids violating a negative prohibition, but also fulfills an active positive mitzvah (an injunction derived from a positive commandment), as Scripture states concerning kosher animals: "These you may eat" (Vayikra 11:3) — from which it is deduced: "These you may eat, but an

impure animal you shall not eat." A negative instruction formulated from a positive command carries the status of a positive mitzvah (lav haba miklal aseh).

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ An incident from Rav Shimshon Pincus's childhood clearly revealed an important character trait he would carry throughout his life: caring deeply about other people's spiritual well-being, even if it meant sacrificing something important to him. This happened during Chol HaMoed Pesach, when the young Shimshi asked his mother, Chava Pincus, for half a bar of chocolate. His mother was surprised, as chocolate was expensive and not usually given out casually -- especially in large amounts. She wanted to teach her children to appreciate special treats and not take them for granted. Shimshi was determined, so he made an offer: "If I learn Torah for three hours straight, could I get the chocolate as a reward?" Impressed by his dedication, Chava agreed. Shimshi kept his promise and studied Torah seriously for three hours. He earned the chocolate bar, but to Mrs. Pincus's great surprise, instead of eating it himself, Shimshi immediately gave it to a friend. Only afterward did Mrs. Pincus discover why. Earlier that day, Shimshi had seen his friend eating chocolate that lacked a proper hechsher (kosher certification). This upset Shimshi deeply -- especially because it was Pesach, making the concern even more serious. Shimshi knew that just talking wouldn't convince his friend, so he decided to act. He made a deal with his friend: "If you throw away that chocolate now, I promise to get you half a bar of kosher chocolate." His friend trusted him and agreed right away. Shimshi then took on the difficult task of learning Torah for three hours to fulfill his promise. This anecdote reflected a character trait that would guide Rav Shimshon throughout his life: an unwavering commitment to helping others uphold their spiritual integrity, even when it meant considerable personal sacrifice.

*Table Talk, Edition 435 (Parshas Vayikra), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

❖ One story in particular, which transpired when Shimshi was still a young child, exposed a glimpse of his remarkable character that would reveal itself later in life. One Chol HaMoed Pesach, he approached his mother and asked for half a bar of chocolate. Chava Pincus didn't hide her surprise. Half a bar of chocolate was quite a luxury, and parents didn't just dispense the expensive sweet without a very good reason, both due to financial and educational considerations. Shimshi, however, was bent on achieving his request. "What if I learn for three hours straight? Then can I have it as a prize?" She could not refuse such a request, although she was still puzzled by his excessive interest in large amounts of chocolate. Shimshi set about fulfilling his end of the deal and was duly rewarded with the coveted half-bar of chocolate. Only later did his mother discover that Shimshi hadn't enjoyed even a lick of the sweet treat but rather handed it right over to his friend. Several hours earlier, Shimshi had met a friend biting gleefully into a square of chocolate that lacked a suitable hechsher. This was distressing enough during the year, but much worse on Pesach! Knowing that mere urging would fail to override the temptation of chocolate, Shimshi made him an offer he couldn't refuse: "If you throw out that chocolate, I'll get you half a bar of kosher chocolate!" he promised. They shook on it, and Shimshi was left with the difficult task of earning his end of the deal by learning for three hours uninterrupted!

*From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll*

❖ Yehudit Raanan shares: We huddled together in silence. There was nothing to say. Our fear screamed louder than words. The five of us were dumped into the back of a black jeep. The doors were locked and off we were taken. To where? For how long? To live or die? Together or alone? Questions spun in our minds, but we dared not utter a word. It felt like eternity until we were pulled out of the jeep and "graciously" shown to our "accommodations" in a dark, damp, moldy storage room. No, this was not World War Two, but it didn't seem so far off. I am a Yehudi and proud of it. No, I was never religious, and never wanted to be. It was enough for me to be proud of being Jewish. That's how I was raised. But the first time they yelled at me, "Yahud," I knew I was being taken because of my religion, and I decided I must live up to that identity. It took courage and guts, but at the first meal of stale bread with some mold on it (the kind you put out for the pigeons), I told

them I needed water to wash netilat yadayim. They laughed. "You're in Gaza. Have you forgotten?" "I am a Yehudi. You took me here because of that, no?" I said with a confidence I didn't know I had. "Well, washing netilat yadayim is part of our religion." I guess they were kind of shocked that I had the nerve to answer, because they brought me water for washing. One day, the terrorist brought a "treat." Instead of moldy bread, he gave us some kind of meat soup. I guess someone's children didn't fancy their mother's cooking skills. Well, I didn't take a portion. When asked about it, I responded simply, “Have you forgotten? You've taken Yehudim captive. We eat only ritually slaughtered meat." It was the first time in my life that I refused tarfus. It may have been the first time I was so hungry, as well, but I felt right about what I was doing. "Leave religion to the Jews in Israel. Your G-d is there, and you are here!" the Arab responded, seemingly annoyed with me. "A Jew is a Jew wherever he is and Hashem is with him there as well." He poured the soup over my head, slapped me, and left. The next day I was called out of the room. I was terrified. My roommates gave me encouraging wishes and expressed their hope to see me back with them. I never returned to them. I returned to my land, to my people, to my friends. But now I was different. Not because of the trauma I had experienced, but because of the person I had become. It took lots of learning and courage to become the Jew I now wanted to be. Not everything was accepted happily in my anti-religious community. But now, almost one year later, I can say that being a captive changed my life — for the better!

*From Chayeinu Magazine*

❖ The Brisker Rav was extremely meticulous about everything pertaining to kashrus. But honesty in business dealings was no less important to him. The religious settlement of Komemiyus in southern Israel ran a bakery under the supervision of Rav Binyomin Mendelson, the founding Rav. The bakery provided the entire area with strictly kosher bread, and eventually grew to the point where it was supplying bread to 5,000 families. But every rose has its thorn: as the volume of sales grew, so did the bakery's debts. The owners of the bakery turned to me and asked me to help them secure loans from various gemachim. I agreed, and for a period of time I obtained loans for them. When the date of payment arrived, I secured a loan from a different source to cover the first one, and so on. After a while, I gave the matter some thought and realized that there was no way for the bakery to return to profitability in this fashion. The bakery would continue to lose money, and its owners would sink deeper and deeper in debt. Consequently, I told the owners that as much as I wanted to help them out, I did not feel it was possible to continue "rolling" the loans in such a manner. But the owners of the bakery didn't give up. Rav Binyomin Mendelson approached me personally and asked me to reconsider my decision. He explained that the matter was not merely financial, but spiritual as well, as this was the only bakery in the entire area with no problems of insect infestation, tevel or shemittah observance. If the bakery were to close, God forbid, the results would be disastrous. It had to continue operating despite the financial difficulties. "I'm afraid to continue borrowing money," I replied, "because in my opinion there is no chance that the bakery will ever be able to pay it back. But I don't want to make this decision on my own." I suggested that we go together to the Brisker Rav to ask his opinion about what we should do. Rav Mendelson agreed, and off we went to present the dilemma to the Brisker Rav. Rav Mendelson spoke enthusiastically and at length the crucial nature of the bakery, and emphasized the great responsibility that lay in supplying kosher bread to thousands of families even if doing so entailed a monetary loss; I then presented my position, albeit briefly and succinctly. The Brisker Rav's answer represents the cornerstone of worldview based on Torah. "Kosher bread is very important. But that's only true if the bread is completely kosher from every angle. Kosher bread that is manufactured using 'treif' money is not kosher. "When one takes a loan knowing that under the current circumstances, there is no way to repay it, the money received is 'treif money.' Even if the goal is to perform a mitzvah, that's not the proper way to do it."

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Throughout his life, Rav Nota Greenblatt spent unfathomable sums of money, and an inconceivable amount of time, facilitating kosher gittin. But it wasn't just the amount of time Rav Nota spent, it was the quality time that he sacrificed. Rabbi Avraham Shmidman served as the rav of the Knesseth Israel Congregation of Mountain Brook, Alabama. When Rav Nota visited Birmingham, Alabama, for gittin or other halachic needs, he stayed at the Shmidman's home. On one such

visit, Mrs. Shmidman offered Rav Nota breakfast, but he demurred. "Maybe a piece of cake and some tea. I am in a rush, I need to go to Louisiana. There's someone we've been after to give a get to his wife for years and he's finally agreed and I need to get there quickly." At some point during this conversation, Rav Nota let slip a minor detail. "Tonight, my wife and I are hosting sheva berachos in New York for my granddaughter." It was a jarring statement, considering he had just mentioned that he'd be traveling to facilitate yet another get. "Uh, so shouldn't the rav be heading back for the sheva berachos now?" Rabbi Shmidman ventured. "If a man is willing to give a get after all these years, then that's what I must do," was Rav Nota's straightforward response.

*From Rav Nota, by R' Shmuel Botnick, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A young secular Israeli living in North Tel Aviv was once looking through the family photo album. He saw a picture of an old man with a long gray beard. "Who is this, Ima?" he asked. "That's your grandfather. He was a rabbi in Europe before the war, and he spent the war years in a labor camp. One day towards the end of the war the commandant took him out to the center of the courtyard. With all the prisoners assembled, he pulled out a piece of pork and told him to eat it. Your grandfather refused. The commandant pointed out into the distance, 'Do you see the dust over there?' " 'Yes,' answered your grandfather. " 'That's the dust that's being kicked up by the Russian tanks. They're going to be here in a matter of hours and will liberate the entire camp. Eat the pork and you'll be free. If you don't eat it, I'm going to kill you on the spot.' With this, he placed his pistol on your grandfather's temple. Your grandfather still refused to cat the pork and the commandant killed him." Years later, after becoming successful and living out the Israeli dream by going to live in America, this secular young man became very wealthy and returned to Israel, where he moved into an affluent suburb. On his way home from the office one day, his wife called and told him that she hadn't made supper. Would you be good enough to pick up some sandwiches for the family? He stopped off at a restaurant that sold pork and got in line. Suddenly the thought flashed through his head: My grandfather died rather than eat this, and I am waiting in line to pay for it? We can't both be normal and live in the same world the same world; one of us must be crazy. He stepped out of line and went to buy some kosher sandwiches. Later, he attended an Arachim seminar to find out why he should not eat pork. Eventually he became a full fledged baal teshuvah and today is one of the people responsible for the entire Arachim program.

*Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ An avreich was in a supermarket in Lakewood. He saw a black woman trying to get her young child to put down a candy bar he had picked off the shelf. "Latrell, you put that down! It's not kosher!" Intrigued, the young Jew decided to investigate. "Excuse me, ma'am, are you Jewish?" "No." "So why did you say that?" "Why? I'll tell you why. 'Cuz I see all them Jewish mothers saying that to their kids and it works, so I decided to try it."

*Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ During the beginning of Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz's stay in Kremenchung, due to famine, the Communists distributed food to everyone who lived in the city. The order of priority was as follows: the maid who worked in Reb Baruch Ber's house received the best food. Children and elderly people received lower quality food and Reb Baruch Ber received the lowest quality food of all. Although the kashrus of the food was beyond reproach, Reb Baruch Ber was afraid to eat of it for two reasons. The Rebbi had said that Lenin, yimach shemo, was "a velt ganif a world-class thief. Thus, the food distributed by the Communists was stolen. Secondly, and worse yet, Reb Baruch Ber was afraid that if he benefited from the Communists, it might, chas v'shalom, influence his feelings towards them."

*Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim*

❖ Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk generally refrained from making halachic rulings. He left that role to the dayanim of the city. But there were exceptions; in urgent situations he would step in and make a ruling when it was necessary in order to prevent others from sinning. Then, there were times when there was something beyond the scope of the words of the Shulchan Aruch, something only Reb Chaim Brisker's mind could grasp. Once, when he arrived home, he saw a young girl

leaving the room where the dayanim sat. She was holding a slaughtered chicken. Something made him stop the girl and ask her to let him look at the chicken. After looking over the bird inside and out, he told her to wait a moment. He entered the room of the beis din and asked them what they had ruled on the she'eilah. There was no hint of a question, they told him; the chicken was kosher. Surprisingly, Reb Chaim turned to the girl and told her, "Go home and get the other chicken." Indeed, it emerged that there was another chicken. The second chicken was brought and found to be treif. The dayanim were staggered. "We knew that rabbeinu was a gaon," they said. "But now we know that you are also a wonder worker. Your ability to see things is beyond the natural." But he cooled down their excitement; there was no shadow of a miracle here. He understood clearly that no one comes to ask about a chicken that is without a blemish. Since that was the case here, he had concluded that there must have been a second chicken that was questionable. The two birds had accidentally been switched and the one that had been brought to the dayanim was kosher l'mehadrin!

*From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim*

❖ The lessons Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky imparted in avodas Hashem extended to the neighbors' children, as well. A neighbor once drove Rav Kulefsky to the airport, bringing his two young sons along for the ride. As they passed a non-kosher restaurant, Rav Kulefsky turned to his little neighbors and said, "Nu, it smells good? But the Torah says we can't eat it." He then taught them that one should not say regarding non-kosher food, "It smells/tastes bad and therefore I don't want to eat it." Rather, one should say, "The food smells good and I would like to eat it. But I can't because Hashem decreed that I shouldn't." (See Rashi, Vayikra 20:26.) This lesson has remained with those two boys to this day.

*From Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

# 5. Not to eat non-kosher birds

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 94**

*As the Torah says, And these you shall hold in abomination among the fowl, they shall not be eaten (Vayikra 11:13, Parshas Shemini).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Which type of birds are kosher?
- A chicken eats worms, does that make it a bird of prey?
- What are the signs of a bird of prey?
- Is there a minimum amount that one has to eat to violate this prohibition?
- Are the eggs of a bird of prey kosher?
- If a kosher bird was raised by a non-kosher bird, is it still kosher?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Any bird that is a bird of prey (dores) — or exhibits predatory characteristics — is non-kosher and strictly forbidden. This includes any bird that:

Divides its toes evenly when a cord is stretched beneath it to walk upon, placing two talons on one side and two talons on the other;

Or that seizes food out of the air with its claws to consume it in mid-flight — for such behavior indicates a predatory bird (dores), rendering it non-kosher.

Likewise, any bird that consistently dwells among non-kosher predatory species and resembles them is classified as non-kosher.

If someone consumes an olive's volume (k'zayis) of meat from a non-kosher species of bird, he violates this negative commandment.

The eggs laid by a non-kosher species of bird are strictly forbidden for consumption by biblical law.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

## A. A MITZVAH TO REFRAIN FROM EATING NON-KOSHER BIRDS

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-13**

*As it says "Any pure bird you shall eat (Devarim 14:9 Parshas Re'eh),*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Refraining from eating an impure bird constitutes an active positive mitzvah, in addition to its negative prohibition, as Scripture states: "You may eat any pure bird" (Devarim 14:11) — which implies: "Any pure bird you may eat, but an impure bird you shall not eat." An injunction derived from a positive commandment carries the force of a positive mitzvah.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ A little taste of rav Simcha Zelig Riger's attitude in making halachic judgments can be learned from the story told by a native of Brisk. He had observed Rav Simcha Zelig in his home "an entire night," as he put it, inspecting a lung that had an adhesion causing the kashrus of the animal to be in serious doubt. Rav Simcha Zelig sat there, carefully examining the lung, looking for a way to permit the meat, all the time mouthing a tefillah to his Creator, "Tatte! Tatte Zisser! Yiddische gelt, Yiddische gelt..."

*From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim*

# 6. Not to eat non-kosher fish

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 95**

*As the Torah says, and they shall be an abomination to you; of their flesh you shall not eat (Vayikra 11:11, Parshas Shemini).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What are the signs of a kosher fish?
- Is there a minimum that one needs to eat to violate this prohibition?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Any aquatic creature that lacks both fins (snapir) and scales (kaskeses) is non-kosher. If someone consumes an olive's volume (k'zayis) of meat from a non-kosher fish or aquatic creature, he violates this negative commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ When the Mirrer yeshivah students arrived in Japan, they suffered from a shortage of food, due to the rationing that limited its availability to coupon-holders exclusively. There was, however, no shortage of fish. Rav Levenstein customarily refrained from eating fish during the week, in order to honor Shabbos by reserving this choice food for that day. Even under the difficult conditions in Japan, he was unwilling to forgo this practice. Seeing that the mashgiach preferred to go hungry rather than eat the fish, the yeshivah students became concerned that he had doubts as to its kashrus and they also stopped eating it. Rav Levenstein realized that his stringency was causing the students unnecessary distress. Rav Levenstein was therefore compelled to obtain a release from his undertaking (necessary when one wishes to set aside a worthy custom, even in the absence of a formal vow) in order to allow him to partake of the fish.

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ But if his duties gave him little pleasure, Rabbi Dessler was nevertheless scrupulous in their performance. The first piece of advice he gave talmidim who were going into the rabbinate was to treat their congregants' sheilos with the utmost seriousness. If the rabbi treated his congregants' questions as silly, he warned, they would stop consulting the rabbi altogether; To illustrate the point, he would share a story from his days as a rabbi in England. A woman had come to him

concerned that the fish she had just opened up to clean lacked a gall and might therefore be forbidden as a trefah. Even though there are no laws of trefah for fish, Rabbi Dessler took down an imposing — looking volume from his bookshelf and read intently for a few moments before pronouncing the fish kosher."

*Rav Dessler, By Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 122*

### A. A MITZVAH TO REFRAIN FROM EATING NON-KOSHER FISH

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-14**

*As it says "all that has fins and scales you shall eat" (Devarim 14:9, Parshas Re'eh)*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is an active positive mitzvah to refrain from consuming an impure fish, as Scripture states: "These you may eat of all that are in the waters: whatever has fins and scales you may eat" (Devarim 14:9) — which teaches: "Whatever has fins and scales you may eat, but whatever lacks them you shall not eat." A negative injunction formulated from a positive command has the status of a positive mitzvah.

# 7. Not to eat a flying insect

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 96**

*As the Torah says, And all winged swarming creatures are unclean for you; they shall not be eaten (Devarim 14:19, Parshas Re'eh).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Lettuce often has small flying insects. Is it permitted to eat the lettuce with that insect?
- Is there a minimum amount one needs to eat to violate this prohibition?
- A bug is usually less than a kezayis. If one eats a whole bug, that is smaller than a kezayis, has he not violated this prohibition?
- Are any bugs kosher?
- What are the signs of a kosher bug?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This prohibition encompasses all non-kosher winged swarming creatures (sheretz ha'of) — such as impure species of grasshoppers, flies, gnats, mosquitoes, bees, and wasps. If someone consumes an olive's volume (k'zayis) of their bodies, he violates this negative commandment.

Moreover, if one eats an entire creature in its complete form (beriah), he violates this biblical prohibition even if it does not equal the volume of an olive.

Pure, kosher species of grasshoppers (chagavim), however, are permitted for consumption. The Torah identifies three primary physical criteria (simanim) of purity:

It possesses four walking legs;

It possesses four wings that cover the greater part of the length and circumference of its body;

And it possesses two jointed jumping legs (chara'ayim) set above its feet with which to leap upon the ground.

In the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah 85:1), a fourth prerequisite is established: it must belong to a species known traditionally by the generic name of chagav. (In practice, Ashkenazic communities and most Sephardic communities abstain from eating grasshoppers due to the loss of continuous oral tradition regarding their precise identification).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

#### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

## 8. Not to eat a crawling creature

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 97**

*As the Torah says, And every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth is an abomination, it shall not be eaten (Vayikra 11:41, Parshas Shemini).*

#### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What does the Torah mean by "swarming creatures"?
- What is the minimum amount needed to be liable?
- What if one ate an entire creature?
- If one ate a half a kezayis of a frog, and half a kezayis of a snail, do they combine to one kezayis to be liable?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The category of "swarming creatures of the earth" (sheretz ha'aretz; Vayikra 11:41) includes terrestrial creeping creatures such as snakes, scorpions, beetles, centipedes, and worms.

Whoever consumes an entire creature in its complete anatomical state (beriah) violates this negative commandment, regardless of how minute it may be.

If the creature was dismembered or crushed rather than eaten whole, one violates this biblical prohibition only upon consuming an olive's volume (k'zayis).

Portions from different species of swarming creatures combine together to constitute the requisite k'zayis measure.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

# 9. Not to eat insects

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 98**

*As the Torah says, even all the swarming things that swarm upon the earth, them you shall not eat (Vayikra 11:42, Parshas Shemini).*

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Tendler was scrupulous in not eating lettuce or cabbage without first checking it, even if it came with a hechsher, as he had found insects in what others considered bug-free. During a summer stay in Camp Mogen Avraham, he asked the cook how it was possible that he could check all the lettuce that he served. "I freeze the lettuce for three days," the cook explained. "This kills all the bugs. I then wash it in soap, and can guarantee that there are no bugs." "I think that I can prove you wrong," Rav Tendler responded. The next batch of frozen lettuce was brought to him, and he immediately found many bugs crawling around. After that, he offered to check the lettuce, and would sit outside the kitchen inspecting it in the sunlight. The camp also scheduled an activity for the older boys called, "Checking Cabbage with Rabbi Tendler."

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 224*

### A. A MITZVAH TO REFRAIN FROM NON-KOSHER LOCUSTS

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-15**

*As it says "all that do not have jumping legs you shall eat" (Devarim 14:9, Parshas Re'eh)*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is an active positive mitzvah to refrain from eating non-kosher locusts, as Scripture states: "Yet these you may eat of all winged swarming things that go on all fours, which have jointed legs above their feet with which to leap upon the ground" (Vayikra 11:21) — which implies: these you may eat, but those that lack jumping legs you shall not eat. A negative injunction derived from a positive commandment carries the force of a positive mitzvah.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ When the Beis Yosef discusses the kashrus of specific birds,' he cites the Hagaos Maimonis that when one of the Rishonim was discussing the kosher status of a specific bird, one such bird flew to where he was teaching so it could be analyzed. The Chasam Sofer, after quoting the Beis Yosef, writes that stories like this happen in every generation to those who immerse themselves in Torah with pure motives. In our generation we know of such a story that happened with R' Chaim Kanievsky. One of R' Chaim's many sefarim on topics that are not widely studied is his sefer Karnei Chagavim. It was printed in Elul 5736/1976 and is included in his sefer Siach HaSadeh, Volume 2. He discusses the many different aspects pertaining to grasshoppers in halachah, as well as kosher signs for grasshoppers. When R' Chaim was writing his sefer, he was unsure about one of the signs of a chagav (grasshopper). After spending a while reviewing the Rishonim on the matter, he was still unsure. Just then, a grasshopper hopped onto his Gemara in the cheder hasefarim. R' Chaim noted the simanim and was able to continue writing. He was still unsure about one aspect of the chagav and was prepared to move on without resolving that difficulty, when lo and behold! The grasshopper appeared for a second time on his Gemara! R' Chaim mentioned this incident to one person — perhaps his closest confidant — his father, the Steipler. One Shabbos morning, the Steipler made a surprise kiddush for R' Chaim in honor of his newly published sefer Karnei Chagavim. At the kiddush, which took place in the Steipler's home with a minyan of family members, the Steipler told this story to the assembled guests. (A grandchild of the Steipler confided that his grandfather generally did not publicly celebrate R' Chaim's new sefarim, but probably made the kiddush just to publicize this story.) Had the Steipler not made a kiddush and repeated the story, perhaps it would never have been known.

*Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

# 10. Not to eat crawling water creatures

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 99**

*As the Torah says, You shall not make yourselves detestable with every swarming thing that swarms (Vayikra 11:43, Parshas Shemini)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- What is meant by a swarming creature of the sea?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The prohibition against consuming aquatic swarming creatures (sheretz hamayim; Vayikra 11:43) includes creatures such as frogs, crabs, marine worms, leeches, various marine invertebrates, and the seal ("sea dog"). Whoever consumes an olive's volume (k'zayis) of these forbidden creatures violates this biblical commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

# 11. Not to eat maggot-like insects

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 100**

*As the Torah says, neither shall you defile yourselves with any swarming thing that roams, crawls, upon the earth (Vayikra 11:44, Parshas Shemini).*

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The creatures categorized by Scripture as remes ha'aretz (creeping organisms of the earth; Vayikra 11:44) refer to minute organisms and larvae that emerge within decaying organic matter, rotting fruit, or damp molds, rather than propagating through standard male and female reproduction. Whoever consumes an olive's volume (k'zayis) of these creatures violates this negative commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

# 12. Not to eat blood

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 89**

*As the Torah says, And you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of an animal (Vayikra 7:26, Parshas Tzav)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- The term beheima is usually reserved for a domesticated animal. Can one eat the blood of a wild deer?
- Is this prohibition as severe as the prohibition of eating a pig? Is it more severe?
- Can one lick their own wounds if they will ingest blood?
- If someone flosses and his gums bleed, can he swallow the blood?
- Is any blood kosher? Is the blood of fish kosher?
- Is the blood of kosher grasshoppers kosher?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The biblical prohibition against consuming blood (dam) applies equally to wild, untamed beasts (chayah) as well as domesticated livestock (behemah), both of which are encompassed under the scriptural term behemah in this context.

If someone deliberately consumes an olive's volume (k'zayis) of forbidden blood from a kosher animal or bird, he is liable to kares (spiritual excision); if he consumed it unwittingly (b'shogeg), he is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas).

Human blood is rabbinically forbidden for consumption. However, this prohibition applies only once the blood has separated from the body (such as blood from bleeding gums that transferred onto a piece of bread, which must be scraped away); if blood remains inside one's mouth, it may be swallowed without transgression.

The blood of kosher fish and kosher locusts is inherently permissible for consumption according to biblical law, provided it is not collected in a vessel without fish scales present, which might create a misleading appearance of consuming forbidden animal blood (mar'is ayin).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

**SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:**

**SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 148)**

The spirit of the animal lies in its blood. Eating animal blood, even from a kosher animal will give you its animal nature and its character.

## A. TO REMOVE THE BLOOD BY SALTING THE MEAT BEFORE 3 DAYS, OR ROASTING IT

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-4**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Raw meat that has remained unwashed and unsalted for seventy-two hours (three full days) can no longer be prepared through standard salting (melichah) and subsequent boiling, because the blood within it has become permanently hardened and congealed. Consequently, such meat may only be eaten after being roasted directly over an open flame (tzli), which alone possesses the power to extract and purge the coagulated blood. If the meat was thoroughly soaked in water within those three days, the counting of the seventy-two hours is reset.

13. Not to eat forbidden fats.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ The Sages taught that the Korban Pesach may not be roasted on a solid metal spit or solid metal grill, since the Torah requires that the Pesach lamb be roasted directly by the heat of the fire itself (tzli eish) rather than by hot metal. Yet Rabbi Tzadok testified: 'It once happened that Rabban Gamliel told his devoted servant Tavi: Go out and roast the Pesach offering for us on the askala (grill)!' How could Rabban Gamliel permit that? Because Rabban Gamliel's grill was specially perforated with holes all through it, and they arranged the glowing coals directly beneath the holes so that the lamb was roasted directly by the flames of the fire rather than by the metal!

*Mishnah, Pesachim 7:2*

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 88**

*As the Torah says, You shall eat no chelev (forbidden fat) of ox or sheep or goat (Vayikra 7:23, Parshas Tzav).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Is eating this forbidden fat just as severe as eating pig? Is it more severe?
- Is the chelev in the tail forbidden?
- Can one eat the sinews in the chelev?
- Can one eat chelev of a wild animal, like a deer?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

If someone deliberately consumes an olive's volume (k'zayis) of forbidden fat (chelev) from one of the three kosher domesticated species — an ox, a sheep, or a goat — he incurs the penalty of kares (spiritual excision); if he consumed it unwittingly (b'shogeg), he is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas).

The fat of the tail (alyah) of a sheep or ram is entirely permitted for consumption. Although the alyah was offered upon the Altar in sacrificial offerings, it is not halachically categorized as chelev. The biblical prohibition of chelev applies strictly to specific interior fats — namely, the fat covering the entrails, the fat over the kidneys, and the fat upon the flanks (loins).

Certain non-fat tissues and membranes — such as the filaments, veins, and sinews embedded within or adjacent to the chelev, as well as the protective membranes covering it — are likewise forbidden by rabbinic or biblical law and must be purged through the process of nikkur (treiboring / porging).

The fat of kosher wild animals (chayah) — such as the deer (tzvi), gazelle (ayal), and ibex (ya'el) — is permitted for consumption, as the prohibition of chelev was restricted by the Torah exclusively to the three domesticated species eligible for the Altar.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:35)

The Torah wants to teach us to develop the discipline to avoid very tasty foods that are unhealthy for us.

#### ABARBANEL (VAYIKRA 3:17)

Fat is a symbol of the cause of sin, as it says "And Israel will become fat and kick at G-d" (Devarim 32:15). Therefore fat is not eaten and is rather only offered on a mizbeach to express our desire to purify and eliminate the causes that makes us leave the Torah.

#### RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH — CHOREV (CHAPTER 68)

Eating chelev will make our bodies more passive and lazy, and less motivated to do mitzvos.

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Explore the idea of developing discipline regarding very tasty unhealthy foods

## 13. Not to eat an animal that was improperly killed

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 86**

*As the Torah says, you shall not eat anything that dies by itself (Devarim 14:21, Parshas Re'eh)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Would an animal that was not properly slaughtered be included in this prohibition?
- If an animal was born stillborn, is that considered neveila, because it never "died"?
- Can one eat a newborn animal if we are concerned that it may not live very long?
- Do we have to wait eight days if we know that it completed its gestation, and is likely to survive?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The term neveilah denotes any kosher domestic animal (behemah), wild beast (chayah), or fowl (of) that either died of its own accord or was slaughtered without valid shechitah (kosher ritual slaughter).

Whoever consumes a kezayis (an olive-sized portion) of its meat violates this biblical negative commandment.

If someone consumes a kezayis of meat from a stillborn kosher animal, he likewise violates the biblical prohibition of neveilah. It is therefore forbidden to eat the newborn young of an animal until the onset of the night of the eighth day of its life, at which point it is no longer in doubt of being non-viable (nefel). If, however, it is known with certainty that the animal completed its full term of gestation, it is permissible immediately upon birth through proper shechitah.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RALBAG (DEVARIM 14:16)

This mitzvah ensures that animals will be slaughtered properly.

#### ABARBANEL

The prohibition of treifah prevents us from eating animals by hunting them and shooting them.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky was a rav in the town of Tzitevian before he came to America in the mid 1930's. One time, the butchers in nearby Shideleveh became incensed that their Rav ruled certain animals treif. They framed their Rav and circulated rumors that he had been found in compromising and very inappropriate circumstances. But Reb Yaakov nipped their plans in the bud. 'If you have suspicions concerning your rav,' he told the people of Shideleveh, 'then you must have

suspicions concerning your mikveh. And, It so, there must be suspicions concerning all the children born In Shideleveh. In that case, I must prohibit anyone from Tzitevian from marrying anyone from your town.' The message was clear and the plot defeated.

*Reb Yaakov, By Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

### A. A POSITIVE MITZVAH TO REFRAIN FROM EATING AN ANIMAL THAT WAS NOT PROPERLY KILLED

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-17**

*As it says, "You shall slaughter your cattle and sheep" (Devarim 12:21, Parshas Re'eh),*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Regarding the mitzvah of ritual slaughter, the Torah commands: "You shall slaughter from your herd and from your flock... as I have commanded you" (Devarim 12:21). This command carries the direct halachic implication that meat may not be consumed without valid shechitah. In Torah jurisprudence, a negative prohibition inferred directly from a positive command (lav haba miklal aseh) possesses the legal status of an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh).

# 14. Not to eat an animal that has a mortal wound

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 87**

*As the Torah says, and you shall not eat any flesh in the field that is t'refah, torn of beasts (Shemos 22:30, Parshas Mishpatim).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Is it permitted to eat an animal that was slaughtered properly after it had a mortal wound?
- Is this limited to cattle? How about birds?
- What are some examples of a mortal wound?
- If an animal will be able to survive only 15 months with this wound, can it be slaughtered?
- What if a wound or illness developed naturally, not by another animal?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The scriptural term tereifah refers primarily to an animal mauled by a predator of the field, or a bird struck and clawed by a bird of prey (such as a falcon or hawk), inflicting a fatal injury from which the creature cannot survive.

Even if one preemptively slaughters the mortally wounded creature with valid, kosher shechitah, it remains strictly forbidden as a tereifah. This specific Talmudic category is termed derusah (an animal struck or clawed with predatory venom).

In addition to predatory trauma, there are seven other primary categories of fatal bodily defects that render an animal a tereifah, established through the Oral Tradition as a halachah transmitted to Moshe at Sinai (halachah l'Moshe mi-Sinai).

These classical categories of fatal physical defect are:

A creature whose vital organ has been perforated (nekukah);

A creature from which a vital internal organ has been removed or severed (netulah);

A creature that suffered catastrophic internal trauma by falling from a height (nefulah);

A creature born deficient, missing an essential organ from birth (chasurah);

A creature with a severed or fractured spinal column (pesukah);

A creature whose outer abdominal wall covering the stomach is torn open (keruah);

A creature that sustained fractures to the majority of its structural rib cage (shevurah).

As a general halachic principle, whenever an animal or bird develops a defect or internal wound of such severity that it cannot survive for twelve months, it is ruled a tereifah and is biblically forbidden. This applies equally whether the fatal injury was inflicted by a predator, a human being, natural illness ordained by Heaven, or an accidental fall from a roof.

Meat severed or torn from a living creature (basar min hachai) is likewise classified halachically in the broader scriptural category of tereifah; whoever consumes a kezayis (an olive-sized portion) of it violates this negative commandment under Torah law.

Similarly, if a fetal limb emerges from the womb prior to the mother's slaughter and is subsequently retracted, that limb is permanently forbidden in the category of "meat that went beyond its halachic boundary" (basar she-yatza chutz limchitzaso).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### IBN EZRA

An animal that is dying is usually sick and unhealthy.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ In discussing whether a bird with a dislocated hip is a mortal terefah (incapable of surviving twelve months), the Gemara notes: 'Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta had a hen whose hip became dislocated, and they fashioned a little splint-tube of reed for its leg, and it recovered!' (The Gemara explains that it recovered within twelve months when the sinews had not rotted.) The Gemara continues: 'They told of Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta that he was an empirical investigator of natural matters (askan bi-devarim hayah), and he once conducted an experiment to test and refute the view of Rabbi Yehudah—for Rabbi Yehudah used to rule that if a bird lost all its feathers, it is invalid as a terefah. Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta had a hen that had lost all its feathers. He wrapped it in a warm leather apron of bronze-workers, placed it beside the warm stove, and nursed it—until it grew back new feathers that were even fuller and larger than its original ones!'

*Talmud Bavli, Chullin 57b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ By Torah law, an animal that is mortally wounded either through birth defect, disease or injury is deemed a treifah and may not be eaten. There is a question whether a particular lung defect renders the animal a treifah; Beis Yosef (R' Yosef Karo, author of Shulchan Aruch) rules that it does not, while Rama (R' Moshe Isserles) disagrees. Ashkenazic Jews generally follow the opinion of Rama when he and Beis Yosef disagree. However, with regard to this disagreement, one Ashkenazic gaon ruled according to Beis Yosef. He was Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gunzberg, legendary author of Sha'agas Aryeh and one of the eighteenth century's greatest Torah geniuses. His p'sak (ruling) in this matter caused quite a stir among Ashkenazic Jews. Nevertheless, the Jews of Volozhin, where the Shaagas Aryeh served as Rav, faithfully followed his opinion. Years later, when the Shaagas Aryeh's famed disciple, Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, became Rav of Volozhin, he continued to follow his rebbe's ruling. In Volozhin, there lived a man who suffered from a lung disorder identical to that which was the subject of the disagreement between the Beis Yosef and Rama. The man decided that his condition would benefit from the rarified air of Switzerland and he began making plans to move his family there. One night, the man's father, who had died some years before, appeared to him in a dream. "My son, I have come to warn you not to leave Volozhin. The illness from which you suffer is rendered life threatening by the Rama — and his ruling is followed by almost the entire European Jewry, including the Jewish community of Switzerland. "It is only in Volozhin that the Rama's opinion is not followed, for it is there that the great Sha'agas Aryeh served as Rav, and it is he who ruled that this illness is not terminal. The Sha'agas Aryeh's opinion carries great weight in Heaven. Just as the animals in Volozhin with this defect are deemed kosher and not mortally ill, so too, are you deemed capable of living many more years. "However, if you move elsewhere, where the Sha'agas Aryeh's ruling is not accepted, you will die within the year." The man canceled his plans to move. He was never cured of is lung disorder, but he lived into his eighties.

*Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

# 15. Not to eat a mixture of meat cooked with milk

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 92**

*As the Torah says, You shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk (Shemos 34:26, Parshas Ki Sisa).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it permitted to eat and milk if one will get no enjoyment from it? For example, is it permitted to eat if it was too bitter to enjoy?
- Is one permitted to benefit from this mixture without eating it? For example can a Jew sell a cheese burger?
- What if meat and milk were not cooked together, but were soaked together, can it be eaten?
- If they were soaked together, can one get benefit from it without eating it, like to give it to a dog?
- Does the Torah prohibit cooking venison in milk?
- Can one cook fish with milk?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

A person violates this biblical negative commandment if he consumes a kezayis (an olive-sized volume) of meat and milk that were cooked together (basar b'chalav).

One is biblically liable even if he derived no conventional sensory pleasure (hana'ah) from eating it — for instance, if the mixture was scalding hot and burned his throat as he swallowed it, or if a bitter substance was added so that he experienced no pleasant taste whatsoever. Because the Torah strictly prohibited the very consumption of this mixture, he remains liable regardless of personal enjoyment.

If kosher meat and milk were combined without heat — such as through cold steeping for twenty-four hours (kavush k'mevushal) or being salted together (meliach k'rothei'ach) — the mixture is forbidden for consumption by Rabbinic decree, but deriving commercial or other benefit (hana'ah) from it remains permitted.

If the meat of a wild kosher beast (chayah) or fowl (of) was cooked with the milk of a domestic animal (behemah) or wild beast, the prohibition against eating it applies strictly by Rabbinic enactment, as biblical law prohibits only the cooked mixture of domestic livestock with milk.

It is completely permissible under Torah and Rabbinic law to cook kosher fish or kosher locusts with milk and to consume them together.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### IBN EZRA (SHEMOS 26:13)

Cooking an animal in the milk that would nurture it demonstrates a great lack of sensitivity and compassion.

**RABBEINU BACHYA**

This mixture will create a timtum halev, a blockage of the conscience if it is ingested.

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

Michael was a non-Jew who was very interested in learning about Judaism. He and his wife moved to Israel to learn about Judaism, to convert, and to join the Jewish people. Michael connected with a rabbi, Rav Yaakov, and under this rabbi's tutelage and guidance, Michael slowly became ready to convert. Finally, after years of learning and preparation, Michael was ready for the giyur (conversion) process. On the day of his immersion in the mikvah, Rabbi Yaakov prepared a special expensive liqueur to celebrate the occasion of Michael's joining the Jewish people. Rabbi Yaakov explained it was a special chocolate mocha liqueur made in Israel that had milk in it, and so the liqueur was dairy. After Michael finished the conversion, Rabbi Yaakov said, "Mazel tov! Let's make a l'chaim with this delicious drink." Michael was about to drink it when his wife reminded him, "Wait, wait, Michael. This afternoon for lunch you had a corned beef sandwich. You're fleishig!" Michael thought about it and said, "That's true, but the truth is when I ate it, I wasn't Jewish. Now I've converted. Now I'm Jewish. So maybe it's OK that I ate meat because it doesn't count when I wasn't Jewish." His wife countered, "But the reason why we wait six hours is because there might still be oils or meat from the sandwich in your mouth. Why should it make a difference if you were Jewish or not?" Michael said, "I don't know. Once you convert, you're like a whole new person. Maybe I'm a whole new person, and I wouldn't have to wait anymore." This question was brought to Rav Chaim Kanievsky. Was Michael allowed to have the dairy liqueur even though he was still fleishig from before he was Jewish? What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about the Jewish convert who wanted to drink a dairy drink, Rav Chaim Kanievsky answered that this man still should wait six hours even though he ate the meat while he was not Jewish.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Devarim p. 176*

A host preparing 90 schnitzels borrowed a frying pan from a neighbor believing it was fleishig, but learned after frying 30 schnitzels that the pan was milchig. Are the 30 schnitzels kosher, must the neighbor compensate for the ruined food, and if one relies on halachic nullification (bitul), is he obligated to disclose this to dinner guests?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein analyzes whether the 30 schnitzels fried in a clean dairy pan (which absorbed only a secondary taste of dairy, nat bar nat, and were mixed dry with 60 kosher schnitzels) are subject to the stringency of chatichah ha-re'uyah l'hiskabed (a piece fit to honor guests, which normally is not nullified in 60). Because the prohibition here is only rabbinic (from absorbed taste rather than intrinsic issur), and cutting each schnitzel into smaller serving pieces removes its status as a whole prestigious piece, in a case of great financial loss and pressing need for a Sheva Brachos (hefsed merubeh v'sha'as ha-dechak) one may rely on the lenient authorities cited in Darchei Teshuvah (Yoreh De'ah 99:70).

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Metzia, p. 373*

Sara and Nachum, a young couple, had a very endearing relationship to one another. One day, on Nachum's birthday, Sara decided that she wanted to surprise Nachum by making his favorite supper, eggplant parmesan. She spent a lot of time frying the eggplant and used Nachum's favorite cheeses. Sara eagerly looked forward to 7:30 PM when Nachum usually arrived home. Nachum came home and was greeted by the delicious smell of his favorite supper. He was also greeted by his smiling wife who was so excited to offer him the surprise. But inside, Nachum's heart fell. He didn't know that his wife was going to serve dairy. That day, just an hour earlier he took a struggling teen to a shawarma joint and shared a shawarma with him. Nachum was fleishig and would not be able to eat dairy until 1 AM, way past the

time that the two go to sleep. Nachum knew that his wife would be so hurt that all the work that she put into the dinner was not going to be enjoyed. Nachum had the following inner dilemma. "We know that one is allowed to even tell a lie for the sake of peace. Is it possible that one is allowed to violate the custom of waiting six hours after eating meat, for the sake of peace? If one is allowed to violate a severe Torah prohibition of lying for the sake of peace, perhaps one can violate a relatively minor custom for the sake of peace as well. Maybe it would be permitted to eat the supper? But on the other hand, perhaps the mitzvah of truth is a rare exception. Perhaps one cannot violate a custom even if doing so will preserve peace. What do you think?

**Answer:** Rav Zilberstein said it is not permitted to violate this custom for the sake of Shalom Bayis, peace.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive*

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ Rav Yitzchak the son of Rav Mesharshiya once visited the home of Rav Ashi. They served him cheese and he ate it; then they served him meat and he ate it without washing his hands in between. The scholars present asked him: 'Did not Agra, the father-in-law of Rabbi Abba, teach that one who eats cheese and then wishes to eat meat must wash his hands first?' He replied: 'That applies at night when one cannot see if any cheese residue clings to his fingers, whereas during the daytime I can clearly inspect my hands!'

*Chullin 105a*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ The pinnacle of the Mir's fundraising efforts is their yearly dinner in New York. You would imagine that a yeshivah the size of the Mir with so many alumni would host a dinner ten thousand strong. In fact, less than a tenth of that number attended, and each and every one of them had to be reminded, worked on, or coerced to be there. One time, as the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, was about to depart for the dinner, Poikoo offered him some blintzes, but he was too nervous to partake. And there was good reason to be nervous: the weather was stormy which could definitely impact disastrously upon attendance, last minute confirmations had not come through, pledges had not been secured in advance and the Rosh Yeshivah had to appeal to some one thousand individuals to assist him in footing the cost of the yeshivah. Baruch Hashem the dinner was a huge success and later that night a victory celebration was conducted chez the Edelsteins. Some of the yeshivah's closest supporters were there, and they sang the Rosh Yeshivah's favorite song, "Kee Orech Yamim" and danced. Then it was finally time for carbohydrates. It was at this time that the Rosh Yeshivah informed his hostess that despite the fact that he was at a gourmet dinner in the gala Brooklyn Marriot, with an elaborate smorgasbord and a feast catered by one of New York's premier food furnishers, he had remained milchig so that he could eat her blintzes.

*For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 249*

# 16. Not to eat the food that leads to becoming a rebellious son

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 106**

*As the Torah states, You shall not eat over blood (Vayikra 19:26, Parshas Kedoshim),*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What does this phrase mean?
- Is it permitted to eat before we daven in the morning?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The verse "You shall not eat over the blood" (Vayikra 19:26) is expounded by Chazal to mean: "You shall not partake of an eating that leads to bloodshed" — referring directly to the gluttonous meal of meat and wine consumed by the wayward and rebellious son (ben sorer u'moreh), whose unchecked course ultimately leads to capital judgment.

From this same scriptural injunction, the Torah also forbids consuming any meat of a slaughtered animal before its soul has fully departed and its life signs have completely ceased (yetzi'as haneshamah).

Furthermore, Chazal derive from this verse the prohibition against eating or drinking in the morning prior to reciting the morning prayers (Shacharis), as one must not indulge bodily desires before praying to Hashem for the preservation of one's own life and blood.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The common thread between all of the halachos included in this mitzvah is the idea of helping us to become disciplined and controlled people. Just as Hashem is kadosh, and in control of all of his faculties, so should we.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SFAS EMES

• In Parashas Ki Seitzei (Devarim 21:18–21), the Torah sets forth the law of the ben sorer u-moreh—the wayward and rebellious son who devours gluttonous quantities of meat and wine ('zolel ve-sovei'). In Parashas Devarim (5642), on the Midrash 'Tosefto shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu', the Sfas Emes explains that when Heaven blesses a young person with vigor and abundance, that energy is meant to be channeled into Torah growth rather than unbridled physical indulgence (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5642).

• When the Torah permits the consumption of meat, it speaks of Hashem expanding your boundaries and your soul desiring to eat. The Sfas Emes explains that eating meat requires an expanded soul capacity to extract and elevate the spark of life concealed inside the food. Ingesting rich delicacies out of blind biological craving without spiritual purpose drags the mind into heaviness. In Parashas Re'eh (5631), on the verse 'Ki yarchiv Hashem Elokecha es gevulcha — Ve-amarta ochlah vasar', the Sfas Emes teaches that desire for meat and wine becomes dangerous whenever it outruns a person's inner spiritual vessel. The warning of ben sorer u-moreh teaches that training youth to master their appetites early in life prevents a small spiritual slide from hardening into rebellion (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5631).

• In Parashas Bamidbar (5634), contrasting the dedication of the tribe of Levi with those who succumbed to craving in the wilderness, the Sfas Emes explains that youthful passion is a sacred fire. When guided by the voices of father and mother—the Written and Oral Torah—that fire builds a sanctuary; when surrendered to zolel ve-

sovei, it consumes the soul's peace (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Bamidbar 5634).

• In Parashas Re'eh (5634), the Sfas Emes explores the verse 'Tzaddik ocheil le-sova nafsho, u-veten resha'im techsar' (Mishlei 13:25). Because the ben sorer u-moreh seeks to fill an inner spiritual emptiness with stolen meat and intoxicating wine, his craving can never be satisfied; true satisfaction comes only from reconnecting the soul to its root in Torah (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5634).

• Citing his grandfather the Chiddushei HaRim, the Sfas Emes explains that the mitzvos were given so that man should live through them, drawing his vitality directly from Hashem. When an individual consumes heavy food and wine merely to escape reality or indulge lust, he temporarily suffocates his higher intellect. Holy temperance preserves the sharpness of the mind so that our thoughts remain tethered to the eternal. As Rashi cites from the Sages (Sanhedrin 72a), the ben sorer u-moreh is judged 'al shem sofo'—on account of his ultimate trajectory, because addictive gluttony eventually leads to violent robbery and bloodshed. In Parashas Vayikra (5636), the Sfas Emes teaches that every small habit of self-restraint in food and drink guards the purity of our entire future life (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Vayikra 5636).

# 17. To purge pots cooked with non-kosher foods, with hot water or fire

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-60**

*As the Torah says anything that came into fire should be passed through fire and become pure. (Bamidbar 31:23, Parshas Mattos)*

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

When cooking vessels have absorbed non-kosher food through use by non-Jews, one is commanded to purge the absorbed forbidden flavor either by firing them until they glow or emit sparks (libun) or by immersing them into boiling water (hag'alah).

The required method of purging is governed by the universal halachic principle: "As it absorbs, so it purges" (k'vol'o kach polto). If the vessel absorbed non-kosher flavor through direct dry heat without liquid (such as a roasting spit or baking grate), it requires libun (heating the vessel in direct fire until it is white hot or emits sparks). If it absorbed non-kosher flavor through boiling liquid (such as a cooking pot or soup cauldron), hag'alah (scalding immersion in boiling water) is halachically sufficient to purge the vessel.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The laws of kashrus have the express purpose of keeping our bodies tahor, pure, because anshei kodesh tihun li, we are charged to be holy people. If we eat non-kosher food, we become tamei, blocked to the influence of our neshamah and yetzer tov, and more subject to being ruled by our impulses. Keeping kosher allows us to resemble Hashem by making us holy the master of our impulses. This mitzvah helps to remove the residue of non-kosher food from our pots.

## A. NOT TO USE A POT THAT COOKED NON-KOSHER FOODS UNTIL IT IS PURGED

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-9**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

A vessel in which non-kosher food was cooked — even if it was thoroughly scrubbed and washed immediately afterward — may not be used for cooking under Torah law for the first twenty-four hours (ben yomo), because the absorbed non-kosher flavor (beli'ah) remains fresh and imparts a beneficial taste (noten ta'am l'shvach) into any food subsequently cooked within it. After twenty-four hours have elapsed (eino ben yomo), the absorbed flavor deteriorates into a stale, foul taste (noten ta'am lifgam); while biblical law no longer prohibits using the vessel at that point, our Sages enacted a permanent Rabbinic prohibition against using it without proper purging through hag'alah or libun, lest one mistakenly come to cook in a non-kosher pot on the very day it was used.

### MORAL DILEMMAS:

A family who embraced Torah observance kashered their kitchen but was left with numerous delicate porcelain and china plates that could not be halachically kashered. They conceived an idea to donate these non-kosherable dishes to establish a communal gemach providing plates for couples to break at their engagement (tena'im) ceremonies as a memorial to the destruction of the Temple (zecher l'Churban). Is it halachically permissible to repurpose non-kosher dishes for this ceremonial breaking, or does it violate prohibitions regarding non-kosher vessels and wanton destruction (ba'al tashchis)?

**Answer:** Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that one should not keep non-kosher plates in the house to lend out or display, primarily because of the halachic concern (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 121:1) that leaving treif eating plates in a home creates a stumbling block lest a family member or guest inadvertently serve food on them. Only a single plate broken immediately at a tena'im to symbolize the family's return to teshuvah may be used right away, rather than storing a collection of treif dishes.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 410*

## B. TO REMOVE RUST OR OTHER SEPARATIONS BEFORE THE PURGING

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-62**

*As it says "Only the gold... shall you pass through the fire" (Bamidbar 31:23, Parshas Mattos).*

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Before subjecting a vessel to libun or hag'alah, one is halachically obligated to scour and remove all surface rust, grime, or physical residue, ensuring that no interposition (chatzitzah) remains. This requirement is derived from the verse: "Only (ach) the gold, and the silver, the copper, the iron, the tin, and the lead" (Bamidbar 31:23). Chazal expound that the restrictive term "only" (ach) teaches that the vessel must be completely unblemished and free from rust (chaludah) before the kashering process can take effect.

## HOLINESS BY MASTERING AND CHANNELING SEXUALITY FOR ITS TRUE PURPOSE

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask us to emulate Hashem's holiness by developing the discipline to dedicate sexuality for its holy purpose*

# 18. A man should not gaze at a forbidden woman's body

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 156**

*As the Torah says, that you shall not follow after your heart and your own eyes (Bamidbar 15:39, Parshas Shelach).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- What is the prohibition of following your heart?
- What is the prohibition of following your eyes?
- Is it wrong for a man look at a woman who is dressed suggestively?
- Is it wrong to pursue materialism as a goal?
- Does the Torah forbid having pleasure?
- What should a person have in mind when he or she experiences pleasure?
- Is it ok to have sexual fantasies?
- What are the consequences of having impure thoughts?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The verse "Do not stray after your heart and after your eyes" (Bamidbar 15:39) forbids us from harboring in our hearts any ideological speculation or skeptical thought capable of undermining the foundational principles of our Torah faith, lest the evil inclination lead a person into philosophical heresy (apikorsus), Heaven forbid.

The phrase "and after your eyes" refers directly to gazing upon forbidden sights and harboring sexual immorality, as Chazal expounded (Berachos 12b): "'After your heart' — this refers to heresy; 'and after your eyes' — this refers to immoral desire."

Included within this negative prohibition is the injunction against consciously plotting and scheming to pursue hedonistic cravings and the transient bodily lusts of the material world.

It is of supreme spiritual importance to exercise vigilant discipline over one's thoughts, for purity of the mind is the foundation upon which all Torah service rests. A person must sanctify and refine his consciousness with all his strength. If physical pleasure or sustenance comes his way, let his intention be directed solely toward acquiring strength to stand in the palace of the King of the universe, blessed is He, ensuring that his physical body does not weaken in the dedicated service of the Creator.

If a person transgresses this command by actively entertaining destructive thoughts against the principles of faith, indulging in immoral fantasies, or premeditating the pursuit of material lusts, he commits a grave spiritual offense that damages his portion in the World to Come (Olam HaBa). Such thoughts defile the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of both the physical body and its spiritual counterpart, the neshamah. A person must therefore guard the sanctuary of his mind with exceptional care.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

## HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 387)

Thoughts lead to action. If we can control what we look at and then what we think about, we will have greater self control.

### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 14)

Kedushah teaches that a person should train his eyes not to wander beyond his immediate four cubits unless necessary, guarding the sanctity of his vision and thought.

### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Shelach, immediately following the tragic narrative of the twelve spies who returned with a demoralizing report of the Holy Land, the Torah introduces the mitzvah of tzitzis: 'That you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of Hashem — And that you seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to go astray.' Our Sages in Maseches Berachos emphasize this psychological sequence: 'The eye sees, the heart covets, and the body commits the transgression.' Why did the Torah placing side by side the failure of the spies in the desert with the daily obligation to guard one's personal gaze? The Sfas Emes explains that human eyes are not passive biological lenses that simply record light; they are the active scouts of the soul. We cannot control every image that appears before us, but we can control whether we choose to look. By guarding our eyes with humble discipline, we keep our vision pure and our souls aligned with divine truth (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5635).

• The Prophet Isaiah proclaims the glorious reward awaiting those who master their senses: 'He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly — Who stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil; he shall dwell on high, his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks — Your eyes shall behold the King in His beauty.' The Talmud in Maseches Bava Basra quotes this verse to establish that an individual who has

the opportunity to avoid walking past an immodest location must take a detour, and if he walks there anyway, he is labeled wicked even if he closes his eyes. The Sfas Emes reveals how human retinas are prepared for divine revelation. The Sfas Emes explains that human consciousness possesses a finite visual capacity. Our eyes are the spiritual film of the soul. Looking away from impropriety is not a prudish sacrifice, but a glorious investment. By keeping our vision unstained, we prepare ourselves to behold the sublime beauty of the Almighty in this world and the Next (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayechi 5640).

• The Talmud in Maseches Menachos records the famous teaching of Rabbi Meir: 'Why was techeiles (the sky-blue dye of tzitzis) singled out among all other colors?' The Sfas Emes explains that visual perception is the primary gateway to the human imagination. Every color, shape, and image a person sees triggers an immediate chain reaction of psychological associations. When someone looks at coarse physical objects or provocative sights, the mind instantly associates downward toward animal appetite, material greed, and earthly transience. The Torah provided the techeiles as an intentional visual anchor that pulls consciousness in the opposite direction. What we gaze upon directly dictates the altitude of our thoughts. By choosing to look upon sacred, wholesome, and noble things, we elevate our minds toward the heights of divine connection (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5641).

• In the Song of Songs, King Solomon describes the intimate relationship between the Almighty and Israel with delicate poetic imagery: 'Behold, he stands behind our wall, he looks in at the windows, he peers through the lattice (meitzitz min hacharakim).' The Talmud in Maseches Menachos notes that the very word tzitzis is derived from this root of peering and looking: tzitzis means looking with deep spiritual intention. The Sfas Emes explains that the physical universe is an ornate lattice through which the Beloved—the Creator—constantly looks upon His people. Human vision was gifted to man so that he could peer back through the lattice, recognizing the divine presence concealed within nature, art, and human kindness. True sight is an act of spiritual contemplation, an effort to see the Hand of Hashem orchestrating every detail of reality. Refraining from forbidden sights is not an act of blind deprivation; it is the deliberate preservation of our spiritual vision. By keeping our eyes clean, we develop the rare ability to see Hashem's light shining everywhere (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5637).

• Rashi on the closed parshah teaches that following the passing of Yaakov Avinu, the eyes and hearts of Israel were sealed from the distress of bondage. Our eyes and hearts of Israel were sealed. The Sfas Emes takes this as a Midrashic foundation (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5658)

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- Discuss the far reaching implications of this mitzvah and the subsequent mitzvos. We have to be careful about:
- Going to a mixed beach
- Internet filters
- Mixed Dancing
- Watching movies and television
- Listening to secular music
- Casual dating and having a girlfriend or boyfriend before a time that one is looking to get married
- This is why many orthodox schools are not co-educational

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

An officiating rabbi at an observant wedding was informed that the mechitzah would be removed for mixed dancing immediately after the ceremony. Is he halachically required to remain behind to protest the improper dancing, or may he depart to teach his regularly scheduled Torah class?

**Answer:** Citing Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l (Igros Moshe, Yoreh De'ah 1:155), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the rabbi may officiate at the chuppah itself — since the mitzvah of mesader kiddushin ensures the couple is married according to halachah and no immodesty occurs during the chuppah — provided he stipulates and leaves immediately after the chuppah before the mechitzah is removed and mixed dancing begins.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 433*

## STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rav Masya ben Cheresh was known for his piety. He was once studying Torah in the beis midrash, and his face was shining like the sun and appeared like the ministering angels... Satan saw him and was jealous and said, "Is it possible that a man such as he has never sinned?" Satan said to the Holy One, blessed is He, "Master of the world, R' Masya ben Cheresh, what is he before you?" God answered, "A completely righteous one." Satan said, "Give me permission and I will test him." "You will not succeed," was the reply. "Nevertheless..." and Satan went to test R' Masya. He disguised himself as a beautiful woman... and stood before him. R' Masya turned his face away. Satan moved in front of his face, and R' Masya turned away again... R' Masya worried to himself that his evil inclination would overcome him. He called to his student and said, "Go and bring me fire and a nail." The student brought it, and R' Masya blinded himself. When Satan saw what R' Masya had done, he trembled and fell over backward. At that moment the Holy One, blessed is He, called the angel Rephael and said, "Go and heal R' Masya ben Cheresh." Rephael stood before R' Masya and said, "I am Rephael and the Holy One, blessed is He, has sent me to heal your eyes." R' Masya said, "Leave me, what happened already happened." Rephael returned to God and told him what R' Masya said. God said, "Go and tell him: 'I take responsibility that the evil inclination will not dominate over you '" Immediately he was healed.

*Midrash Tanchuma, Chukas 1*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ None of Rabbi Yehudah Naftali Mandelbaum's projects gave him more pleasure than those designed to increase Torah learning. Shortly after arriving in Baltimore, he and his lifelong friend Rabbi Moshe Juravel established a Mishnayos learning program, called Chemdas, for youngsters. The highlight of Chemdas's year was an out-of-town trip to a famous yeshivah or other Torah center. One year, the end-of-the-year trip turned out to be a complete fiasco. Nothing seemed to go right, including the weather. To compensate, Rabbi Mandelbaum arranged for the boys to go to a large amusement park the last day. The overcast skies seemed to assure that immodest attire would not be a problem, but just before the boys arrived at the park, the sun started shining bright and clear. When Rabbi Mandelbaum and Rabbi Juravel saw how the women in the park were dressed, they did not know what to do: To go in was impossible; to disappoint the boys again, almost as difficult. They need not have worried. The boys themselves sized up the situation, and announced that they could not go into the park. That they had reached that level of understanding turned the disastrous trip into one of the happiest days of Reb Yehudah Naftali's life. For months afterwards, he spoke with awe to anyone who would listen of the elevated madreigah (spiritual level) that his students had shown.

*Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ There was a story, which was reported in the secular Israeli media, regarding a group of leading professors who met with the Gerer Rebbe. The meeting took place at a tense time in chareidi secular relations. The previous week, a women's choir had performed at the Kosel, provoking the ire of the religious population, who were vocal in their opposition. One of the professors posed a question to the Rebbe "I hear Women singing all the time, and it has no effect on me. Are you chareidim really that primitive that the voice of a woman disturbs you so?" The Rebbe smiled. "You know," he replied, "the Bedouins in the desert walk without shoes. They cross stretches of hot desert sand, filled with rocks and debris, yet it has no effect on their toughened soles. A sophisticated European, on the other hand, can't bear to Walk barefoot, and the smallest particle will irritate his sensitive foot. I ask you, who is the primitive one, the Bedouin or the European?" After minutes of silence, the academic burst out, "Oy, Rebbe, you answered so well!"

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Naftali Liebowitz was 19 years old when his mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Mrs. Liebowitz was a powerhouse of yiras shomayim and chesed. Even in the hospital she would go from room to room to spend time with other patients, hold their hand and give them support. Naftali bought her a beautiful new tichel for her to wear in the hospital. But soon the cancer got much worse and she slipped into a coma. Naftali was devastated to see her mother who was so committed to living and teaching Torah in such a debilitating state. He took out the tichel he bought her and uncovered her hair to put on the new one on. In her coma her face began to jerk and tighten. She was clearly uncomfortable. When he finished covering her hair she relaxed and was smiling for the first time. Naftali was awed. Even in her comatose state she instinctively reacted to being in an immodest state. She was niftar a short while later, but that lesson stayed with Naftali's family forever.

*Visions of Greatness 2, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers, p. 126*

❖ At the end of twelfth grade, I was offered a very lucrative job at a bungalow colony in New York. I needed the money because I was going to learn in Eretz Yisrael. My rebbi, Rav Yosef Tendler, told me that he didn't think that any bachur should be in a bungalow colony due to the tznius issues present there; rather he should go to an all-male sleepaway camp. Rebbi didn't just give advice. He gave me several thousand dollars, the difference in salary between the two positions.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 247*

## A. A MAN SHOULD NOT LUSTFULLY GAZE AT SINGLE WOMEN

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-1**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ When is it appropriate to look at a woman's beauty?

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages have forbidden a man from gazing at an unmarried woman in a lustful or promiscuous manner, citing the pious declaration of Iyov: "I made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze upon a maiden?" (Iyov 31:1).

It is completely permissible, however, to look at a woman with dignified intent for the purpose of prospective marriage.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Hirschprung's glasses once broke, causing him to be nearsighted, yet he refused to have them repaired. He would often have to ask his children who people were, even though they stood just a few feet from him. When his children pressured him to buy new glasses, he finally explained. "As a Rav I often have to attend weddings or events where tzniyus is lacking, and though I must be there, I don't have to look. The broken glasses make it that much easier for me." He wore the broken glasses for forty years, until his last day.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

### B. ONE MUST LOOK AT HIS PROSPECTIVE SPOUSE BEFORE MARRIAGE

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-1**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Beyond being merely permitted, a man is affirmatively obligated by halachah to look at his prospective bride prior to concluding the marriage to verify that she finds favor in his eyes. As Chazal instituted (Kiddushin 41a), it is strictly forbidden for a man to betroth a woman until he has seen her in person, lest he later discover something unpleasing to him and come to violate the biblical command, "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18).

# 19. Not to have impure thoughts or look at immoral things

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-30, 22-4**

*As the Torah Says, You shall guard from any evil matter (Devarim 23:10, Parshas Ki Seitzei)*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Our Sages expounded (Avodah Zarah 20b) upon the verse "You shall guard yourself from every evil thing" (Devarim 23:10) that a man must not entertain impure or sexually stimulating thoughts during the daytime, lest such fantasies induce a nocturnal seminal emission (keri). This prohibition applies strictly even if he has no intention of translating those fantasies into physical action.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 5)

The yetzer hara lures a person through innocent curiosity: first he invites a person merely to walk by, then to stand and observe, and ultimately to sit and participate with the scornful. Curiosity is the hook; once the eye gazes, the heart begins to desire.

### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)

Our Sages teach that sinful thoughts cause greater damage than the physical transgression itself ("hirhurei aveirah kashu me'aveirah"). Because thought operates at the highest realm of the soul, impure contemplation damages the spiritual worlds far more profoundly than physical action alone.

### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 17)

Performing mitzvos for the sake of personal honor or ulterior motives is akin to infidelity of the heart (zenus halev). If the heart's devotion is turned toward external glory rather than Hashem, it violates the spirit of "Lo sasuru acharei levavchem".

### SFAS EMES

• In the liturgy of Al HaNissim on Chanukah, we recount the desecration of the Holy Temple by the Syrian-Greek kingdom: 'When the wicked kingdom of Greece stood up against Your people Israel — They defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary.' Our Sages in Maseches Shabbos explain that the miracle of Chanukah occurred because one single cruse of pure olive oil, sealed with the signet ring of the High Priest, remained hidden and untouched. The Sfas Emes reveals how guarding the mind from impure fantasies reenacts the miracle of Chanukah. The Sfas Emes explains that olive oil represents the pure intellect and imagination residing within the human brain. Olives are crushed to extract pure, clear oil that rises to the top of all liquids, burns with a bright, smokeless flame, and illuminates the darkness. Our thoughts are the consecrated oil of the Menorah. By refusing to let impure imagery contaminate our minds, we rekindle the eternal light of Chanukah within our own souls (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5644).

• In Parshas Shelach, following the sin of the spies and the commandment of tzitzis, the Midrash quotes the triumphant verse of King David in Psalms: 'Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.' The Baal Shem Tov famously taught an essential psychological and spiritual axiom based on this verse: 'In the place where a person's thoughts reside, that is where the person is entirely situated.' What does it mean that an individual is located wherever his thoughts wander? The Sfas Emes explains that a human being is not defined by his physical coordinates in space. A person may be physically standing inside a holy synagogue, wearing tallis and tefillin with an open Gemara before him; yet if his mind is actively daydreaming about a business deal, a sports contest, or an immoral scene, he is not in the beit midrash at all. No matter where our bodies are required to go for our livelihoods, our minds can always dwell in the presence of Hashem. By keeping our thoughts pure and noble, we walk continuously in the light of the righteous (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5639).

• In Parshas Tzav, the Torah begins its description of the sacrificial order with the burnt-offering: 'Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the burnt-offering (olah); it is that which goes up on its firewood upon the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it.' The Talmud in

Maseches Yoma and the Zohar reveal the unique spiritual purpose of this offering: whereas sin-offerings atone for physical transgressions of action, the olah atones specifically for the impure thoughts and sinful daydreams of the heart (hirhur halev). The Sfas Emes explains that a physical action occurs in the lower, external realm of the body and the physical world. Thought, however, resides in the innermost Holy of Holies of the human personality. The brain is the sanctuary where the divine soul directly touches the physical organism. Our minds are holy sanctuaries dedicated to divine wisdom. By filling our thoughts with words of Torah and deeds of kindness, we keep the fire burning on the altar and banish darkness from our souls (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tzav 5631).

• In Parshas Pekudei, Scripture describes the completion of the contributions for the Mishkan with words of profound precision: 'For the materials they had were sufficient for all the work to make it, and there was a surplus.' The Hebrew phrase vehamelecha hayesa dayam—the work was exactly sufficient for them—encapsulates the spiritual ideal of the Tabernacle. The Sfas Emes explains how the Mishkan models the prohibition of Bal Tosif for all generations. The Sfas Emes explains that the construction of the Mishkan mirrored the original creation of the universe. When Hashem created heaven and earth, Scripture emphasizes that He ceased all His work on the seventh day. The divine title Sha-ddai means 'the One who said to His world, Dai—Enough!' Creation reached perfection precisely when the Almighty set boundaries and halted the expansion of matter. Spiritual maturity is not measured by relentless frenzy or self-invented asceticism. True greatness lies in the quiet dignity of fulfilling Hashem's exact will with precision, joyful satisfaction, and humble restraint (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Pekudei 5636).

• The Sfas Emes discusses how the Jews carried the remnants of matzah and maror from Egypt and why the Midrash emphasizes their affection for mitzvos. He explains that every mitzvah should leave a lasting spiritual imprint (reshimah) on the person. The act itself fulfills the Divine command, but the longing that surrounds it—before and after—can shape the inner soul. He then reasons from Chazal's statement impure thoughts of transgression are even more spiritually damaging than the transgression itself (hirhurei aveirah kashin me-aveirah) to an important positive converse: thoughts and longing for a mitzvah can be deeply beneficial to the person's inward condition. The teaching should not be oversimplified into saying that a thought and an action always have identical legal culpability. The Sfas Emes explicitly distinguishes their different spiritual effects: deeds directly enact commands or violations, while cultivated thought has a special formative power over the inner self (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5659).

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Avigdor Miller sometimes asked people to look on the street for rubber bands that the mailmen discarded, claiming he needed them to pack his tapes. This was an unusual request, but his loyal students complied. One person was particularly scrupulous in keeping his eyes glued to the sidewalk and managed to amass a large quantity of rubber bands. When he brought them to Rabbi Miller the Rav told him to keep them because they were holy -- they protected his kedushah. The man then realized that the reason Rav Miller asked for the rubber bands was to help his students avoid looking at improper things while they walk. In another incident, one day, a talmid chacham who served as a maggid shiur in a yeshivah came to Rabbi Miller. He told him that he had tremendous gratitude to Rabbi Miller and felt that he needed to meet him and tell him his story in person. He related as follows: When I was a bachur in yeshivah, I was definitely not among the best students there. I used to listen to non-Jewish rock and roll music in my dorm room. I was nervous, though, that the Mashgiach would find out, so I came up with a plan. I found tapes of Rabbi Miller's shiurim and placed them on my night table next to my tape player. When I heard the Mashgiach coming in, I quickly replaced whatever tape I was listening to with a shiur from Rabbi Miller. Because of this, I came to listen to the shiurim of Rabbi Miller every day, even for only a couple of minutes. Each time I listened, I heard insights, new ideas, and they started to make an impact on me.

Eventually, I abandoned my rock music tapes and switched to Rabbi Miller tapes. In time, I became a different person and I am currently a maggid shiur in a yeshivah. This is all because of Rabbi Miller's tapes which I used to hide my music tapes. When Rabbi Miller heard this story he particularly enjoyed it.

*From Rav Avigdor Miller, His Life and Revolution, By Yaakov Y. Hamburger, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ "We must punish that wicked bookbinder," cried the outraged townspeople to their rabbi. "He had the nerve to bind together in one volume our sacred Chumash and this trashy novel." The rabbi sighed heavily as he picked up the book and turned to his visitors. "Why do you only ask me to act against the binder? What about the people who read such novels and bind together in their minds and hearts the knowledge of Torah and worthless stories?" "There is still a solution for the problem created by this bookbinder. We can simply take apart what he has done and rebind the Chumash separately. But what can we do about a person who has bound them together in his mind?" Parents often fail to realize the danger of allowing their children and sometimes themselves — to read or watch immoral popular culture. All of the expense and effort poured into providing them with a solid Jewish education may be wasted because their minds are binding together Torah with trash.

*Who Wants Life?, By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*

❖ A new bachur arrived in body, but his spirit hadn't yet completely left the streets. His head was filled with all sorts of impurities that made learning difficult. Rav Shlomo Freifeld called him into the office. "It's impossible to rid yourself of such thoughts; what we can do is replace them. Let us make a seder in mishnayos ba'al peh, the study of mishnayos by heart, word by word. That will fill your head with holiness." The next week, Reb Shlomo called him in to test him on the first perek of masechta Bava Metzia by heart. The talmid recalls how "after I recited the perek by heart, he turned to me and said, 'Okay, now it's my turn; test me.' He said it without a hint of a smile, as if we were best friends and it was the most normal thing in the world to test each other. I sat there as he recited the Mishnayos to me, "In time, my head was full with Mishnayos, the timeless and holy words that became my constant companion. One day, months later, when I had progressed to a level that I never thought possible and knew the entire masechta Bava Metzia flawlessly, Rabbi called me in. 'It's no good to rest on your laurels now we are going to start Zevachim"

*Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press*

❖ The following was related to me by a doctor who heard it from the surgeon involved. Once, the surgeon performed brain surgery on a certain woman. While the surgery was in progress, the patient began to sing an aria from an Italian opera. After the surgery, when the woman was fully alert, the surgeon asked her where she had learned the piece. At first, the woman was dumbfounded. She had no interest in opera and certainly knew nothing of Italian opera. She thought long and hard until she recalled that as a little girl, she had been taken to an Italian opera by her schoolteacher. Though the incident had meant nothing to her and decades had passed since its occurrence, the opera remained embedded in her memory. Apparently, the surgical procedure had touched a part of her brain which caused her to recall this childhood event while she was in surgery and under the influence of anesthesia. What we see and hear even once can leave a lifelong impression upon our minds. What a child sees once can cause him or her spiritual harm many years later. A child subjected to the decadence of television or similar popular media is a child whose mind and heart can be tainted by immorality and other forms of sin.

*The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Chanina Hertzberg had the privilege of driving the Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld around one summer In the 1970's. One day he was driving him on an errand from the bungalow colony to Woodridge, a small town where many orthodox Jews shop in the summer. They stopped in to pick up some pastry goods at the bakery. Chanina went in to the bakery. When he came back he saw the Rosh Yeshivah looked saddened. What's wrong? That pharmacy has very explicit magazines displayed out the front window right by a bus stop where many yeshivah bachurim are waiting. Can you pleased

go into the pharmacy and ask the owner how much he plans to make on the sale of the magazines this summer? Chanina went in. The owner was very confused why Chanina wanted to know that but said he would try to figure it out. He said he would make 150 dollars over the summer. When Chanina told Rabbi Freifeld, Rabbi Freifeld wrote out a check of 150 dollars. He told Chanina to offer to the owner all of the profit on the magazines If he would agree to display it in a less conspicuous place than the front window. When Chanina made the offer, the owner was flabbergasted but impressed. It's ok, you can keep the money. I'll move it anyway. Chanina was indelibly impressed at the sensitivity and concern that Rav Freifeld displayed towards Klal Yisrael.

*Visions of Greatness, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers, p. 140*

❖ The gaon R. Mordechai Schwab related, "In Kamenetz, before the yeshivah had its own beis midrash, we would daven in the town's beis midrash and on Shabbos we would daven in Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz's house. Reb Baruch Ber had a married son who died young. The widow and her small son and daughter lived in Reb Baruch Ber's house, too. One Shabbos, we all heard the loud noise of two gentiles yelling and fighting with each other on the street just in front of the house. Immediately, Reb Baruch Ber ran to search for his grandson so that the child would not see the awful sight. After Reb Baruch Ber found him he explained torus that when he was a youngster, too, there was a similar incident outside of his house. He recalled how his father rushed frantically to try to shield his eyes from seeing it. Reb Baruch Ber told us that his father, in fact, had arrived too late, for he already had seen the two gentiles exchanging blows. R. Boruch Ber added, 'Quite possibly, had I not witnessed that sight, I would have had much more success in my Torah learning in those days. That barbarous scene made such a strong impression on me, that I still see it today and cannot erase it from my mind."

*Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim*

## A. A MAN SHOULD NOT GAZE AT THE CLOTHING A WOMAN WEARS

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-2**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is halachically forbidden for a man to gaze intentionally at the colorful, worn garments belonging to a woman whom he recognizes, even when those garments are hanging spread out upon a wall (Avodah Zarah 20b), because looking at personal clothing worn by an acquaintance evokes vivid imagery of her and incites improper thoughts.

## B. NOT TO GAZE AT THE PRIVATE AREAS OF THE BODY

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-4**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must not gaze intentionally upon the anatomical place of circumcision on his own body, and certainly not upon that of another person. As our Sages warned (Nedarim 20b), one who brazenly gazes upon private parts diminishes his modesty and risks being punished with childlessness or spiritually compromised offspring.

## C. NOT TO WATCH WHILE ANIMALS ARE MATING

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-3**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

A person must not gaze intentionally upon animals, beasts, or fowl while they are mating (Avodah Zarah 20b), lest witnessing the act arouse animalistic desires and induce immoral fantasies in the human mind.

## D. A MAN SHOULD NOT LISTEN TO A FORBIDDEN WOMAN SINGING

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 46-2**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Listening to the singing voice of a woman forbidden to a man is classified halachically as an encounter with intimacy (kol b'ishah ervah), as the verse states: "For your voice is sweet and your appearance is comely" (Shir HaShirim 2:14). From this juxtaposition, Chazal derived (Berachos 24a) that a woman's singing voice carries sensual allure; consequently, a man is forbidden to listen to the singing voice of any woman who is an ervah (a forbidden relation, including a married woman or a niddah).

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ One summer, Reb Moshe Feinstein was planning to remain in the city but his family prevailed upon him to spend a couple of weeks in a Catskill Mountains bungalow colony. After one day, Reb Moshe asked that arrangements be made for a driver to take him back to the city with all his luggage. He would not explain what had gone wrong. He simply said, "if a driver cannot be arranged, I will take a bus." Only later did he explain the problem. His bungalow adjoined that of a widow, whose daughter had a sweet voice. The daughter entertained her mother much of the day with her singing. Halachah did not permit Reb Moshe to hear the singing, and he was not going to deny the widow this pleasure. There was no choice but to return home."

*Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ One of Rav Isser Zalman's neighbors once saw him ascend the stairs leading to his house and then come down. He did this several times, going up and coming right down again. The neighbor approached him and asked him to explain. Rav Isser Zalman said, "A widowed lady is working in my apartment at the moment... As I approached the entrance I heard her singing to herself as she worked. It is clear to me that as soon as she would see me, she would stop singing. I am unsure whether I am allowed to let that happen; her singing may help her take her mind off her troubles I have gone up several times to see whether or not she has stopped singing and I could go inside."

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

## E. NOT TO SPEAK ABOUT IMPURE THINGS AND USE PROFANE LANGUAGE

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 24-49**

*As it says "because Hashem your G-d walks in the midst of your camp... and your camp should be holy, and He should not see an immoral matter and turn away from you (Devarim 23:15, Parshas Ki Seitzei)".*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What is wrong with speaking profanity?

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

The grave scriptural warning against uttering vulgar, profane speech (nivul peh) — which brings harsh tribulations and destructive decrees upon the world — is expounded in the Zohar (end of Parshas Noach) based on the verse: "For Hashem your God walks in the midst of your camp to rescue you... therefore your camp shall be holy, that He see no unseemly thing (dvar ervah) in you and turn away from you" (Devarim 23:15). The Zohar explains that "your camp" signifies the 248 limbs of the human body, while "in the midst" denotes the heart, situated at the core of the physical frame, where the Shechinah (Divine Presence) desires to dwell. The human encampment must therefore remain consecrated and purified of all sin. This applies with exceptional stringency to sexual impropriety, for the God of Israel abhors promiscuity. This is the inner meaning of dvar ervah — reading the word davar literally as speech: even an unseemly word of vulgarity must never be heard within you. If vulgarity is found in a person's mouth, the Almighty immediately turns away and the Divine Presence withdraws from him.

When a person utters profane speech, he is placed under heavenly excommunication (nidui) within the celestial chamber known as Nogah by forty appointed angels, who proclaim a ban of excommunication for every single word of vulgarity he uttered. These angels likewise ban anyone who commits an act liable to excommunication. Consequently, for forty days his prayers are rejected and unanswered on High, and ten public proclamations are broadcast daily throughout the celestial encampments: "Beware of so-and-so, for he has been placed under heavenly excommunication until he repents for the severe prohibition he violated!"

Once this individual genuinely repents and rectifies his speech, those same forty angels escort him before the heavenly court, rescind the excommunication, and issue a new proclamation: "This person has been released from excommunication; from this moment onward, his prayers shall be accepted and answered."

Until he achieves complete repentance, however, he remains under excommunication both in Heaven and on earth. The divine shield of protection is removed from him, leaving him vulnerable and exposed to harmful occurrences. Furthermore, when he sleeps at night, because his soul is under the ban of excommunication, his neshamah is barred from ascending through the gates of Heaven and is instead thrust among the impure external forces (kelipos). This profound metaphysical reality is revealed in the Zohar (Parshas Pekudei 249b).

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)

Avoiding foul speech is not merely a protective fence (geder) against transgression; coarse speech is itself an intrinsic immorality within the faculty of speech (ervah shel dibur).

**SFAS EMES**

• In Parshas Shemos, the Torah describes the bitter oppression of Israel in Egypt: 'And they made their lives bitter with hard labor, with mortar and with bricks.' The Zohar makes an astonishing cabalistic observation on this servitude, declaring that the true inner tragedy of the Egyptian exile was that 'the speech itself was in exile.' What does it mean for human speech to be imprisoned in exile? The Sfas Emes explains the Zohar's insight based on the dual meaning of the verse 'and they made their lives bitter.' The Targum defines life as the capacity for articulate spiritual speech. In the depraved culture of Egypt, speech was thoroughly exiled; language was degraded into tools of manipulation, coarse physical complaints, and empty chatter about bricks and mortar. The slaves had lost the ability to articulate sacred yearning, noble ideals, and divine praise. Freedom is not the license to speak nonsense; freedom is the capacity to speak with dignity, love, and holiness. By choosing our words with care and avoiding idle chatter, we live as truly free children of the King (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Shemos 5637).

• In Parshas Noach, the Torah records the total destruction of early human society: 'And the earth was corrupt before Hashem, and the earth was filled with violence (chamas).' Our Sages in the Midrash and Gemara identify two catastrophic sins that sealed the fate of the generation of the Flood: sexual depravity and robbery. The Sfas Emes explains that human language was created to be the vehicle of truth, harmony, and divine connection. When the generation of the Flood corrupted their ways, their moral decay immediately infected their vocal communication. They used their mouths to lie, flatter, exploit, and verbally violate the dignity of their fellow human beings. Language was transformed from a tool of peace into a weapon of predatory violence. Language has the power to build civilizations or destroy them. By committing ourselves to pristine, dignified speech, we help sustain the world in goodness and peace (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Noach 5638).

• In Parshas Ki Seitzei, the Torah issues a stern warning: 'You shall observe and perform that which has gone out of your lips.' While the simple halachic context of this verse addresses the binding nature of voluntary vows and pledges, our Sages in the Midrash hear a much broader directive governing all human speech. The Sfas Emes explains that when the Almighty created man, He did not fashion speech from the dust of the earth; He exhaled His own innermost breath into man's being. Therefore, human speech is the physical manifestation of the divine soul itself. Whenever words travel across our lips, a piece of that divine breath is being spent and sent out into the world. Every sentence we utter is an expenditure of the divine soul within us. By guarding our speech from triviality and speaking only what is constructive and holy, we preserve our inner spiritual vitality and illuminate the world around us (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5641).

• The Sfas Emes explains a Midrash that Torah releases the tongue, “the Torah releases and heals the bound tongue” (ha-Torah matir es ha-lashon). He begins with Chazal's teaching that each Divine statement at Matan Torah divided into seventy languages. Every human language, he says, contains sparks of holiness, because no form of speech can exist outside the world sustained by Hashem. But those sparks may be spiritually imprisoned when language is used for triviality, degradation and profanity. His formulation is exceptionally direct: the other languages became sullied through the profane speech of the wicked. By contrasting profane speech with the healing power of the Holy Tongue, the Sfas Emes shows that guarding our mouth from vulgarity keeps our voice clear to carry the living words of Torah (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5648).

• The pasuk in the camp-laws says literally, bodily nakedness — yet the Sfas Emes, following the midrash of the war against Amalek, reads the mouth into it: the prohibition is to guard the sign of the holy covenant (li-shmor os bris kodesh). A natural question arises: what has debased talk to do with the covenant of circumcision? The

passage answers that the two are one covering: where the covenant should be revealed, base speech throws the covering back on. For the Name of Hashem is sealed within man — and through milah and periah that Name is revealed, until the camp itself can be called holy (kadosh). That is why the prohibition sits in the camp-laws and not in a code of manners: the camp was promised holiness (kedushah) precisely because the Name within it had been uncovered, and anything unseemly (ervas davar) re-veils it (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas Zachor 5664).

### F. NOT TO LISTEN TO PROFANE SPEECH OR IDEAS

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 11-3**

*As it says, You shall have a pick (yated) among your tools (Devarim 23:14, Parshas Ki Seitzei)*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

The Torah commands: "And you shall have a peg (yated) among your gear (azeneka)" (Devarim 23:14). In the Talmud (Kesubos 5b), Chazal derived a homiletical lesson through sacred wordplay: do not read azeneka merely as "your gear," but also as ozneka — "your ear." This teaches that if a person hears unseemly, slanderous, or profane speech, he must insert his finger into his ear to block the sound. As Rashi elucidates, the Almighty shaped human fingers like tapered pegs (yated) precisely for this purpose, enabling a person to immediately plug his ears against improper speech.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Even though his hearing was impaired, for several reasons the Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky) refused to use a hearing aid. One was that if his ears became used to hearing clearly with it during the week, it might be harder for him to hear on Shabbos. In particular, he might not hear the Torah reading. "Why is it important to hear well?" he would ask. "This way no one goes to the trouble of shouting lashon hara into my ears. The things that are necessary I somehow manage to hear. So what do I need it for?"

*The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 141*

## 20. Not to needlessly spill seed

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 32-19**

*As it says, do not be promiscuous (Shemos 20:13, Parshas Yisro)*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Rabbi Yishmael taught (Niddah 13b) that the commandment "You shall not commit adultery" (lo sin'af — Shemos 20:13) can be read homiletically as lo teheneh af — prohibiting any unnatural sexual stimulation of the body, whether by hand or foot. This refers to solitary self-gratification without a partner. Tosafos (Niddah 13a) explains that this encompasses any friction applied to the organ of circumcision that leads to the destruction

and waste of human seed (hotza'as zera l'vatalah). One who intentionally destroys his seed incurs liability to death at the hands of Heaven, as befell Er and Onan (Bereishis 38:7–10), and commits the very sin that sealed the doom of the Generation of the Flood (Dor HaMabul).

Furthermore, Chazal declare that one who wastes seed is considered as if he had spilled human blood. Concerning this offense, the prophet proclaims: "You who inflame yourselves among the terebinths, under every leafy tree, slaughterers of the children in the ravines" (Yeshayahu 57:5). For this reason, the prohibition of adultery (lo sin'af) is placed directly adjacent to "You shall not murder" (lo tirtzach) in the Decalogue. As Rabbeinu Yonah writes (Sha'arei Teshuvah), one who commits this act is placed under formal excommunication (shamta) by the Sages of Israel. The Zohar (Vayechi 219b) adds that one who willfully corrupts his seed undergoes severe judgment in Gehinnom.

#### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

## 21. Not to do activities that can lead to an illicit relationship

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 110**

*As the Torah says, None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to him, to uncover nakedness (Vayikra 18:6, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

#### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is meant by "things that bring you close to immorality"?
- Is it ok to listen to a radio program that discusses suggestive material?
- What is one solution to preventing young people from arousing themselves in forbidden ways?
- Is it ok for a young man to marry an old woman, or an old man to marry a very young woman? Why not?
- Is it ok to be secluded in a house with a woman that you are not married to?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This negative prohibition ("You shall not draw near to uncover nakedness" — Vayikra 18:6) includes, for example:

Embracing affectionately;

And kissing;

Because these intimate physical acts directly facilitate and lead toward illicit relations (gilui arayos).

If a person violates this command by embracing, kissing, or deriving sensual physical pleasure from any woman forbidden to him as an ervah (such as a married woman, a niddah, or close consanguineous relatives), he violates this biblical negative commandment and is presumed suspect regarding immorality.

It is likewise strictly forbidden for a man:

To wink, hint, or make suggestive physical gestures toward forbidden women;

To jest, flirt, or engage in levity with them;

To intentionally smell their fragrance or perfume;

Or to gaze lingeringly at their physical beauty.

More broadly, a person must never engage in any conduct or thought pattern that stimulates improper sexual fantasy.

It is strictly forbidden to emit seed wastefully (hotza'as zera l'vatalah), and Chazal regard this as an exceptionally grave transgression.

If someone willfully induces an erection through physical stimulation or improper thoughts, he is placed under a ban of excommunication (nidui).

It is a Rabbinic mitzvah for parents to marry off their sons and daughters close to their reaching the age of maturity, for leaving youth unwed leaves them vulnerable to sexual sin and immoral thoughts.

It is forbidden for a mature woman to marry a minor male, as this invites marital breakdown and immorality. Likewise, a young man should not marry an elderly woman, nor should an elderly man marry a young maiden, for such stark mismatches inevitably lead to marital discontent and sexual transgression.

It is forbidden under Torah law for a man to be secluded (yichud) with any woman forbidden to him as an ervah, and Chazal further extended this prohibition to include seclusion with an unmarried woman. If a man violates this and isolates himself with a woman with whom seclusion is prohibited, both are liable to Rabbinic lashes of rebellion (makas mardus), and their misconduct is publicly announced — with the sole exception of seclusion with a married woman, where lashes are not administered and no public announcement is made, in order to prevent casting a false stigma of illegitimacy (mamzerus) upon her children. Even so, remaining in seclusion with her remains strictly forbidden.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SFAS EMES

• The Torah's command of purity of thought is given to the camp of war. The Sfas Emes explains, in the name of his grandfather, that the Sifri's "your camp" (machanecha) refers not to armies but the limbs of man: every person must go out to war, gathering all his wills and his whole soul for the will of the Place. When a man assembles all his forces to do a mitzvah — to turn from evil with his whole living being — the guarding happens by itself: there is no longer any room to be confused by foolish words of temptation (divrei shetus), since he is willing to give his very soul, and nothing is dearer to a man than his soul. For this reason the verse speaks in the passive ("and you shall be guarded"): the war itself gives the guarding, since he who is wholly enlisted has no vacancy left for the enemy to enter (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5631).

• The Midrash on "May He send your help from the Sanctuary" (yishlach ezrecha mi-kodesh) teaches that the psalm "May Hashem answer you" (ya'ancha) was David's prayer for Yoav, whom he sent to war. The Sfas Emes (Kedoshim, 5644) reads the whole of a man's inner life as that war, in physical deeds too, everything is Hashem's war for one who acts for Heaven's sake, and it is called a time of distress — and then one needs aid: "May He send your help from the Sanctuary." But why should holiness need a war? The Jewish soul carries a holy point from the spark of Godliness — that cannot change. And the aid arrives precisely at the front, then the light of the soul grows strong—for "your aid" is the help designated for you alone, the power of the soul that is rooted in heaven. The distance is the battle, and the battle is what draws down the reinforcement — the fence does far more than protect the holiness, it summons it (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5644).

• In Parshas Vayeishev, Scripture describes the dramatic climax of Yosef's moral test in Egypt: Potiphar's wife seized him by his garment, demanding that he succumb to sin, but Yosef 'left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.' The Sages in the Midrash teach that Yosef earned the eternal crown of 'HaTzaddik'—the ultimate Righteous Man—specifically through this single moment of moral courage. In his discourse on Parshas Lech Lecha (5634), the Sfas Emes explains that in the spiritual arena, the greatest warrior is not the one who proudly engages in a direct duel with sexual temptation. The yetzer hara of immorality is an unholy fire; if a person stands in the flames attempting to argue or reason, the heat will consume him regardless of his intellect. Yosef understood that true heroism requires absolute humility. When inappropriate situations, images, or environments appear, we do not need to negotiate or lingeringly observe. Dropping everything and fleeing with humble courage is the highest mark of spiritual greatness (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5634).

• In Kedoshim, the Sfas Emes interprets "May He send your help from the Sanctuary, and support you from Tzion" (yishlach ezrecha mi-kodesh u-mi-Tzion yis'adecha) by relating Tzion (a spiritual signpost), through gematria, to Yosef, who embodies the sanctity of the bodily covenant. He distinguishes the higher holiness of the soul (kedushas ha-neshamah) associated with Torah from the role of the sign of the covenant (os bris) inscribed within the body. The sign declares that this bodily vessel is meant to receive holiness (she-kli zeh ra'ui le-ha-kedushah). The mitzvah of milah marks the physical being as capable of bearing a sacred spiritual life. Guarding intimacy is a way of allowing physical existence to remain fit for a spiritual task that transcends it, so that the soul's holiness (kedushah) can become present through the person's deeds (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5660).

• In the foundational kabbalistic work Sefer Yetzirah, our Sages reveal a profound structural correspondence: the Creator established two parallel covenants in the human body—the covenant of the tongue in the mouth, and the covenant of circumcision in the reproductive organ. The Sfas Emes explains that both speech and reproduction

are creative faculties through which human beings project their inner spiritual essence outward. Through speech, a person articulates thoughts, gives birth to ideas, and connects with fellow souls. Through the reproductive faculty, a person generates biological life, bringing new human beings into existence. These two faculties are the primary channels of divine creative power entrusted to man. We cannot separate what we say from how we live. By purifying our speech from vulgarity and our actions from immorality, we keep the twin gates of our soul radiant with divine holiness (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5636).

## A. NOT TO CONVERSE UNNECESSARILY WITH A FORBIDDEN WOMAN

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-19**

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Mishnah teaches (Pirkei Avos 1:5): "Do not engage in excessive conversation with a woman." The Sages explained that this caution was stated even regarding a man's own wife — how much more so does it apply to the wife of another man! Furthermore, this admonition applies even when one's wife is ritually pure; how much more so when she is forbidden to him during her state of niddah, and incomparably more so with any other woman forbidden to him as an ervah.

Indeed, excessive idle chatter is unseemly even when speaking with another man. Therefore, even when necessity requires a man to speak with a woman, he should speak with utmost brevity and dignified restraint. This standard is illustrated by the Talmudic account (Eruvin 53b) of the pious and learned Beruriah and Rabbi Yosi HaGelili: When Rabbi Yosi encountered her at a crossroads and asked, "By which path shall we walk to Lod?" — using four words — she gently rebuked him: "Foolish Galilean! Did not the Sages instruct, 'Do not engage in excessive conversation with a woman'? You should have asked simply: 'By which to Lod?' using two words instead of four."

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ During the period that Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotsk was a disciple of Reb Simchah Bunem of Pshischah he was walking down the street with his friend Reb Yitzchak of Vorki and they encountered an old woman who was peddling knives. Reb Yitzchak wanted to buy himself a small knife, for which the old woman asked for four copper coins. Reb Yitzchak offered her three - but the deal was interrupted by the loud voice of his friend, calling him by his nickname: "Itshe! The Mishnah teaches us: 'Do not converse excessively with women.' Now isn't that worth one copper coin?"

*A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 191*

## B. NOT TO BE SECLUDED WITH A FORBIDDEN WOMAN

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 32-25**

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Would this mitzvah apply if a young man is secluded with an elderly woman?
- Are there exceptions to this mitzvah? Can one be secluded with any ervah? Can one be alone with his mother?

▪ Is there a problem of a man being secluded with another man?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

In the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 25a), our Sages affirm that being secluded in private (yichud) with a woman forbidden as an ervah is biblically prohibited under Torah law. It is forbidden for a man to be secluded with any forbidden woman — whether she is elderly or a young maiden — because unsupervised physical privacy creates intimacy that directly leads to sexual transgression.

The sole biblical exceptions where seclusion is permitted are a father with his biological daughter, a mother with her biological son, and a husband with his wife when she is in a state of niddah, as natural familial love or marital bond does not evoke illicit fear of sin. However, this leniency does not extend to a newlywed bride who becomes a niddah prior to consummating the marriage; in that case, the prohibition of yichud remains fully in effect, requiring a chaperone.

The members of Klal Yisroel are fundamentally upright and not suspected of committing homosexual relations or bestiality; consequently, halachah does not prohibit seclusion with another male or with domestic animals. Nonetheless, certain exceptionally pious scholars adopted a personal stringency (chumra) to refrain from remaining alone with animals.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ There are secular critics who believe that chareidim, the so-called "Ultra Orthodox," are close minded. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that yichud is a rabbinical decree to prevent people from stumbling in sin. No doubt there are letzanim who mock the front door of a frum home being left open, with something blocking it from closing, to forestall yichud. I recall that we once had non-Jewish cleaning help who came when my wife was out of the house. I propped the front door open with a chair. When my wife returned, the cleaner asked her why I had done that, and for the first time she was introduced to the concept of yichud. "If only everyone would do this, it would eliminate many of society's problems," this non-Jewish woman observed.

*I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 261*

## C. A YOUNG WOMAN SHOULD NOT MARRY AN OLD MAN

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 32-7**

*As it says, "do not profane your daughter by giving her over to sexual immorality, (Vayikra 19:29, Parshas Kedoshim)".*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

In the Gemara (Sanhedrin 76a), our Sages expound the verse: "Do not profane your daughter to cause her to be a harlot" (Vayikra 19:29). Chazal teach that this warning applies directly to a father who gives his young daughter in marriage to an elderly man; because the severe disparity in age and vitality fosters marital incompatibility and emotional distress, it risks driving a dissatisfied young woman to commit adultery with a younger companion.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rabbi Leib has come down in chassidic history as Reb Leib, the son of Sarah. Why this strange appellation? That is a story in itself. Rabbi Leib's father, Reb Yosef, was one of the hidden tzaddikim, who made his living tutoring children in Torah. There were some Jews who operated inns on the roads connecting cities, where travelers would stop for food and lodging. Being in the countryside, they did not have access to a cheder (Hebrew school) where their children could learn, and Reb Yosef would be hired for several months at a time to teach the children how to read and understand Hebrew so that they could pray and read the Torah. The innkeeper's family loved Reb Yosef, looking at him as a godly person. Reb Yosef was a widower, his entire family having been wiped out in a pogrom. The poritz (feudal lord), from whom the inn was rented, periodically visited to inspect his property, and on one occasion, noted the innkeeper's daughter, Sarah, who was stunningly beautiful. "I am going to have that young woman as my wife," the poritz said, and he said it in a tone that indicated he was not in jest. In czarist Russia, the feudal lords were supreme rulers over their fiefdoms, and they had the authority to sentence one to be executed at their whim. To throw an entire family into the dungeon was not an unusual occurrence. "I will be back in three days with my priest, and I will marry her right here," he thundered, and then, emitting a fiendish laugh, he said, "Unless, of course, she happens to be married already." The family was crushed. How does one deal with such an evil fiend? There was no one to whom they could appeal. They turned to Reb Yosef — who shared in the family's anguish — who said, "All I can do is pray to G-d for a miraculous salvation." The young Sarah then said, "We are not to depend on miracles. I know what I will do. I will marry Reb Yosef and the evil poritz will not be able to touch me." "What are you saying, my child?" Reb Yosef said. "I am old enough to be your grandfather. You need a young, handsome husband." "There is no way a husband can be found for me in three days, and I will rather die than be taken by the poritz. Reb Yosef, you are the answer to my prayers, you are my only hope, and you will marry me," Sarah said, as she looked at Reb Yosef with pleading eyes. The father gathered together a minyan (quorum of 10) and a wedding was held. Shortly before the chupah (marriage ceremony) Sarah said, "Reb Yosef, you must promise me that we will have an outstanding child." Reb Yosef responded, "We know that G-d acts toward people according to how they act. You are doing something extraordinary, marrying a man so much older than you, and G-d will therefore reward you with an extraordinary child." Aryeh Leib was born a year after their marriage. Reb Yosef did not live to see young Leib's bar mitzvah. Prior to his death, Reb Yosef said to his son, "You were born as a result of your mother's determination to save herself from the clutches of an evil poritz. Your mission in life will be to travel from village to village, seek out helpless Jews who are being persecuted by their poritzim, and do whatever you can to help them. G-d will crown your efforts with success. And you, my child, will always bear the name of the noble woman who bore you: Leib, the son of Sarah."

*Not Just Stories, by Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twerski*

# 22. A man should not be intimate with a promiscuous woman

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 133**

*As the Torah says, There shall be no k'deshah of the daughters of Israel (Devarim 23:18, Parshas Ki Seitzei).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- What is meant by the term kedesha?
- Is this a prohibition on the man or the woman or both?

▪ Is it permitted to marry such a woman?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The scriptural term kedeshah ("There shall not be a harlot [kedeshah] among the daughters of Israel" — Devarim 23:18) denotes an unmarried woman who abandons herself to promiscuous intimacy, or whose father gives her over for intimacy outside the covenant of marriage, or whose father submits her to commercial harlotry.

If a man engages in intimate relations with a kedeshah for licentious purposes without the sanctification of marriage (kiddushin and chuppah), both the man and the woman violate this biblical negative prohibition.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

**RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:49)**

If different men have relations with a woman out of marriage, that will lead to many men fighting over a woman and lead to many arguments.

Additionally, having relations with a woman out of marriage will lead to children being raised outside of a marriage.

Finally, if children are born out of marriage people who are related to each other but don't realize it may eventually end up having relations with each other. For example, a man many have a sister that he doesn't know about from a woman that his father had relations with. This brother and sister may end up marrying each other. This will fill the world with incest and mamzerim (bastards).

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ Discuss the importance of having relations only within a marriage, and raising children within a stable marriage.

# 23. Not to have intimate relations before marriage

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 32-6**

*As the Torah says, Do not profane your daughter by giving her over to sexual immorality (Vayikra 19:29, Parshas Ki Seitzei).*

### SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Sifrei expounds upon the prohibition of kedeshah (Devarim 23:18) that a father must not permit his daughter to engage in intimacy with any man prior to the formal wedding canopy (chuppah) and the execution of a valid marriage contract (kesubah). The Vilna Gaon (Bi'ur HaGra, Even HaEzer 26:1) notes that this prohibition likewise commands the daughter herself never to surrender herself to illicit intimacy outside of sanctified marriage.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### SFAS EMES

• When the Torah commands, 'Lo sihyeh kedeishah mi-benos Yisrael' (Devarim 23:18) and forbids intimate relations outside the consecrated bond of kiddushin, the Sfas Emes in Parashas Vayeishev (5647) points to Yosef HaTzaddik's flight from temptation in Egypt ('Vayanas vayeitzei ha-chutzah'). By guarding his personal holiness before marriage, Yosef unlocked an enduring wellspring of strength for every Jewish youth across the generations (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeishev 5647).

• In Parashas Noach (5654), comparing the generation of the Flood with the generation of the Dispersion, the Sfas Emes explains that human holiness rests upon two twin covenants: bris ha-lashon (purity of speech) and bris ha-ma'or (purity of bodily intimacy). Guarding against casual intimacy outside of marriage keeps both covenants whole so that a person's future home is built upon truth (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Noach 5654).

• When Pinchas risked his life to stop the moral breakdown at Shittim, Hashem rewarded him with an eternal covenant of peace. The Sfas Emes explains that moral purity brings profound inner serenity to the human personality, ending the painful civil war between body and soul. Guarding the covenant restores harmony to our entire being. In Parashas Pinchas (5651), on the Midrash concerning Pinchas's reward of 'Brisi shalom', the Sfas Emes teaches that true peace (shalom) means joining two halves together under Hashem's name. Intimacy without the sacred commitment and blessing of marriage fragments the soul, whereas guarding purity until marriage prepares a vessel for enduring marital peace (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Pinchas 5651).

• In Parashas Kedoshim (5634), on the Midrash 'Ve-Atah marom le-olam Hashem', the Sfas Emes explains that the very word kedushah means designation and sacred exclusivity—just as the vessels of the Sanctuary may never be used for casual, secular purposes. Reserving marital intimacy exclusively for the covenant of marriage elevates human love to the level of the Sanctuary (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5634).

• In Parashas Bereishis (5634), reflecting on Yaakov Avinu's blessing to Reuven ('Kochi ve-reishis oni'), the Sfas Emes writes that guarding the purity of one's youthful years plants the spiritual foundation for all future generations. Every act of restraint before marriage stores up pure light that will shine within one's future spouse and children (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Bereishis 5634).

## HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer

tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Reb Chaim Brisker like all of his descendants, was a true zealot — zealous about causes and zealous about his love for his fellow Jew. "I am alone with nothing to eat," whimpered a woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy at the threshold of the Soloveitchik home. Reb Chaim asked his wife why the women of the town were not helping — but the Rebbitzen did not respond and pretended not to have heard the question. Reb Chaim continued to probe until the Rebbitzen disclosed that this woman's husband had abandoned her over eleven months ago... "How much more so," interjected Reb Chaim, "is she all alone and dependent upon our help. Hurry and prepare a room for her where she will be our guest for the next few weeks, and then we will provide a monthly stipend for her and the child for the coming two years..." Two weeks later a bris was held in the very same house which had lodged the mother - the guest of Reb Chaim Brisker..."

*Sunset, by Rabbi Hanoch Teller*

### A. NOT TO HAVE RELATIONS WITH YOUR ARUSA UNTIL AFTER CHUPPAH

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 51-1**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is forbidden to have marital relations with one's betrothed (arusah) — even if she has already immersed in a mikveh — until he brings her beneath the chuppah (bridal canopy) and recites the wedding blessings (sheva berachos). As stated in Maseches Kallah (1:1): 'A bride without blessings is forbidden to her husband like a niddah.' This ruling is codified as definitive halachah by all of the Poskim (halachic authorities).

## 24. Not to marry a non-Jew

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 19**

*As the Torah says, neither shall you make marriages with them (Devarim 7:3, Parshas Va'eschanan).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

▪ Can a Jewish woman marry a non-Jew, because the children will still be Jewish?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 427)

Marrying a non-Jew will cause him to follow the non-Jewish values of his spouse. In addition, their children will be raised with non-Jewish values.

#### SFAS EMES

• The Torah does not say merely "do not marry them" — it says, in the reflexive: do not become intermarried, do not enter into a state of blending with them. The Midrash on this verse (Tetzaveh) gives the image: Israel are compared to the olive, whose oil cannot blend with other liquids; even if mixed, it rises and stands above. The halachic puzzle is obvious: a prohibition can forbid an act, but how can the Torah command an inner constitution — that a Jew be made in such a way that blending is impossible? The Sfas Emes resolves the grammar. To marry out is far more than to break a rule; it is to act as if the unblendable power were absent — to un-make oneself as oil (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Tetzaveh 5635).

• In Parshas Balak, the wicked prophet Bilaam looks down upon the tents of Israel encamped in the wilderness and exclaims in involuntary prophecy: 'Behold, it is a people that dwells alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.' Rashi, citing the Midrash, explains that when the Almighty judges the world, Israel stands in a unique, eternal covenant that is not subject to the collective fates of the seventy nations. The Sfas Emes examines the biological and spiritual transmission of the covenant. The Sfas Emes explains that the Jewish people are far more than an ideological club or a religious denomination that an individual joins through intellectual agreement. Israel is a single, continuous family tree rooted in the patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, bound to the Almighty through an eternal covenant of the soul. We are the living heirs to an unbroken royal heirloom. By building homes exclusively upon the foundation of the covenant, we honor our ancestors and secure the vibrant future of our people (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Balak 5643).

• In the Book of Psalms, King David composes a majestic bridal hymn celebrating the eternal covenant between Hashem and Israel: 'Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear; forget also your own people, and your father's house; so shall the King desire your beauty; for He is your God, and bow down to Him.' In Parshas Lech Lecha, this royal call echoes the opening command given to Avraham Avinu: 'Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.' Why did the birth of the Jewish people require this radical, uncompromising departure from the surrounding nations? The Sfas Emes explains that human civilization was thoroughly mired in idolatry, moral depravity, and pagan selfishness. Avraham had to leave behind his culture, his family, and his worldly homeland to build a new, consecrated family dedicated solely

to justice, righteousness, and truth. We were set apart from the nations for a glorious, transformative purpose. By choosing to build homes rooted in our sacred heritage, we honor the faith of Avraham and bring pride to our Father in heaven (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5632).

• In Parshas Balak, the Sfas Emes returns to Bilaam's profound declaration: 'Behold, it is a people that dwells alone.' Bilaam was hired by Balak, king of Moav, to utter deadly curses against Israel, seeking a spiritual crack in their armor that would enable the Midianites to destroy them in battle. The Sfas Emes explains that as long as the Jewish nation remains culturally and maritally separate, they are sheltered directly beneath the wings of the Shechinah. They operate under supernatural providence. No weapon formed against them can prosper, no curse can land, and no empire can extinguish their light. Bilaam, in his cunning wickedness, recognized this truth. He realized that external military armies and supernatural curses were useless against a united, separate Israel. The greatest threat to Jewish survival is not anti-Semitism from without, but assimilation from within. By cherishing our covenantal boundaries, we maintain our divine shield and stand unconquerable against the tides of time (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Balak 5631).

• The Jewish wedding ceremony is formally designated by our Sages as Kiddushin, from the root kadosh—holy, separate, and consecrated. Why is the mechanism of kiddushin intrinsically exclusive to the covenant of Israel? The Sfas Emes examines the spiritual architecture of marital union. The Sfas Emes explains that marriage in the secular world is a legal contract and emotional partnership between two independent individuals who agree to share a life together. While noble, such a union exists entirely within the bounds of this physical world. In Judaism, marriage is an act of spiritual fusion. Marriage is far deeper than companionship; it is the sacred reunification of an eternal soul. By choosing a partner who shares our sacred heritage, we build an authentic sanctuary of unconditional love and divine peace (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Balak 5635).

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ Discuss the importance of marrying a Jew and the dangers of intermarriage

▪ Is this prohibition racism? Discuss why it is not.

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ R' Tzadok was taken captive to Rome during the period of the destruction of the Temple. In Rome he was sold to an aristocratic household. When he refused to marry one of the mistress's beautiful slaves, pleading that he was a member of a priestly and influential Jewish family, he was given his freedom.

*Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 40a*

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In Vienna, before world war two, a man once came to the Kopishnitzer Rebbe with a sorry tale. His daughter who was raised in a fine religious home had deteriorated spiritually to the point where she intended marrying a gentile. Her father begged her not to inflict such anguish on him but to no avail. He therefore resolved to tell her that if she went ahead, he wouldn't have anything to do with her ever again. The Rebbe listened, shared the man's pain, and then, after think the matter over, said that in his opinion, he shouldn't speak to about it anymore nor should he try to coerce her by threatening to cut her off. "I'll give you just one piece of advice and may Hashem be with you — tell her that the engagement party will be held in your home and that you want all her fiancé's family to come. Not a single member of his family should stay away. There should be no party unless arrangements have been made for them all to attend. You must prepare a large meal with all

kinds of fine, high quality foods and plenty of spirits and with Hashem's help, everything will work out just fine. The main thing is, not to remove your trust from Hashem Yisbarach." The father was astounded by the Rebbe's advice, but he had faith in the advice of a Torah sage and firmly believed that if this was what the Rebbe recommended it would be wrong of him to act differently. He returned home and told his daughter that he was to host the engagement party. He added that every member of fiancé's family would have to attend, and he therefore wanted event scheduled for a day that would be convenient for all of them. His daughter was delighted with her father's acquiescence and began making calls to find out which day would suit everyone. The great day arrived. The guests took their places and fell to consuming the fish, meat and other sumptuous dishes that their host served them. The party was typical of gentile celebrations, with clowning and frivolity. The guests stuffed themselves just as they were used to doing at their clubhouses and at their other celebrations. They became drunk and began swearing and speaking contemptuously about the Jews The girl's father stood on the side wiping away the tears that kept on filling his eyes. His daughter sat at the head of the table, looking and sounding like one of them, Rachmana Litzlan. Eventually, the guests went home. The unexpected turnabout came only several hours later... The man's daughter said to him, "I've been having second thoughts and I want to call off my engagement. I was born Jewish and so I shall remain all my life." Naturally, her father's despondency was instantly transformed into supreme joy. Tears of joy now filled his eyes instead of tears of pain. Without asking any questions, he raced over to the Kopitshnitzer Rebbe's house to thank him for the miracle he'd wrought for him. The Rebbe was overjoyed to hear the wonderful news and said, "Have a seat and I'll explain to you why your daughter changed her mind so completely. "Realize that even if a Jewish girl sinks very low, chas v'shalom, she still remains on a very high spiritual level. She was used to the refinement of her upbringing. I therefore advised you to hold a banquet with all of them there. This would enable your daughter to become acquainted with their true behavior and habits within a short time, and that is indeed what has happened. Now she knows very well what they are like, and she therefore canceled her engagement to the gentile.

*In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l spoke at the 1981 Torah Umesorah convention and shared the following thoughts. In 1981 America was absorbing many Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union and they were resettling in many Jewish communities across America. Reb Yaakov felt very strongly about the responsibility that the local communities had in welcoming them and their children to Torah and her ways. Regarding this responsibility there were two points that he wanted the audience to recognize. His first point was that our Sages teach us that the entire world is worthy of being created for just one tzaddik. Even if there is no other worthy person other than this one tzaddik, Hashem would still bring the world into existence. This was learnt from the final verse of Koheles. He explained that even if all our efforts in welcoming the newly arrived Jews will yield just one child who will become a ben Torah, it is worth all the effort we expend. His second point was astounding. He said that even if we only succeed in stopping a Jewish child from marrying out, we have accomplished tremendous things. Why? Because when his children grow up, they will be 'tinokos shenishbu' like Jewish children who were captured by non-Jews and never learned that they are Jewish. To quote Reb Yaakov; "When Eliyahu Hanavi will come to announce Moshiach's arrival, it will be in their merit; they will be the perfect tzaddikim, they did nothing wrong. They will be finer Jews than we. Those who protected this child from intermarrying will be credited for that."

*Table Talk, Edition 277 (Parshas Tzav), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner*

## A. NOT TO HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A GENTILE

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 32-17,18**

*As it says "your daughter, do not give to his son and his daughter do not take for your son" (Vayikra 7:3, Parshas Va'eschanan).*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

A Jewish man is strictly forbidden to have intimate relations with a non-Jewish woman, and a Jewish woman is strictly forbidden to have intimate relations with a non-Jewish man. Rabbeinu Yonah wrote that regarding one who cohabits with a non-Jewish woman, Scripture declares: 'Hashem will cut off the man who does this, him who calls and him who responds, from the tents of Yaakov' (Malachi 2:12); moreover, zealous individuals may strike him down while engaged in the act (kana'im pog'im bo). The Holy Zohar treats this prohibition with greater severity than any other form of forbidden sexual relations (arayos).

# 25. Not to commit adultery with a married woman

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 124**

*As the Torah says, You shall not commit adultery (Shemos 20:13, Parshas Yisro); and it says, And you shall not lie carnally with your fellow's wife (Vayikra 18:20, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Are both the adulterous woman and the adulterous man liable for the capital offense?
- What if the man was not married?
- What if she was betrothed but not fully married? Is it still adultery?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

Both the man and the woman who commit adultery are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by strangulation, chenek).

Even if she is only a betrothed maiden (na'arah me'orasah) who still resides in her father's home, both transgressors are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by stoning, sekilah).

These court-imposed capital penalties apply specifically when the transgression was committed in the presence of valid witnesses and preceded by formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah).

If the act was committed willfully but without formal forewarning, both transgressors are liable to kares (spiritual excision); if it was committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH

Adultery is a form of theft because one steals a wife's affection from her husband.

Additionally, adultery may lead to murder if a jealous husband finds out.

In addition, Hashem wants sexual relations to occur within a stable relationship. Children born out of this union may not know their parents and won't be able to do kibud av.

Finally, this behavior may also lead to people marrying arayos because they don't know that they are closely related.

#### SFAS EMES

• In tractate Yoma (35b), our Sages teach that in the World of Truth, Yosef HaTzaddik's life obligates anyone who struggled with temptation: If a person claims, "I was young, attractive, and surrounded by temptation," the Heavenly Court answers, "Were you more attractive or more tested than Yosef?" In his 5647 discourse on Parshas Vayeishev, the Sfas Emes raises a piercing question about fairness. The Sfas Emes explains that the Talmud is not making a harsh, unrealistic comparison. Instead, it reveals the lasting spiritual inheritance Yosef created for all of us: The monumental tests faced by our ancestors were trailblazing missions. Before Yosef stood firm and fled outside, resisting Egypt's culture was nearly impossible. But when Yosef conquered temptation, he cleared a road through the desert: The Midrash teaches that all of Israel were protected from immorality in Egypt in Yosef's merit. Yosef does not obligate us to match his greatness on our own. Instead, he gave us the spiritual power to walk the path he already paved (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeishev 5647).

• In Parshas Noach, the Torah records two tragic collapses of early humanity. In his discourse from 5654, the Sfas Emes asks: why did early human history break down at these two specific points? The Sfas Emes explains that these two generations failed in the two core covenants Hashem later entrusted to Israel. These are the covenant of the body (bris hama'or) and the covenant of the tongue (bris halashon): Why are these two faculties called covenants? Because both possess the sacred power to generate new life and bring renewal into the world: Just as bodily intimacy brings a new soul into the world, sacred speech creates spiritual renewal. Because they touch the core of creation, both faculties are deeply fragile. To heal that ancient stumbling, Hashem gave us Bris Milah to guard bodily intimacy, and the holy Torah to guide our speech (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Noach 5654).

• When Pinchas took bold action to stop the moral breakdown at Shittim, Hashem rewarded him with an eternal blessing: "Behold, I give him My covenant of peace" (Bamidbar 25:12). In his discourse from 5651, the Sfas Emes asks: why is the repair of moral purity (arayos) rewarded with peace (shalom)? The Sfas Emes explains that the

word shalom signifies completion and the sealing of a whole vessel (hashlamah). During the six days of creation, individual details were formed. When Shabbos arrived, creation was completed and sealed with Hashem's Name. The initial letters of 'The sixth day. And the heavens were completed' (Yom HaShishi Vayechulu HaShamayim) spell the Four-Letter Name of Hashem. When Pinchas defended covenantal purity, he completed the nation's spiritual vessel. By guarding moral boundaries, we welcome divine peace into our homes and make our lives a sanctuary for Hashem's presence (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Pinchas 5651).

• In Parshas Kedoshim, the Torah calls upon us to live elevated lives: "You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your God, am holy" (Vayikra 19:2). The Sfas Emes explains the mechanism through the language of Jewish marriage. When a man marries his bride, he declares: "Behold, you are consecrated to me" (Kiddushin 2b). The word mekudeshes means set apart for one person alone. It excludes all others: In the design of creation, every person and every force has its rightful, designated counterpart. Forbidden unions destroy this harmony by crossing boundaries and treating sacred relationships as disposable. But when a person honors the boundaries of marriage, he awakens holiness across all of life: “Who sanctifies His people Israel” (Mekadeish amo Yisrael). By honoring covenantal exclusivity in our personal lives, we reflect and deepen the exclusive bond between Hashem and the Jewish people (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5634).

• In Parshas Kedoshim, right after the call to holiness, the Torah commands: "My Sabbaths you shall observe, and My sanctuary you shall revere; I am Hashem" (Vayikra 19:30). Why does the Torah link Shabbos and the Sanctuary to our personal fences against immorality? The Sfas Emes teaches a profound rule of spiritual life: wherever the highest holiness is concentrated, negative impulses gather around it to pull it down. That is why the most sacred areas require the strongest protective fences: In the human body, the site where the foreskin grew is the exact place where the sign of the holy covenant (os bris kodesh) is sealed. Reverence for the Sanctuary includes treating our own bodily covenant with awe. When we guard our personal boundaries, we protect the living sanctuary Hashem entrusted to our care (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5655).

# 26. A man cannot have homosexual relations with another man

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 116**

*As the Torah says, You shall not lie with a male as with a woman (Vayikra 18:22, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Does this only prohibit the active partner?
- Is partial intercourse also prohibited?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This commandment serves as an admonition to the passive partner as well, for Chazal read the scriptural prohibition lo sishkav ('you shall not lie') homiletically as lo sishachev ('you shall not be lain with') (Vayikra 18:22).

Once intimate contact reaches the halachic threshold of intercourse through the insertion of the corona (ha'ara'ah), both participants are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by stoning, sekilah).

If the transgression was committed willfully but without formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), both are liable to kares (spiritual excision); if it was committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men.

#### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

#### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

**RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:49)**

Intimacy between a husband and wife is a holy mitzvah because it helps form the marital bond, and brings children into the world. This form of intercourse is purely for self indulgent pleasure, and has no higher purpose.

**IBN EZRA**

It is impossible to produce offspring from these relationships, and they are therefore like spilling seed in vain.

#### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- How should we relate to homosexuals? How should they be treated by observant Jews? Should we reach out to them, should they be ostracized?

## A. A WOMAN CANNOT HAVE HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONS WITH ANOTHER WOMAN

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 32-23,51**

*As it says, "Do not do the acts of the land of Egypt, in which you have lived (Vayikra 18:3, Parshas Acharei Mos)".*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Scripture warns: 'Do not follow the practices of the land of Egypt in which you dwelt' (Vayikra 18:3). The Sifra (Toras Kohanim) expounds: What did the Egyptians do? A man would marry a man, and a woman would marry a woman. From this verse, Chazal derived the strict prohibition against female homosexual intimacy (nashim

hamesolelos zo bazo), establishing it as a severe violation of the Torah's standard of personal holiness.

# 27. A man cannot have homosexual relations with his father

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 111**

*As the Torah says, The nakedness of Your father… You shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:7, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This commandment constitutes an independent biblical prohibition in addition to the general ban on male homosexuality, as Scripture states: 'The nakedness of your father… you shall not uncover' (Vayikra 18:7).

If one violates this injunction and engages in intimacy with his father to the extent of inserting the corona (ha'ara'ah), in the presence of valid witnesses and following formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), both are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by stoning, sekilah).

If the transgression occurred without witnesses or forewarning but was committed willfully, both are liable to kares (spiritual excision). If it was committed unwittingly (beshogeig), the son is obligated to bring two distinct sin-offerings (chattasos) — one for violating the specific prohibition regarding his father, and one for violating the general prohibition against male homosexuality.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Noach Weinberg observed that when the Torah prohibits this relationship with a father or an uncle, it is likely addressing one who had homosexual sexual desires. The message the Torah is conveying is that if a person is a homosexual, at least stop here. It is not all or nothing. This is illustrated by the following parable from the Chofetz Chaim. It was during the lunch break of the construction crew that Danny took his walk along the shore. Ever since he had started working on the new hotel building going up near the beach, he had made it a daily practice to stroll on the nearby sand and watch the waves dance back and forth. By new he knew the exact hour when the waves came up to the strip at sand he had chosen for an observation post. But today there was something strange about the beach. The sand seemed to be shining with the light of a thousand suns. Danny picked up a handful of the glistening sand and could hardly believe his eyes. In his hand, and all over the beach, were precious pearls that had been washed to shore by the sea. Danny began to have visions of the wealth

which these pearls would bring him, when he took a look at his watch. "In another half hour," he thought, "the big waves will be coming up to this part of the beech and will certainly wash away all of these pearls. If I can only gather pearls for half an hour it doesn't pay to begin with searching and sifting sand so I'd better forget about it," When Danny returned to his job he told the foreman about his strange experience. "But why didn't you pick up the pearls?" asked the amazed foreman. "How much could I pick up in a half hour anyway?" Danny explained. "You foolish fellow" scolded the foreman. "It will take you a hundred years of picking up these heavy bricks you work with to earn as much as you could have with a half hour's worth of picking up pearls."

*Who Wants Life?, By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*

# 28. A man cannot have homosexual relations with his father's brother

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 114**

*As the Torah says, The nakedness of your father's brother you shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:14, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This commandment constitutes an independent biblical prohibition in addition to the general ban on male homosexuality, as Scripture states: 'You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother... he is your uncle' (Vayikra 18:14).

If a man engages in intimate relations with his father's brother in the presence of witnesses following formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), both are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by stoning, sekilah). If it was committed willfully without forewarning, both are liable to kares (spiritual excision); if it was committed unwittingly (beshogeig), the nephew is obligated to bring two distinct sin-offerings (chattasos) — one for violating the prohibition regarding an uncle, and one for the general ban on male homosexuality.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 29. A man cannot have sexual relations with an animal

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 117**

*As the Torah says, And you shall not lie with any beast (Vayikra 18:23, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### IBN EZRA

It is impossible to produce offspring from these sexual acts, and they are therefore like spilling seed in vain.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

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Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 30. A woman cannot have sexual relations with an animal

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 118**

*As the Torah says, neither shall a woman stand before a beast, to lie down to it (Vayikra 18:23, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What should be done to the animal?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

It is a negative commandment that a woman shall not submit herself to mate with an animal, whether through natural or unnatural intimacy, as Scripture states: 'Neither shall any woman stand before a beast to mate with it; it is a perversion' (Vayikra 18:23).

The Torah makes no distinction regarding the species or age of the animal; the prohibition applies equally to a domestic animal (beheimah), a wild beast (chayah), or a fowl (of), whether mature or young. Both the woman and the beast become liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by stoning, sekilah) from the initial threshold of intimate contact (ha'ara'ah).

If the act was committed willfully without formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), the woman is liable to kares (spiritual excision), while the beast is put to death by stoning. If she acted unwittingly (beshogeig), she must bring a sin-offering (chattas), and the animal is entirely exempt from penalty.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 31. Not to have sexual relations with one's mother

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 112**

*As the Torah says, and the nakedness of your mother You shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:7, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

Even if a woman was not legally married to one's father, having conceived him through an illicit union, she is nonetheless his mother under halachic law (Vayikra 18:7). It makes no difference whether intimate relations occurred during the father's lifetime or after his passing: if committed in the presence of witnesses following formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), both are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by stoning, sekilah). If committed willfully without forewarning, their penalty is kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (chattas). Furthermore, if she was legally married to his father, the son incurs double liability — requiring two separate sin-offerings if unwitting — violating both the prohibition against one's mother and the prohibition against his father's wife.

By rabbinic enactment, Chazal instituted a protective fence around the biblical incest laws known as 'secondary degrees of consanguinity' (sheniyos le'arayos), under which a man is also rabbinically forbidden to marry or have intimate relations with:

His maternal grandmother, a rabbinic prohibition that extends upward through all preceding maternal generations without limit (her mother, her mother's mother, and so on);

The mother of his maternal grandfather (his mother's father's mother), though this rabbinic restriction does not extend further back into earlier generations;

His paternal grandmother, a rabbinic prohibition that likewise extends upward through all preceding maternal generations without limit (her mother, her mother's mother, and so on);

The mother of his paternal grandfather (his father's father's mother), though this rabbinic restriction does not extend further back into earlier generations.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 107)

The prohibitions of having relation with close relatives are because these people are often present and close by. If it would not be forbidden to have relations with them, the world would be filled with sexual immorality and mamzerim.

Additionally, if you have relations with these people, you will no longer have the same respect for them anymore. You will have a different relationship with them. For example, if one has relations with a mother, she will no longer be respected as a mother.

Finally, this relates to the secret, mysterious inner nature of the birth process which requires that the parents not be too closely related to each other.

#### RABBEINU BACHYA

It is unhealthy for the children to have parents who are too closely related to each other.

#### RALBAG (IBID.)

Because you are close with this people all the time, this will end up with close relatives having relations with a relative even if that relative is married to another.

#### SFORNO

Normally, intimacy has the higher purpose of bringing a husband and wife close together. However, because these relatives are already closely related, the intimacy between relatives as close as these is not for the higher purpose of bringing them close together, rather just for self indulgent pleasure.

# 32. Not to have sexual relations with one's father's wife

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 113**

*As the Torah says, The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:8, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can someone marry a woman that his father was very briefly married to, but then divorced?
- What if the father died?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition applies even if the woman is not his biological mother. She is biblically forbidden to him whether she became his father's wife through betrothal (erusin) or full marriage (nissu'in), and she remains permanently forbidden during the father's lifetime, after the father's passing, and even if his father divorced her (Vayikra 18:8).

If the transgression occurred in the presence of witnesses following formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), both parties are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by stoning, sekilah). If committed willfully without forewarning, they are liable to kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas).

The secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict (sheniyos le'arayos) include:

The wife of one's paternal grandfather, a prohibition that extends upward through all preceding generations of paternal grandfathers without limit;

The wife of one's maternal grandfather, though this rabbinic restriction does not extend further back into earlier generations.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### A. NOT TO HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A WOMAN YOUR FATHER HAD ANY SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 32-22**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

A man is biblically forbidden to have intimate relations with a woman with whom his father had illicit relations, even if his father merely violated or seduced her without marriage. Scripture commands: 'A man shall not take his father's wife, nor uncover the skirt of his father' (Devarim 23:1), which Chazal expound as an explicit prohibition against cohabiting with a woman his father violated (anusas aviv).

# 33. Not to have sexual relations with a daughter-in-law

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 115**

*As the Torah says, The nakedness of your daughter-in-law you shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:15, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- If your son married a woman very briefly but divorced her, can you marry that woman?
- What if the son died?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This prohibition applies throughout his son's lifetime — even if his son subsequently divorced her — and remains permanently in effect after his son's passing (Vayikra 18:15).

If the transgression occurred in the presence of witnesses following formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), both parties are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by stoning, sekilah). If committed willfully without forewarning, the penalty is kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (chattas).

The secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict (sheniyos le'arayos) include:

The daughter-in-law of one's son (his grandson's wife), a prohibition that extends downward through all subsequent generations without limit;

The daughter-in-law of one's daughter (his maternal grandson's wife), though this rabbinic restriction does not extend further down to later generations.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 34. Not to have sexual relations with one's granddaughter

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 119**

*As the Torah says, The nakedness of your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, even their nakedness you shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:10, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The punishment for violating the prohibition against relations with one's granddaughter (whether his son's daughter or his daughter's daughter, Vayikra 18:10) is court-imposed capital punishment (by burning, sereifah), provided there were witnesses and formal forewarning (hasra'ah). If committed willfully without forewarning, the penalty is kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (chattas).

The secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict (sheniyos le'arayos) regarding a son's lineage include:

The daughter of one's son's daughter alone (a great-granddaughter), extending no further down subsequent generations;

The daughter of one's son's son alone, extending no further down subsequent generations.

Regarding a daughter's lineage, the secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict include:

The daughter of one's daughter's daughter alone (a great-granddaughter), extending no further down subsequent generations;

The daughter of one's daughter's son alone, extending no further down subsequent generations.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer

tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 35. Not to have sexual relations with one's daughter

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 120**

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

Even if a daughter was conceived through an illicit union outside of marriage, she is nevertheless fully recognized as his daughter under halachic law, and the prohibition applies to her in full force.

This prohibition is not stated explicitly in the verses of the Torah; rather, Chazal derived it through an a fortiori argument (kal vachomer — if a granddaughter is forbidden, how much more so one's own daughter) and through a verbal textual analogy (gezeirah shavah) connecting the scriptural passages of consanguinity.

The court-imposed penalty for this offense is capital punishment (by burning, sereifah), provided there were witnesses and formal forewarning (hasra'ah). If committed willfully without forewarning, the penalty is kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (chattas).

If the daughter was born to him from his legally wedded wife, he incurs double liability, being obligated to bring two distinct sin-offerings if he sinned unwittingly: one for the prohibition of one's daughter, and one for the prohibition against cohabiting with 'a woman and her daughter' (Vayikra 18:17).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 36. Not to have sexual relations with a woman and her daughter

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 121**

*As the Torah says, You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter (Vayikra 18:17, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

**SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:**

**ABARBANEL (VAYIKRA 18)**

Marrying or having intimate relationships with these two women will cause great rivalry and arguments between the two.

# 37. Not to have sexual relations with a woman and the daughter of her son (Granddaughter)

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 122**

*As the Torah says, her son's daughter, etc. (Vayikra 18:17, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

If one has intimate relations with his wife's granddaughter during his wife's lifetime, both are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by burning, sereifah); if the act occurred after his wife's passing, or willfully without forewarning, the penalty is kares (spiritual excision), and if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), a sin-offering (chattas) is required (Vayikra 18:17).

The secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict (sheniyos le'arayos) regarding the granddaughter of his wife's son include:

The daughter of his wife's son's daughter alone (a great-granddaughter), extending no further down subsequent generations.

The daughter of his wife's son's son alone, extending no further down subsequent generations.

Regarding the granddaughter of his wife's daughter, the secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict include:

The daughter of his wife's daughter's daughter alone (a great-granddaughter), extending no further down subsequent generations.

The daughter of his wife's daughter's son alone, extending no further down subsequent generations.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

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Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 38. Not to have sexual relations with a woman and her daughter's daughter (Granddaughter)

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 123**

*As the Torah says, or her daughter's daughter, you shall not take (Vayikra 18:17, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- If someone had relations with a woman outside of marriage, can he ever marry her daughter, or mother? Would there be a difference if the first woman is still alive or died?
- If someone was married to a woman, and that woman died, can he later, marry her mother? Is it as severe if his wife was still alive, and he had relation with her mother?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

From the moment a man marries a woman (even through betrothal, erusin), six of her female maternal and paternal relatives become biblically forbidden to him: her mother, her maternal grandmother (mother's mother), her paternal grandmother (father's mother), her daughter, her son's daughter, and her daughter's daughter (Vayikra 18:17).

Regarding each of these six women, intimate relations during his wife's lifetime carry court-imposed capital punishment (by burning, sereifah), provided there were witnesses and formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), regardless of whether he cohabited with them under the guise of marriage or in an act of promiscuity.

If, however, he had intimate relations with any of them after his wife's passing, the penalty is kares (spiritual excision); and if the act occurred unwittingly (beshogeig), he is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas).

Biblically, these relatives become forbidden to him only when he marries the woman through formal sanctification (erusin or nissu'in); if he merely engaged in an illicit union with an unmarried woman, biblical law does not forbid him from marrying her relatives. Nevertheless, Chazal enacted a rabbinic decree forbidding him from marrying any of these relatives during that woman's lifetime. Post facto (bedi'avad), however, if he did marry one of them, the court does not compel him to divorce her.

The secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict (sheniyos le'arayos) corresponding to these lines of kinship include:

The daughter of his wife's son's son (his wife's great-granddaughter through her son);

The mother of his wife's maternal grandfather (his wife's mother's father's mother);

The mother of his wife's paternal grandmother (his wife's father's mother's mother);

The mother of his wife's paternal grandfather (his wife's father's father's mother);

The secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict regarding his wife's maternal lineage include:

The daughter of his wife's daughter's daughter (his wife's great-granddaughter through her daughter);

The mother of his wife's maternal grandmother (his wife's mother's mother's mother).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

## 39. Not to have sexual relations with the wife of one's paternal uncle

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 125**

*As the Torah says, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt (Vayikra 18:14, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can one marry the wife of a paternal uncle after the uncle dies or divorces her?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This biblical prohibition applies specifically to the wife of one's paternal uncle who is his father's brother through the same father (Vayikra 18:14).

If one has intimate relations with her during the uncle's lifetime, both participants are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by strangulation, chenek), because she is a legally married woman (eishes ish).

If the act occurred after the uncle's passing, or after divorce, and was committed willfully without forewarning, the penalty is kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (chattas).

The secondary degrees of consanguinity instituted by rabbinic edict (sheniyos le'arayos) include:

The wife of one's father's maternal brother (a paternal uncle related only through the father's mother);

The wife of one's maternal uncle (mother's brother), whether he shares the same father or the same mother with one's mother.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 40. Not to have sexual relations with a brother's wife

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 126**

*As the Torah says, The nakedness of your brother's wife you shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:16, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Is this prohibited even after your brother dies or divorces her?
- The Torah allows marrying your brother's wife in a case of yibum. What if he did chalitza instead, can he eventually change his mind and marry her? Would it be as severe as if she never received chalitza?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

If one has intimate relations with his brother's wife during the brother's lifetime while she remains married to him, both participants are liable to court-imposed capital punishment (by strangulation, chenek), as she is a legally married woman (eishes ish).

If the brother had previously divorced her, or if intimate relations occurred after the brother's passing in a situation where levirate marriage (yibum) does not apply (such as when the brother left surviving offspring), willful transgression carries the penalty of kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (Vayikra 18:16)

If she is a childless widow (yevamah) who has already performed the release ritual (chalitzah) with the brother, intimate relations do not carry the penalty of kares, but rather violate the negative biblical prohibition derived from the verse: 'So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house' (Devarim 25:9) — teaching that once he declines to build, he may never marry her.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 41. Not to have sexual relations with a half sister

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 127**

*As the Torah says, the nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home or born abroad, you shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:9, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

If one willfully engages in intimate relations with his paternal or maternal half-sister, both are liable to kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (chattas) (Vayikra 18:9). Furthermore, if she is also the daughter of his father's legally wedded wife, he violates two separate biblical prohibitions — one as his sister, and one as the daughter of his father's wife (Vayikra 18:11) — obligating him to bring two distinct sin-offerings if committed unwittingly.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 42. Not to have sexual relations with a full sister

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 128**

*As the Torah says, The nakedness of your father's wife's daughter… you shall not uncover (Vayikra 18:11, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Does this verse prohibit marrying a stepsister?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This verse clarifies that the prohibition applies only when the woman is biologically his sister; if she is merely the daughter of his father's wife from another man — a stepsister sharing no blood relation — she is completely permitted to him in marriage from the outset (Vayikra 18:11).

If she is his biological sister and also the daughter of his father's wedded wife, he violates two distinct prohibitions, as noted above. There is no court-imposed death penalty for this offense; rather, willful transgression is punishable by kares (spiritual excision), and an unwitting violation (beshogeig) requires a sin-offering (chattas).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 43. Not to have sexual relations with a father's sister

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 129**

*As the Torah says, You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister (Vayikra 18:12, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 44. Not to have sexual relations with the sister of one's mother or father

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 130**

*As the Torah says You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister (Vayikra 18:13).*

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition applies equally to a paternal aunt (father's sister) and a maternal aunt (mother's sister), whether she is a full sister or a half-sister through the same father or the same mother (Vayikra 18:12–13). Even if she was conceived through an illicit union, she is halachically considered his father's or mother's sister, and the prohibition applies in full force.

The punishment for either of these forbidden unions is kares (spiritual excision) if committed willfully, even where there were witnesses and formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (chattas).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer

tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

# 45. Not to have sexual relations with your wife's sister, during your wife's lifetime

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 131**

*As the Torah says, And you shall not take a woman to be a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while with the other, in her lifetime (Vayikra 18:18, Parshas Acharei Mos)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If you marry a woman and divorce her can you marry her sister?
- What if you divorce your wife and she dies?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

From the moment a man marries a woman (even through betrothal, erusin), her sister becomes strictly forbidden to him, whether she is a paternal or maternal sister, and even if she was conceived through an illicit union (Vayikra 18:18).

If he engages in intimate relations with his wife's sister while his wife is still living — even if he has already divorced his wife — both participants are liable to kares (spiritual excision); if committed unwittingly (beshogeig), each must bring a sin-offering (chattas).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 210)

Having a relationship with two sisters will cause great strife and rivalry between the two sisters (as we see to a limited extent with Rachel and Leah).

# 46. Once someone divorces his wife, if she marries another man, she is forbidden to her first husband forever

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 134.**

*As the Torah says, her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled (Devarim 24:4, Parshas Ki Seitzei).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If you divorce a woman, are you allowed to marry her again?
- What if she married someone else in the meantime?
- If a husband would remarry his ex wife after she was married to another man, what would beis din do?
- What if she was not fully married to another person, but was just betrothed, and never had intimacy with the second man? Would she be permitted for him to remarry?
- What if after she was divorced she had relations with another man outside of marriage, would that disqualify her from remarrying her first husband?
- If a woman commits adultery, is the husband allowed to stay married to her?
- What if she was forced to have relations with another man?
- What if she is the wife of a cohen? Would the same rule apply?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If a man's divorced wife marries another man and is subsequently divorced or widowed, her first husband is biblically forbidden to remarry her (Devarim 24:4). If he takes her back and engages in marital relations, he violates this negative prohibition, and the beis din (rabbinic court) compels him to divorce her immediately.

Even if she was merely consecrated to the second man through betrothal (erusin) without completing the marriage (nissu'in), she becomes permanently forbidden to her first husband.

If, however, she merely engaged in promiscuous relations outside of marriage following her divorce, she does not become forbidden to remarry the husband who divorced her.

Included within this biblical injunction is the law that a married woman who willingly commits adultery becomes permanently forbidden to her husband, as Scripture states: 'after she has been defiled' (Devarim 24:4) — and Chazal expound that she has rendered herself defiled to her husband and to the adulterer.

If, however, the woman was violated under compulsion (rape, ones), she does not become forbidden to her husband, provided he is an ordinary Israelite; but if her husband is a kohen, she becomes forbidden to him regardless.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### RAMBAN

This mitzvah will prevent the immoral practice of wife swapping; of two people temporarily divorcing their wives to swap them, and then remarry them.

#### RALBAG

Without this mitzvah the following conspiracy could be possible. A married couple wants to find a way to make money. They conspire to divorce so that the wife can marry another man who has money. Then she plans to purposely make life miserable for him so that they divorce and she can gain a large cash settlement for the divorce. The woman will then return to her first husband with her extorted money. The prohibition of returning a divorced wife who is married to another man precludes this activity.

## A. NOT TO HAVE RELATIONS WITH ONE'S WIFE IF SHE COMMITTED ADULTERY

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 32-12**

*As it says "since she has defiled herself (Devarim 24:4, Parshas Ki Seitzei)"*

#### SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture states regarding a divorced woman who remarried: 'After she has been defiled' (Devarim 24:4). Chazal expound that this verse serves as the biblical source establishing that a married woman who willfully commits adultery becomes permanently forbidden to resume marital relations with her husband.

54. Not to marry a mamzer, a child who is the product of a severely prohibited union.

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 137**

*As the Torah says, A bastard shall not enter the assembly of Hashem (Devarim 23:3, Parshas Ki Seitzei).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If a child is born out of wedlock is that a mamzer?
- If a person remarries his ex-wife who was married to another man in the interim, would the child be a mamzer?

- If a mamzer is the product of a union that is liable for kares, then if a woman does not go to the mikva and conceives, would that child be a mamzer?
- Can a girl be a mamzer?
- What are the consequences of being a mamzer?
- Who can a mamzer marry?
- Do their children have the status of a mamzer?
- What should be the status of a child who was born out of wedlock and doesn't know who his father is? Should we concerned that perhaps the father is a mamzer?
- What is the status of a child whose mother says was conceived from a mamzer?
- What should be the status of an abandoned infant child found in the street?
- Can a safek mamzer (doubtful mamzer) marry another mamzer? Can he marry another safek mamzer?
- Who can a safek mamzer marry?
- What is the status in the following case: A woman hears that her husband was killed in war. She gets remarried, and after a while her first husband shows up alive. Who is she married to? Can she go back to her first husband?
- If she did. Would the child be a mamzer?
- Can a mamzer d'Rabbanan marry another mamzer from the Torah?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The halachic status of a mamzer denotes an individual conceived from a forbidden union punishable by celestial excision (kares) or execution by the court.

This principle excludes a child conceived with a woman who is a niddah; while a child born from such a union bears a blemished status (pagum), he is not categorized as a mamzer.

The halachic status of a mamzer applies equally whether the individual is male or female.

A mamzer is permanently forbidden from marrying into the congregation of Klal Yisroel. Nevertheless, both a male and a female mamzer are permitted to marry converts (geirim). Any children born from such a union, however, inherit the status of a mamzer.

If a child is born to an unmarried woman and she refuses or declines to state who fathered the child,

or alternatively, if she states, 'I conceived from a certain mamzer,' the child is assigned the status of an undetermined, doubtful mamzer (mamzer safek).

Similarly, if an abandoned infant is discovered in the public marketplace and neither his mother nor his father is known (an asufi), he is placed in the category of a doubtful mamzer.

Under biblical law, an individual whose status as a mamzer is uncertain is technically permitted to marry into the congregation; however, the Sages enacted a decree prohibiting such individuals from marrying into the community (Kiddushin 73a).

Furthermore, an individual of doubtful status is likewise forbidden from marrying either a definite mamzer or another person of doubtful status.

There is an additional category known as a rabbinic mamzer (mamzer mi-divrei Sofrim). For example, if a woman was informed that her husband had died and she consequently remarried, but her first husband was in fact still alive, and her first husband subsequently had relations with her while she was still living with the second man, a son born from that union is designated a mamzer by rabbinic law.

A mamzer by rabbinic decree is permitted to marry only someone who shares that identical rabbinic status.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 560)

This child of such a forbidden relationship will inherit the unholy character of its parents.

#### ABARBANEL (DEVARIM 23:3)

The Torah wants us to only marry someone who was born in the kedushah, the sanctity that comes from a permitted marriage. This child was born through impurity and immorality and it will have an effect on his character.

#### RALBAG (IBID.)

Letting the mamzer marry into the community will give perpetuation to the terrible aveirah his parents did and prevent that aveirah from becoming forgotten.

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Are we punishing the child for the sins of his parents?
- Discuss the concept of the kedushah that is a result of the kiddushin.

# 47. Not to marry one with mutilated privates

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 136**

*As the Torah says, He whose testes are crushed or whose membrum is cut off shall not enter the assembly of Hashem (Devarim 23:2, Parshas Ki Seitzei).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Is there any person this person can marry?
- A cohen can normally not marry a convert. If a kohen is such a patzua daka, can he marry a convert?
- What if only one testicle was injured?
- What if he was born that way?
- What if only part of the male organ was cut?
- What if he was born that way?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

If a man with crushed or severed reproductive anatomy transgresses and marries a daughter of Klal Yisroel and is intimate with her, he violates this negative commandment. Such an individual is permitted, however, to marry a female convert (giyores). Indeed, even a kohen who is a patzua daka (one with crushed reproductive organs) is exceptionally permitted to marry a female convert under these circumstances.

The designation patzua daka applies to a man who sustained a wound, laceration, or crushing injury by human hands to either testicle or to the seminal ducts, having occurred through an external trauma rather than from birth.

If, however, he was born with this congenital condition, it is classified as having occurred 'by the hand of Heaven' (bidei Shamayim), and he remains fully eligible to enter the congregation and marry a Jewish woman.

The designation kerus shofchah applies to a man whose reproductive organ was severed, crushed, or wounded by human agency, or whose coronal glans (or any essential part thereof) was removed by human hands.

Conversely, if this condition occurred by the hand of Heaven — meaning he was born in this state — he remains fit to enter the congregation.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 559)

This mitzvah is to dissuade anyone from castrating or sterilizing himself.

#### RAVAD HILCHOS ISUREI BIAH 15,2

A woman will not be satisfied with this kind of a relationship and may become tempted by adultery.

#### BCHOR SHOR DEVARIM 23,2

A woman should not marry such a man because a woman should try her best to have children and it will be difficult to become pregnant with such a husband.

#### RABBEINU BACHYA

One of the primary purposes of marriage is to have children, and this marriage cannot fulfill that purpose.

# 48. Not to have sexual relations with a woman during her period

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 132**

*As the Torah says, And you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in the defilement of her menstrual uncleanness (Vayikra 18:19, Parshas Acharei Mos).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What does a woman need to do to become tahor after her period?
- When can a woman begin to go to the mikveh?
- If one had relations with his wife after she finished her period but she did not go to the mikveh, doe he violate this prohibition?
- How large must a mikveh be to be valid?
- Who violate this prohibition, if his wife did not go to the mikveh, the husband or the wife?
- Would the child conceived under this condition be a mamzer? Does this child have any unique status?
- Is it permitted to be intimate with one's wife, if one suspects she may get her period soon?
- How close to that time must one separate?
- Is it permitted to have relations with one's wife shortly after she gives birth? Would giving birth be considered like nidda?
- What if no blood came out during labor?
- What if she had a miscarriage?
- How many days must one wait after birth to go to the mikveh?
- When can one begin to count the seven clean days after the birth?

- Is there a difference between a boy or girl who was born?
- Is the prohibition of being intimate with one's wife after birth just as severe as having relations during her period?
- If a woman reached menopause and doesn't have a period anymore, can her husband be intimate with her if she never went to the mikvah?
- Does violating this prohibition only effect the two people involved, or does it impact their environment as well?
- If somebody says that they will kill any woman who goes to the Mikva, would a couple still be obligated to separate until the wife can go to the Mikva?
- What are the consequences if someone willfully violates this prohibition?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

If an individual transgresses this prohibition and is intimate with a woman during her state of menstrual impurity (niddah), both partners are liable for celestial excision (kares). Any child conceived from such an intimacy inherits a blemished status (pagum); the later authorities (Acharonim) explain that his spiritual character is deeply marred, and it is fitting to maintain distance from him.

This prohibition remains fully in effect even after the menstrual bleeding has entirely ceased, for as long as the woman has not immersed in a kosher mikvah.

The mikvah must conform to all requirements of halachah and contain at least forty se'ah of living, ungathered water.

It is likewise forbidden for a husband to be intimate with his wife immediately prior to the anticipated onset of her menses (onah samuch l'vestah). What duration is defined as 'close to her anticipated period'? If her established cycle typically begins during the daytime, marital intimacy is forbidden throughout that entire day; if she is accustomed to experiencing it at night, intimacy is forbidden throughout that entire night.

A woman who gives birth (a yoledes) becomes ritually impure to her husband with the identical severity of a niddah. Even if she experienced no visible discharge of blood during childbirth, she is rendered impure, as the opening of the womb is presumed not to occur without bleeding; this applies equally whether she gave birth to a healthy, viable child or to a non-viable infant.

In our times, following seven days after the birth of a male child or fourteen days after the birth of a female child, once all bleeding has ceased, the woman performs an internal examination (hefsek taharah), counts seven clean days (shivah nekiyim), and subsequently immerses in a mikvah, whereupon she becomes fully permitted to her husband.

Should she experience any bleeding after her immersion, she immediately becomes forbidden to her husband like any woman experiencing niddah, as the original biblical provision of 'pure blood' (yemei tohar) no longer applies. Anyone who is intimate with a woman after childbirth prior to her immersion in a mikvah violates the identical prohibition of intimacy with a niddah.

Regarding the absolute obligation of ritual immersion for a woman who has become a niddah, it should hardly be necessary to elaborate, for who among Klal Yisroel is unaware of the paramount gravity of immersing in a mikvah according to the Torah? She remains in an absolute state of ritual impurity until she immerses. Even if

decades pass since she last experienced a menstrual flow, and even if she has reached advanced age, she remains bound by biblical impurity from the moment of her last menses until she undergoes valid immersion; the mere cessation of her cycle never purifies her without the waters of the mikvah.

The strict prohibition against intimacy with a niddah is universally known across Klal Yisroel, familiar even to young school children studying Chumash. The Torah explicitly commands: 'Do not approach a woman in her menstrual impurity to uncover her nakedness' (Vayikra 18:19). Scripture concludes the passage with an uncompromising warning: 'For whoever commits any of these abominations — the souls that perform them shall be cut off from among their people' (Vayikra 18:29), establishing that both the man and the woman incur celestial excision (kares) for this transgression.

Throughout this Torah portion, Scripture repeatedly underscores that this violation is an abomination that defiles both the holy land and the human neshamah, severing the soul from its eternal source in the land of the living.

Even if persecutors attempt to compel a person to violate this prohibition on pain of death, he is halachically obligated to surrender his life rather than transgress (yehareig v'al ya'avor), as the laws of forbidden relationships (arayos) share the identical cardinal stringency as idolatry and murder.

Given the universal prominence of this mitzvah across Jewish life, it might appear redundant to elaborate upon the severity of its prohibition — just as one needs no admonition against severing his own head. Yet in our times, on account of our manifold sins, irresponsible individuals have breached this sacred fence, treating immersion in a mikvah as if it were a mere pious custom rather than a biblical command of kares, allowing their wives to forgo immersion entirely. It is therefore vital to articulate the gravity of this transgression, awakening the public to the catastrophic severity of this sin.

First and foremost, one must recognize that every penalty and stern warning formulated in the Torah and by Chazal regarding incestuous relationships applies with equal force to intimacy with a woman who is a niddah.

One must also understand that both partners who willingly participate in this transgression incur the penalty of celestial excision (kares).

If an individual intentionally violates this prohibition out of wanton rebellion, he is halachically classified as wicked (rasha) and is disqualified from serving as a witness in a court of law.

He is likewise disqualified from taking a judicial oath in beis din.

One who willfully commits this sin is designated by Chazal as 'a deliberate transgressor of Israel with his body' (poshei Yisroel b'gufan). If such an individual's heavenly account contains an overwhelming majority of iniquities alongside this defiance, he is sentenced to twelve months in Gehinnom; his physical form is consumed, his soul is burned, and the celestial wind scatters his ashes beneath the soles of the righteous (Rosh Hashanah 17a).

Who can fathom the immense spiritual anguish that both the man and the woman bring upon themselves in Gehinnom for even a single violation of this prohibition — and how much more catastrophic when, Heaven forbid, this grave sin becomes habitual in their eyes through repeated transgression!

Furthermore, Chazal teach that laxity in this commandment places a woman's physical life in mortal peril during labor: 'For three transgressions women die during childbirth: because they are not meticulous regarding niddah, challah, and the kindling of the Shabbos lights' (Shabbos 31b).

This sin is also the cause that their children die.

Even if one sees that his children survive, let him not think that all will be well for him, for he does not know what will happen at the end of his days.

Furthermore, the children born to him as a consequence of this transgression can be completely wicked. They are counted among the "nine types" - one of which is the sons of a woman impure from nidda. The Torah says about these people, I will purge out from among you the rebels and those who sin against Me as the Sages of blessed memory said (Talmud Bavli, Nedarim 20b). How much will the father suffer over this in the ultimate future, for as if it was not enough that for himself he ruined all the days of his life, he also brought wicked people into the world to rebel against Hashem and His Torah all the days of their life as well. Their evil activity will remain a remembrance of sin for him perpetually. The holy Zohar writes (the portion of Shemos): The children that he conceives at that moment draw down upon them a spirit of impurity, and all their days they will be in impurity. For here his edifice and foundation remain in a state of impurity greater and stronger than all defilements in the world (see there how it continues at length).

For this reason, let every man who is designated by the name Jew take pity on himself and on all his generations of descendants that will come after him, that they should not be consumed through his sins. Let him muster his strength against his impulse, so as not to transgress this severe prohibition, and it will thereby be well for him in this world and the next.

It follows from this that it is necessary to take great care not to live with one's wife in a town or city where there is no kosher [proper, acceptable] mikveh (ritualarium).

Even if someone has children who are dependent upon him, and his main way of earning a living, as he sees it, is connected solely with that place, let him not exchange a world that endures ever and always for a world that passes away. For quite certainly, if he lives permanently with his wife in that place, in the course of time he will come to stumble over this prohibition punishable by kareth (Heaven preserve us). Then let him place his trust in Hashem, that He will not abandon him elsewhere either.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and makes us more similar to Hashem.

In addition, we mentioned above how being married is an important perquisite to being G-dlike. That is because marriage and having a family allows us to resemble Hashem by bringing life into the world, and by giving and displaying love to the members of our family. It is also the foundation of being able to pass down the traditions of how to be G-dlike. This mitzvah, is an extremely powerful way of strengthening our marriages. It has the brilliant effect of transitioning the relationship from a purely physical one to one that is emotional and intellectual as well. A husband has an obligation to spend intimate time with his wife all of the time. During the period of Nidda, the couple

shifts the intimacy from taking a physical form to a communication that conveys emotional and intellectual intimacy. This shift in communication is extremely important for the health of a marriage. That time also allows the anticipation and excitement of their reunion to progressively build up. When a husband and wife finally come back together, there is a tremendous surge of almost nuptial freshness brought into the relationship. Thus this mitzvah serves to greatly strengthen our marriages which are important pathways to emulating Hashem.

**SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:**

**GEMARA NIDDA 31B**

[The anticipation of being together] is to make a husband and wife as beloved to each other throughout their marriage, as they were when they first went to the Chuppah.

**SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVOS 167, 18, 19)**

Based on the inner mysteries of conception, It is unhealthy both spiritually and physically for children to be conceived during the Nidda period.

**RAMBAM**

This mitzvah is designed to help people develop discipline in conquering their lusts.

**RAMBAN**

A woman should not have relations during nidda because it is impossible to conceive during that time.

**KLI YAKAR**

According to our Sages, Womanhood was given the menstrual period after the sin of the Garden of Eden and Chava's role in influencing her husband to sin. After the period has ended a woman is asked to spend the seven clean day in meditation and reflection in order to see how she how she can improve herself, and how to best use her enormous powers of influence for positive purposes. She then goes to the Mikva to symbolize the removal of those transgressions.

**RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:**

- Discuss the recharge of the relationship that results from this mitzvah
- Discuss the importance of the transition of a physical relationship, to an emotional relationship, back to a physical relationship. Discuss how this perfectly addresses both the man's needs and a woman's needs.

## A. TO SEPARATE WHEN A WIFE EXPECTS HER PERIOD

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 20-9**

*As it says "you shall warn the children of Israel to be careful about their impurity (Vayikra 15:31, Parshas Metzora)"*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

▪ How close to the expected time should they separate?

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is a positive rabbinic commandment for a husband and wife to separate from marital relations during the interval immediately preceding her anticipated menstrual period (onah samuch l'vestah). If her established cycle regularly begins during the daytime, they must separate throughout that entire day; if her cycle begins at night, they must separate throughout that entire night.

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ An incident occurred involving a woman who came before Rabbi Akiva to ask about a doubtful stain. Rabbi Akiva gently questioned her: 'Perhaps you had a small wound on your skin?' She replied: 'Yes, and it healed.' He asked: 'Perhaps it could have reopened and bled?' She answered: 'Yes!' Rabbi Akiva declared her pure. Seeing his disciples exchange surprised glances, Rabbi Akiva said to them: 'Why is this matter difficult in your eyes? The Sages themselves enacted this rabbinic decree not to be stringent, but to allow lenient attribution whenever a reasonable explanation exists!'

*Mishnah, Niddah 8:3*

# 49. Not to act like an animal when having relations

**(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-10**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Scripture warns: 'Do not be like a horse or a mule, devoid of understanding' (Tehillim 32:9). Rabbi R' Shimon bar Yochai expounds that this verse admonishes husband and wife never to conduct their marital intimacy in an animalistic manner. Rather, they must conduct themselves with deep sanctity, elevated intent, and refined modesty, uniting for the sake of the mitzvah and the service of Hashem.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

Sexuality has a very noble and holy purpose of creating an intimate marital relationship and bringing children into the world. But if we misuse our powers of sexuality, then our bodies—our horse, our impulses, and our yetzer hara become more of our master. Furthermore, when we misuse sexuality, we become tamei, a blockage prevents our yetzer tov from influencing us, and we lose our sense of yiras shomayim, our reservoir of moral willpower which drives us to do mitzvos. Mastering and channeling our impulses for its holy and true purposes gives us self control, discipline, and kedushah, and consequently makes us more similar to Hashem.

**SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:**

**RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTERS, VOL. 13, P. 14)**

Marital intimacy is a holy mitzvah; yet when pursued for pure physical gratification rather than holy connection, it can easily slide into animalistic indulgence. Kedushah demands that marital life be conducted with dignity, modest intention, and sacred purpose.

## A. NOT TO HAVE RELATIONS OUTSIDE

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 51-3**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is strictly forbidden for a husband and wife to engage in marital intimacy in an open field without a sheltering tent. The Talmud records that when a man acted with vulgarity by having relations with his wife beneath a fig tree in public view, the Sages sentenced him to corporal punishment (lashed for impudence) to safeguard the sanctity and modesty of Klal Yisroel.

## B. TO HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS UNDER COVERS

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 51-6**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

As a fundamental requirement of Jewish modesty (tzniyus), a husband and wife are forbidden to engage in marital intimacy without being shielded beneath a covering or blanket.

## C. NOT TO HAVE RELATIONS IN FRONT OF ANOTHER PERSON

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 51-7**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is forbidden for a husband and wife to engage in intimacy in the presence of any other human being, even an attendant or domestic servant. Furthermore, as an act of pious refinement, one should remove domestic animals, mice, or other creatures from the room during intimacy to maintain pure holiness.

## D. TO HAVE RELATIONS AT NIGHT OR IN A DARK ROOM

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 51-4**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Marital relations are forbidden during daylight hours, unless the room has been thoroughly darkened to ensure complete privacy and modesty.

## E. NOT TO BE INTIMATE WITH THE LIGHT ON

**(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 51-5**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

It is forbidden to engage in intimacy at night by the direct light of a lamp; even if one shields the light with a garment, sufficient darkness must be established so that the partners cannot see one another by its illumination.

## HIGHER STANDARDS OF MARITAL RELATIONS REQUIRED OF A KOHEN

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask a Kohen to emulate Hashem's holiness by avoiding marital relations with certain categories of women*

# 50. A Kohen should be holy by refraining from women forbidden to him

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 20-14**

*As the Torah says, "You shall be holy to your God" (Vayikra 21:6, Parshas Emor).*

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

The Torah demands an elevated degree of sanctity from a kohen, beyond that of the rest of Klal Yisroel. It is an active positive commandment for kohanim to sanctify themselves by separating from women whom the Torah forbids them to marry, namely:

A divorced woman (gerushah), even if she was previously his own wife whom he divorced;

A woman who has engaged in a forbidden intimate union (zonah);

And a woman desecrated from the priesthood (chalalah).

All of these categories are forbidden to an ordinary kohen (kohen hedyot), and not merely to the Kohen Gadol.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The word Kohein comes from the Hebrew root, ken, correct and nachon, proper. Kohanim were given the role of teaching and showing the Jewish people the correct way to come close to Hashem. (Just as the Jewish people are kohanim to show the nations the way to come close to Hashem.) Because the lives of a kohen and his family are put on a pedestal, and the Jewish people are required to look at them for their example, the kohanim were given a higher standard of who they should take as spouses. Just like all of the mitzvos of sexual morality, when a Kohein refrains from having relations with one who is forbidden to him, he exhibits kedushah, and he emulates Hashem's kedushah and control.

# 51. A Kohen cannot marry a Zonah, one who had a forbidden intimate relationship

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 138**

*As the Torah says, A woman that is zonah… they shall not take (Vayikra 21:7, Parshas Emor).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is a zonah?
- If a woman had relations outside of marriage would that make her a zonah?
- Would a convert be a zonah for this halachah?
- If a woman remarried her husband after she was married to someone else in the meantime, would she be considered a zonah?
- If a woman married a cohen who was a challal, and she became widowed could she marry another cohen?
- If a mamzer raped a woman, would she be considered a zonah?
- If someone had relations with a forbidden person in an "unnatural way" would that make her a zonah?
- If a man had relations with a woman while she was a niddah, would that make her a zonah?
- If a woman had relations with an animal, would that make her a zonah?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The halachic definition of a zonah whom the Torah forbids to a kohen encompasses:

Any woman who was not born Jewish (such as a female convert, who held non-Jewish status prior to conversion);

A Jewish woman who engaged in intimacy with any man whom she is biblically forbidden to marry (such as one of the arayos or a mamzer);

And a woman who engaged in intimacy with a disqualified kohen (chalal), even though she was initially permitted to marry him.

A woman acquires the status of a zonah through any such forbidden union regardless of whether it occurred willingly or through coercion (rape), and whether through natural or unnatural intimacy.

Conversely, a woman is not categorized as a zonah if she engages in relations with:

An unmarried Jewish man (though promiscuity without marriage is severely prohibited as a kedeishah);

A man while in a state of menstrual impurity (niddah);

Or if a woman was violated by an animal;

In none of these circumstances does she become a zonah disqualified from marrying a kohen.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The word Kohein comes from the Hebrew root, ken, correct and nachon, proper. Kohanim were given the role of teaching and showing the Jewish people the correct way to come close to Hashem. (Just as the Jewish people are kohanim to show the nations the way to come close to Hashem.) Because the lives of a kohen and his family are put on a pedestal, and the Jewish people are required to look at them for their example, the kohanim were given a higher standard of who they should take as spouses. Just like all of the mitzvos of sexual morality, when a Kohein refrains from having relations with one who is forbidden to him, he exhibits kedushah, and he emulates Hashem's kedushah and control.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 266)

This woman may influence her husband to turn away from his service of Hashem.

#### SFORNO (VAYIKRA 21:7)

There is a mitzvah to respect a kohen. Having this kind of wife may diminish people's respect for him.

#### RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The kohen and his wife are supposed to be role models and represent the ideal servants of Hashem.

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS

- Discuss why a kohen has a higher standard than other Jews
- Discuss how just like a kohen has a higher standard, the Jewish people need to hold themselves to a higher standard.

# 52. A Kohen cannot marry a Chalalah

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 139**

*As the Torah says, A woman that is… profaned… they shall not take (Vayikra 21:7, Parshas Emor).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If a kohen marries a divorcee, (who he is not allowed to marry), and they have a daughter, can that daughter marry a kohen?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

A desecrated woman (chalalah) disqualified from the priesthood denotes:

A daughter born from any marriage or union biblically forbidden to a kohen;

Or a woman forbidden to the priesthood who entered into an illicit union with a kohen, thereby becoming desecrated through that intimacy.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The word Kohein comes from the Hebrew root, ken, correct and nachon, proper. Kohanim were given the role of teaching and showing the Jewish people the correct way to come close to Hashem. (Just as the Jewish people are kohanim to show the nations the way to come close to Hashem.) Because the lives of a kohen and his family are put on a pedestal, and the Jewish people are required to look at them for their example, the kohanim were given a higher standard of who they should take as spouses. Just like all of the mitzvos of sexual morality, when a Kohein refrains from having relations with one who is forbidden to him, he exhibits kedushah, and he emulates Hashem's kedushah and control.

## 53. A Kohen cannot marry a divorcee

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 140**

*As the Torah says, neither shall they take a woman divorced from her husband (Vayikra 21:7, Parshas Emor).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- A kohen can't marry a divorcee. Would a woman who got chalitza be like a divorcee for this rule?
- If a kohen had relations with a divorcee outside of marriage, would he violate this prohibition?
- If a kohen married a woman he was forbidden to, is he still a kohen?
- Can a female kohen marry a kohen who was disqualified because he married a forbidden woman?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

By rabbinic decree, a woman who has performed the ceremony of chalitzah is likewise forbidden to marry a kohen. If a kohen nevertheless marries a chalutzah, she and any children born from the union acquire the status of chalalim by rabbinic law.

If a kohen contracts marriage with any of the three categories of women forbidden to him (a gerushah, zonah, or chalalah) and is intimate with her, he violates this negative commandment.

Daughters of kohanim (kohanos) of unblemished lineage remain fully permitted to marry Israelites disqualified from the priesthood, such as a chalal.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The word Kohein comes from the Hebrew root, ken, correct and nachon, proper. Kohanim were given the role of teaching and showing the Jewish people the correct way to come close to Hashem. (Just as the Jewish people are kohanim to show the nations the way to come close to Hashem.) Because the lives of a kohen and his family are put on a pedestal, and the Jewish people are required to look at them for their example, the kohanim were given a higher

standard of who they should take as spouses. Just like all of the mitzvos of sexual morality, when a Kohein refrains from having relations with one who is forbidden to him, he exhibits kedushah, and he emulates Hashem's kedushah and control.

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ If a doctor would tell Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz to do or not do something for the sake of his health, Reb Baruch Ber would comply without hesitation. Once, when a doctor told him to not eat a certain food, for it was not good for him, Reb Baruch Ber said that because it was a question of his health, that particular food now was forbidden to him "like treif meat.

*Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim*

## AVOIDING ACTIVITIES THAT LEAD TO IMMORALITY

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask us to emulate Hashem's holiness and self control by avoiding activities that can lead to sexual immorality*

# 54. A man cannot wear female attire

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 179**

*As the Torah says, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment (Devarim 22:10, Parshas Ki Seitzei).*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is this mitzvah limited to woman's clothing?
- What else is included in this prohibition?
- What if a few men wear this article anyway?
- Is it ok for a man to pluck out white hairs from his head because he wants to appear younger?
- How about to pull out only one hair?
- Is it ok for a man to dye his hair?
- How about to dye only a small amount of hair, or even one hair?
- If only women shave their armpits, is it ok for men to do that?
- Is it ok to shave those parts with scissors or an electric shaver?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

The biblical prohibition against a man donning female attire includes:

Any garments,

Ornaments, cosmetics, or jewelry,

That are recognized in that specific locale as distinctively female attire.

Similarly, if a man plucks even a single white hair from among dark hairs on his head or beard to disguise his age, or dyes even one white hair black, he violates this prohibition by engaging in female cosmetic practices.

By rabbinic law, a man is forbidden to remove underarm or pubic hair. Anyone who removes hair from regions of the body where hair removal is practiced exclusively by women violates this rabbinic decree.

It is permitted, however, for a man to trim body hair on other limbs using scissors.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

The Ethical Dimension: How this mitzvah elevates our character to emulate Hashem:

We are commanded to emulate the Almighty by cultivating an elevated state of holiness (kedushah). We foster this sanctity by mastering our instinctual desires and erecting protective safeguards against immorality. By establishing clear distinctions between the genders, this commandment creates a vital boundary that prevents promiscuity and preserves personal dignity.

Furthermore, the very exercise of disciplined restraint in refraining from practices that blur moral and gender boundaries is itself a profound manifestation of holiness, reflecting the divine attribute of self-mastery.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 442)

This activity can lead to an improper mingling of the sexes and that leads to sexual immorality.

#### ABARBANEL (DEVARIM 22:5)

Sometimes, when a man or a woman wants to secretly commit adultery, they dress up like someone of another gender so that spouse will not suspect anything.

Additionally, cross dressing is a practice that is often a part of homosexuality.

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss the idea of trying to avoid an improper mingling of the sexes. Discuss for example, why boys and girls go to separate schools.

### MORAL DILEMMAS:

Chaim recently bought a new hat and jacket that he wore at minyan. One day as he was walking to shul, it began to rain very hard. He ran back to his house to find an umbrella. The only umbrella he could find was his sister's bright pink, Strawberry Shortcake umbrella. It would do the job, but it was clearly designed to be a girls' umbrella. Chaim wondered if he was allowed to use that umbrella to walk to shul, so as to not get soaked and ruin his hat and clothes. On the one hand he wasn't wearing the umbrella, and it was not an article of clothing. But on the other hand, Lo Silbash for a man is not limited to wearing feminine clothing. It also proscribes doing feminine activities. Was he allowed to use his sister's pink umbrella to walk to shul? What do you think?

**Answer:** Regarding the question of the pink umbrella, Rav Zilberstein said it would be fine to use the umbrella because he does not wear it. It is also not considered a feminine activity because both men and women use umbrellas.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 361 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 092 (Ki Seitzei))*

# 55. A woman cannot wear male attire

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 178**

*As the Torah says, A woman shall not wear what pertains to a man (Devarim 22:5, Parshas Ki Seitzei).*

## QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is this mitzvah limited to clothing? Which other things does this include?
- If a few women wear that anyway, would that make it a woman's article?
- Is it ok for a woman to have a specifically masculine haircut?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The biblical injunction against a woman wearing male attire applies to:

Any garments,

Ornaments, gear, or weapons,

That are recognized in that specific locale as distinctively designated for men, which a woman is strictly forbidden to wear.

Similarly, a woman is forbidden to cut or style the hair of her head in a manner uniquely characteristic of men.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

The Ethical Dimension: How this mitzvah elevates our character to emulate Hashem:

We are commanded to emulate the Almighty by cultivating an elevated state of holiness (kedushah). We foster this sanctity by mastering our impulses and creating protective boundaries against immorality. By maintaining the distinct identity and dignity of each gender, this mitzvah erects a vital fence that safeguards society against promiscuity.

Furthermore, the deliberate practice of modesty and disciplined restraint is itself an expression of kedushah, aligning our character with the divine will.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### RABBEINU BACHYA (DEVARIM 22:5)

This mitzvah is to prevent a woman from donning weapons and going to battle with men because that will lead to sexual immorality.

### RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The mitzvah of a woman not wearing masculine attire is to be a symbol that a woman should appreciate her role as a woman, and not instead take on a masculine role.

## RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss the concept of not mixing men and women during war.
- Discuss the concept of the different roles that men and women play.
- Discuss the woman's primary role of raising the family, and the husband's primary role as the breadwinner and teacher.
- Discuss why women are not supposed to take public communal leadership roles, like being a shul rabbi.

## MORAL DILEMMAS:

There was once an undercover unit in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) tasked with infiltrating enemy territory to carry out rescue missions. To blend in, members of the unit often disguised themselves, and on some occasions, the male soldiers dressed as women. Among the soldiers was a religious man named Donny. On one mission, the unit planned an operation scheduled to take place on Shabbos, and Donny was assigned to disguise himself as a woman. Part of his disguise required him to wear makeup, which presented two significant halachic (Jewish law) challenges. Tzove'a: Applying makeup on Shabbos could be a violation of the prohibition against coloring or dyeing. Lo Yilbash: Wearing makeup, as part of a woman's attire, could violate the Torah prohibition against men wearing feminine garments. The extreme and life-saving nature of the mission justified overriding these prohibitions. However, Donny still wanted to minimize his halachic infractions. This left him with a dilemma: when should he apply the makeup? Option 1: Apply the makeup before Shabbos. This approach would avoid violating tzove'a on Shabbos. However, it would increase the duration he wore makeup, thereby increasing the duration of the violation of lo yilbash. Option 2: Apply the makeup during Shabbos. This approach would reduce the time spent wearing makeup and, by extension, the lo yilbash violation. However, it would involve actively violating tzove'a on Shabbos itself. Faced with this complex question, Donny sought the guidance of Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein. He asked: Should he prioritize minimizing the violation of tzove'a by applying the makeup before Shabbos, or should he prioritize minimizing the violation of lo yilbash by applying it during Shabbos? What do you think he should do?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about the undercover soldier who wanted to know when to put on makeup, Rav Zilberstein did not give a final psak (halachic ruling). However, he did point out that if the makeup was not lasting, like powder makeup, then it might only constitute a rabbinical prohibition. In such a case, it would seem preferable to apply the makeup on Shabbos to minimize the prohibition of lo silbash. However, if the makeup was lasting, like nail polish, then it would involve a Torah prohibition. In that case, it would be preferable to apply it before Shabbos to avoid breaking Shabbos. To minimize the prohibition of lo silbash, the individual should try to stay separate from other people while wearing it.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shabbos Besimcha, p. 134*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ An Orthodox rabbi was approached by Mrs. " Leibenstein, a neighbor from down the block. She informed him that she had recently resigned from her position as a Conservative rabbi. "It was an extremely frustrating experience," she told him. "Do you want to know why? Because they were a lot more interested in what I was wearing than in what I was saying. I have to admit. You Orthodox are on the right track."

*Impact, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

## HOLINESS OF OUR BODY

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask us to emulate Hashem's holiness with activities that infuse our bodies with holiness.*

*Because these mitzvos are part of the Chukim, the superrational mitzvos of holiness, at times it may not be intuitively clear how these mitzvos bring us holiness. This mitzvah urges us to trust the Creator of the universe and the Creator of our bodies who understands how these mitzvos fill us with kedushah.*

# 56. A man cannot cut off his sideburns

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 176**

*As the Torah says, You shall not round off the temples of your head (Vayikra 19:27, Parshas Kedoshim)*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Is it only prohibited to remove both sides, or is removing even one prohibited?
- Does the barber violate this for cutting the peyos, or is the prohibition only on the wearer?
- It is permitted to cut a beard with scissors or an electric trimmer. Can you do the same with peyos?
- Is a woman allowed to cut off her peyos?
- Is she exempt from the prohibition of cutting or having hers cut? If she is exempt from cutting, can she cut a man's peyos?
- Can one cut off the peyos of a child?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

A man incurs a distinct transgression for each side of the head; therefore, if one shaves both of his temples (peyos harosh), even in a single act, he violates this negative commandment twice. This liability applies whether he shaves the corners of the head alone or shaves his entire scalp at once.

Biblical liability falls primarily upon the person who performs the shaving (ha-megalei'ach), since he performs the physical act; the person who is shaved (ha-mitgalei'ach) is not punished by the court unless he actively assisted the barber during the shaving.

It is even rabbinically prohibited to crop the peyos flush with the skin using scissors in the manner of a razor (misparayim k'en ta'ar).

A woman is not bound by the prohibition against rounding the corners of her own head, yet she is strictly forbidden to shave the peyos of any Jewish male, including a male minor.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

### HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Torah wants us to treat our bodies in a way that will give us greater kedushah, greater mastery over our impulses. That kedushah helps us emulate Hashem's kedushah. This mitzvah, through its message of maintaining our distinct Jewishness, and message of the importance of controlling our impulses (see below) gives us a spiritual influence that gives us that kedushah.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### IBN EZRA (VAYIKRA 19:27)

This mitzvah is to make us look different than the non-Jews and teaches us to keep us separate from their ways.

#### RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The peyos create a symbolic separation between the rear and frontal lobes of the brain. The frontal lobes of the brain control human thought, whereas the rear lobe controls the physical and autonomous functions of the body. The rear lobes symbolize and control the animal aspect of man, whereas the frontal lobes symbolize and control the human aspect of man. The lesson of the peyos is for man not to allow his animal impulses (rear lobe) to control his thoughts and decisions (frontal lobe). He is to keep both aspects separate (kadosh), and make choices based on his neshamah, not his animal impulses.

#### SFAS EMES

• In his final years of leadership, in 5664, the Sfas Emes shares the Zohar's parable on Parshas Vayechi of a king who sends his son to live in a distant village while warning him never to forget the habits of the royal court. The Sfas Emes explains that our physical world is that village, and every human soul is a royal prince sent on a temporary mission. King Solomon taught: "He-chacham einav b'rosho" — "The wise man has his eyes in his head" (Koheles 2:14). The Zohar explains that a wise person keeps the gaze of his mind directed toward his true home with Hashem. The distractions and anxieties of daily life must not invade the sanctuary of our thoughts. Our peyos remind us that our true citizenship lies in the presence of our Father in Heaven (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5664).

• The prohibition against rounding the corners of the head—"lo sakifu pe'as roshchem"—begins with a basic question about human anatomy. If hair is simply bodily residue, why does the Torah attach such deep spiritual weight to the hair of our temples? The Sfas Emes answers in 5646 by examining a verse in Shir HaShirim (5:11): "Kevutzosav taltalim shechoros ka-orev" — "His locks are curled and black as a raven." Our Sages in the Gemara (Eruvin 21b) explain that this verse refers to heaps of Torah teachings that seem dark and difficult on the surface, yet are sweet to those who study them. The Sfas Emes explains that although hair begins as external growth, when we sanctify it through Hashem's commandment, that very surplus is elevated into an added crown of beauty (ma'alah yeseirah). This teaches us an encouraging lesson for our daily lives: no talent, impulse, or raw drive in the human personality is worthless. When guided by the discipline of Torah, our most basic instincts can be refined into a crown of honor before our Maker (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Metzora 5646).

• The Torah introduces its laws regarding the hair of the head with a stirring reminder of who we are: "Banim atem l'Hashem Elokeichem; lo sisgodedu v'lo sasimu korchah bein eineichem l'meis" — "You are children to Hashem your God; you shall not gash yourselves nor make a baldness between your eyes for the dead" (Devarim 14:1). He explains that when ancient pagans suffered a loss, they tore out their hair in violent despair, because they believed that this physical life is all that exists. To them, physical death meant total ruin. But the Torah reminds us that we are children of the living God. Our physical bodies will eventually return to dust, but our souls remain connected to an eternal Father. Even in our moments of sadness, we remember that we belong to an eternal family. Our minds remain anchored in faith and hope (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5653).

• During the festival of Shavuos, the Torah abruptly interrupts the laws of the holiday offerings to repeat an agricultural command: "U'v'kutzrechem es ketzir artzechem, lo sechaleh pe'as sadcha l'kztor — Le'ani v'la-ger ta'azov osam" — "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely reap the corner of your field — For the poor and the convert you shall leave them" (Vayikra 23:22). In his 5646 discourse on the Omer offering, the Sfas Emes examines why this charity law appears right in the middle of a festival. He cites a striking Midrash on the verse in Jeremiah (30:11): "V'oscha lo e'eseh chalah" — "I will not make a full end of you." Our Sages explain that Hashem promises never to destroy Israel because Israel does not completely destroy the corners of their fields! Because we leave a corner untouched on our fields and on our heads, Hashem promises that even during the darkest nights of exile, He will never make an end of us (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5646).

• In Parshas Naso, the Torah describes the laws of the Nazirite, an ordinary person who takes a vow to dedicate himself to Hashem: "Kadosh yihyeh, gadel pera se'ar rosho — Ki nezer Elokav al rosho" — "He shall be holy; he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long — For the crown of his God is upon his head" (Bamidbar 6:5–7). In 5650, the Sfas Emes reflects on the order of the Torah portions. The Torah first describes the strict hierarchy of the camp of Israel: ordinary Israelites stood in the outer camp, Levites stood closer to the Sanctuary, priests served at the altar, and the High Priest alone entered the Holy of Holies. But immediately after this hierarchy, the Torah introduces the Nazir. By refusing to shear away our peyos in pursuit of worldly styles, we wear a quiet reminder of our sacred potential. Even when we are busy with mundane business, our appearance testifies that our thoughts are dedicated to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5650).

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ Discuss the different styles of peyos. Discuss what the Halachah requires, and what is directed by different customs.

### STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ How did they bring the Bikkurim (First Fruits) up to Jerusalem to testify to Hashem's kindness from the Exodus to the Land of Israel? All the villages of a district gathered into the district capital and slept in the town square overnight. Early in the morning, the leader called out (Yirmiyahu 31:5): 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to Hashem our God!' Those living near Jerusalem brought fresh figs and grapes, while those from far away brought dried figs and raisins. And a peace-offering ox walked at the head of the procession with its horns plated in gleaming gold and a crown of olive branches upon its head! A flute played before them all the way until they approached Jerusalem. As they walked through the streets of Jerusalem, all the craftsmen and shopkeepers stood up from their work and called out warmly: 'Our brothers, men of such-and-such town, you have come in peace!' The moment they stepped onto the Temple Mount, even King Agrippa himself lifted his basket of figs onto his own royal shoulder and carried it all the way into the Temple Courtyard, while the Levites burst into song!

*Mishnah, Bikkurim 3:2–4*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Benny was a bright, charismatic yeshivah boy who gradually drifted away from observance during high school until he was no longer keeping Shabbos, kashrus, or tefillin. His heartbroken parents never yelled at him, waiting up late with silent tears and prayers, while his former rebbeim continued checking in on him warmly. Benny took a job at a furniture store alongside his best friend Eli, another teen who had drifted off the derech. One day at work, Eli suffered a severe nosebleed that led to blood tests and a devastating diagnosis: Eli had cancer. Shaken to his core, Benny visited Eli at the hospital and sat beside him in silence. That night, staring at the walls of his room, Benny lit a cigarette and immediately snuffed it out, asking himself what he was doing with his life. The next morning, watching Eli's mother weeping over her Tehillim in the hospital waiting room as Eli underwent chemotherapy, Benny felt a deep stirring in his soul. A week later, Eli's hair began falling out in clumps on his pillow, leaving him crushed and ashamed to be seen bald. When Eli's gentle father mentioned how distraught Eli was over losing his hair, Benny resolved on the spot to shave his own shoulder-length hair so his friend would not feel alone. He sat down in Jake the barber's chair and asked him to shave his head completely bald—but just as the clippers buzzed, Benny leaped out of the chair: "Wait a few minutes, there's one thing I have to find out!" Benny sprinted to Eli's house and knocked urgently. When Eli's father opened the door, Benny's eyes filled with tears: "Could you please show me—where is the bone that determines how far down my peyos have to stay?" Deeply moved, Eli's father pointed to the bone just below his temple. Benny ran back to the barber, had his head shaved completely bald while leaving kosher peyos intact, and walked into Eli's hospital room wearing a cap. Pulling off the cap to reveal his shaved head and new peyos, Benny smiled through his tears: "I figured if I really want to help you, Eli, I should do it right." The two friends wept in each other's arms as Eli's parents looked on in speechless emotion. Eli's treatments succeeded, and together both Benny and Eli returned to yeshivah and a life of Torah.

*A Touch of Warmth, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Klausenberger Rebbe (Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam) arrived in Montreal, accompanied by only one Yid who would drive him around the city. It was in the early years when there was no kabbalas panim. Montreal was asleep. The frum community members were asleep. The streets were "asleep"—empty, blanketed by the icy, gently falling snow. The Rebbe and his driver had no idea where to find a shul where they could daven. There was not a soul in sight, no one to ask. Suddenly, in the distance, they saw a person on the street who appeared to be a goy. The Rebbe told the driver, "Pull over, go out, and ask that man where the closest shul is." The driver wondered, "Why is he sending me to ask a goy about the closest shul?" But being a real chassid, he didn't question the Rebbe. Walking over to the man, he asked in broken English, "Do you know where the closest synagogue is?" To his great surprise, the "goy" answered in a rich, heimishe Yiddish that he was a Yid! He gave directions to the shul, but before the chassid could turn around, the Yid asked, "One minute, how were you able to tell that I was Jewish? I'm not dressed like a Jew." The driver told him, "Truthfully, it had nothing to do with me. I am driving the Klausenburger Rebbe, and he suggested that I ask you." Together, they approached the car, and the Yid asked the Rebbe, "Rebbe, please tell me, how did you know I was a Yid?" The Rebbe explained wryly, "We were driving in the snow, in the freezing cold, when suddenly I noticed a person walking the streets bareheaded. He wasn't even wearing a hat to protect himself in this freezing weather! I thought to myself, 'Who would walk bareheaded in such weather? Even the goyim wear hats in such weather. It must be a Yid who davka wants to show that he is going bareheaded.'" The Yid, amazed at the Rebbe's insight, quickly left. But that was not the end of the story. Many years later, the true ending came to light. At a yahrtzeit seudah, a certain Rav was relating this very story and the Klausenburger Rebbe's clever reply when, to the surprise of the gathering, a Yid stood up and exclaimed, "I am that person! I am that 'goy' who met the Rebbe that morning." This man, who now had a beard and peyos and looked like a true chassidishe Yid, continued, "That incident got

me thinking. I realized that no matter how hard I try to blend in, no matter how hard I try to bury my Yiddishkeit, I will never succeed. The Rebbe's words stoked the almost extinguished embers and lit a fire in my neshamah, and before long, I began to return to the Yiddishkeit that I had seen in the home of my parents before the war."

*From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Chezky Goldstein was a nine year old boy from Bnei Brak. He was a very sweet boy, who looked angelic, and took a lot of pride in his peyos and the mitzvah of peyos in general. He started having blurred vision and headaches and was diagnosed with cancer. The doctors explained to him what the medical procedures would entail. Then they said that the chemo would make all of his hair fall out. He then went in to the other room and looked out the window and spoke to Hashem as if talking to a friend. "Hashem, I am willing to endure all of the pain and procedures if that is what you want me to have. But I heard that all of my hair will fall out. Please just one thing don't let my peyos fall out. That is what makes me look like a Jew. He began to cry uncontrollably. Chesky took four months of chemo and Chezky lost all of his hair. But miraculously all of his payos stayed intact. When he went to Rav Chaim Kanievsky and told the story, Rav Chaim called in his whole family to meet the boy to show his family the power of sincere tefillah and the power of the tefillah of a child.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 206*

### A. NOT TO CUT OFF THE SIDEBURNS OF ANOTHER

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 29-56**

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Both the barber who shaves the corners of the head and the person who knowingly allows his hair to be shaved violate this biblical prohibition.

## 57. A man cannot shave his beard off with a razor

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 177**

*As the Torah says, neither shall you destroy the edges of your beard (Vayikra 19:27, Parshas Kedoshim).*

**QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:**

- Is it permitted to trim one's beard?
- Is it permitted to totally cut off your beard with scissors or an electric trimmer? Is one allowed to be clean-shaven?
- Is the one who shaves it culpable, or the one who is shaved culpable?
- Is a woman permitted to use a razor on facial hair?
- We mentioned that a man is forbidden to remove white hair from his head because it is a feminine activity. If a man uses a razor on his face, can we say that he is also violating the prohibition of doing feminine things?

### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The beard possesses five halachic corners (peyos hazakan), and a distinct biblical transgression is incurred for shaving each corner. Consequently, if a man shaves off his entire beard with a razor in a single sitting, he violates five separate negative commandments.

Biblical liability is incurred only when the shaving is performed with a razor (ta'ar), as Scripture specifies a form of shaving that involves total destruction of the hair root: 'You shall not destroy the corners of your beard' (Vayikra 19:27). If one trims his beard using scissors — even if cut down closely to the skin like a razor — he incurs no biblical penalty.

Direct liability falls upon the one who performs the shaving; the person who is shaved is not punishable by the court unless he actively assists the barber during the act.

A woman is entirely permitted to remove facial hair if she develops a beard or mustache.

If a woman shaves the beard of a man with a razor, she is exempt from corporal punishment, yet it remains strictly forbidden for her to do so.

The Sefer HaChinuch notes that one who shaves his beard with a razor violates two additional negative commandments beyond the five specific prohibitions of the beard, namely:

'You shall not follow in their statutes' (Vayikra 18:3), by imitating the pagan customs of gentiles;

And 'a man shall not don a woman's garment' (Devarim 22:5), by effeminizing his facial appearance.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

## HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Torah wants us to treat our bodies in a way that will give us greater kedushah, greater mastery over our impulses. That kedushah helps us emulate Hashem's kedushah. This mitzvah, through its messages (see below) and spiritual influence, gives us that kedushah.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

### RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The beard is a natural covering of the mouth and jaw which are areas of sensual physicality. This natural covering is supposed to remind man to master his sensual aspects, and not to allow his sensuality to master him. The beard teaches that eating should be subordinated into a means to have energy to do mitzvos, and not become an end in itself. Keeping a beard or remnants of a beard is therefore to remind man of this lesson to master this sensual aspect and not to let it control him. That is why we should be sure not to destroy it.

### CHOFETZ CHAIM TIFERES YISRAEL

The Kabala teaches that the area of the beard is the area of spiritual connection to the spiritual worlds. Man is like an inverted tree with his roots gaining nourishment from the heavens, which draw nourishment down to the earth. The beard, which acts as "spiritual roots", is the pipeline for kedushah to enter man and sanctify him.

**RABBEINU BACHYA (VAYIKRA 19:27)**

One should not eliminate the beard with a razor, in order for men look different than women. This has a similar effect as the mitzvah of not dressing like a woman. Having men maintain a masculine appearance helps to prevent improper mingling of the sexes that can lead to immorality.

**IBN EZRA**

This mitzvah is intended make us look different than the non-Jews and teaches us to separate from their ways.

**SFAS EMES**

• The Torah strictly commands us: "v'lo sashchis es pe'as zekanecha" — you shall not destroy the corners of your beard. The Sfas Emes reveals that the word zaken combines the number seven and the word nest (kein). The seven days of building (shiv'as yemei ha-binyan) represent our seven basic emotional traits, such as love, restraint, and perseverance. In an undisciplined person, these emotions run wild and pull him in opposite directions. The spiritual task of an elder is to weave these seven traits into a harmonious, peaceful nest—a kein. When a person uses a razor to destroy his beard at the root, he harms the vessel that reflects this peaceful nest. By preserving our facial hair, we remind ourselves to keep our emotions aligned with divine truth, making our daily lives a welcoming home for Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Chayei Sarah 5649).

• In his very first recorded discourse on Parshas Chayei Sarah in 5631, the young Sfas Emes shared a profound insight from his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim. The answer lies in authentic wisdom: "zaken zeh she-kanah chochmah." True wisdom is an enduring acquisition (kinyan). It becomes engraved into our physical bodies and souls: "She-ha-chochmah kinyan etzlo, she-nisdabek bo she-lo l'shachecho klal, rak lihyos nitba bo b'guf va-nefesh." This psychological truth forms the bedrock of the prohibition against destroying the beard with a razor: "lo sashchis es pe'as zekanecha." A razor is unique because it cuts below the skin line, completely wiping out the visible root-impression (roshem) of the hair. Just as our spiritual accomplishments must remain firmly planted in our consciousness, our facial hair must retain its living root upon our countenance. By refusing the razor's destructive blade, we guard the living memory of our values, ensuring that our spiritual growth stays fresh day after day (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Chayei Sarah 5631).

• In his teachings on Parshas Tzav in 5647 and 5648, the Sfas Emes examines the holy anointing oil (shemen ha-mishchah) poured upon the High Priest. The Sfas Emes explains that the beard is a living bridge. Through this bridge, the pure wisdom of the mind descends into the active garments of emotional and practical life. He writes: "Hagam she-nignaz shemen ha-mishchah, mi-kol makom ha-ha'arah she-kibeil ha-Kohen Gadol nish'ar l'doros." Even though the physical oil was hidden away, the spiritual light received by the High Priest remains for all generations. When we guard our facial hair, we preserve a tangible reminder to let our wisdom guide our practical deeds. Our Torah study must flow downward into patience, generosity, and thoughtful speech (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tzav 5647).

• In Parshas Korach in 5652, the Sfas Emes explores a fascinating detail in King David's psalm. Why does Scripture repeat the word beard: "yored al ha-zakan, zekan Aharon" — "running down upon the beard, the beard of Aharon"? The Sfas Emes reveals the secret behind this miraculous vision. Aharon completely set aside his personal ego in his devotion to Moshe, the master of the Torah. Through this deep humility, Aharon's oral teaching merged seamlessly with Moshe's written words. Their two beards became unified into a single reflection of peace: "V'ha-

peirush she-biteil atzmo el Moshe Rabbeinu sar ha-Torah, v'na'aseh k'zakan echad." To destroy the beard with a blade represents discord and impatience. By preserving our facial hair whole and unmolested, we anchor our daily appearance in the peace of Shabbos and the forgiving mercy of Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5652).

• The Torah commands us in Parshas Kedoshim: "Mipnei seivah takum, v'hadarta pnei zaken" — "You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of an elder" (Vayikra 19:32). In Parshas Tazria in 5659, the Sfas Emes links this reverence to the original creation of humanity. King David declared: "Achor va-kedem tzartani" — "You formed me back and front" (Tehillim 139:5). We enter this world in a state of "achor", meaning posterior roughness. In childhood, our bodies are physically immature. Selfish desires often dominate our choices. But as we grow in Torah and character, our task is to journey toward "kedem"—the serene state of spiritual maturity where wisdom guides our actions. By keeping our facial hair intact, we honor the responsibility of adulthood. We wear the outward badge of a person who has chosen self-mastery, patience, and moral integrity over youthful vanity (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tazria 5659).

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ The mitzvah is not to cut your beard with a razor. Should one have a visible beard? Is it better to?

### INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Satmar Rebbe was very fond of Reb Elimelech "Mike" Tress. A couple of his chassidim complained to him once that they didn't understand why the Rebbe was so close to Mr. Tress, considering that he did not have a beard. "After 120 years," began the Rebbe with a warm smile, "they will say to him in Shamayim: 'Jew, Jew, where is your beard?' But to you, they are going to say: 'Beard, beard, where is your Jew?'"

*Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ All the Warsaw Ghetto laborers were ordered to shave their beards. Anyone who refused to comply was likely to be killed. Despite the danger, the Klausenberger Rebbe refused to shave his beard with a razor. His devoted followers tried to find a scissors or a shaver for him since these are permitted in halachah, but they were unsuccessful. The Rebbe therefore wrapped his beard and face in a handkerchief as if he had a toothache, so as not to be caught.

*The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press*

# 58. Not to wear clothing made of a mixture of wool and linen

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 181**

*As the Torah says, You shall not wear a mixed material, wool and linen together (Devarim 22:11, Parshas Ki Seitzei).*

### QUESTIONS ADDRESSED BY THE HALACHAH

▪ Cotton is called tzemer gefen, "vine wool". Can one wear cotton and linen?

- Is the prohibition only to weave wool and linen together? Can one attach linen tzitzis strings to a wool garment if the wool and linen is not woven together?
- Can a person wear shatnez for a few seconds, like to try a jacket on to see what it looks like?
- What if one gets no benefit from the shatnez, like if one is wearing many layers of clothing. Would it be permitted in that case?
- Is the intent behind wearing it a factor? For example can one wear it just as a means of carrying it?
- Does one have to check their wool blankets for shatnez?
- Can one sit on a couch made of shatnez?
- If you have a pile of mattresses and the bottom one is shatnez, can you sit on the top one?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

This prohibition is designated as kilayim of garments, commonly known as sha'atnez.

The halachic definition of 'wool' in this context refers exclusively to the wool of sheep and rams, combined with linen derived from flax.

Once wool and linen are combined through spinning, weaving, sewing, or any permanent attachment (shua, tavui, or nuz), the garment is biblically forbidden as kilayim.

It is strictly forbidden to wear a garment containing sha'atnez,

even for the briefest moment,

even over ten other garments where one derives no direct physical pleasure from its warmth,

even if worn solely to evade customs duties (mechus),

and even to drape it over oneself as a blanket or cover.

By rabbinic decree, it is likewise forbidden to sit upon mats, cushions, or spreads containing sha'atnez. Even if ten soft mattresses are stacked one atop another and only the bottom layer contains sha'atnez, it remains forbidden to sit on the top mattress if the material can wrap around the body.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

## HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Torah wants us to treat our bodies and all the material aspects of our lives in a way that will give us greater kedushah, greater mastery over our impulses. That kedushah helps us emulate Hashem's kedushah. This mitzvah, through its message (see below) and spiritual influence, gives us that kedushah.

## SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

**RABBEINU MENACHEM RECANATI**

Linen and wool are reminders of the first murder in human history, the conflict of between Cain and Hevel, who fought over their offerings of sheep (wool) and flax (linen). This mitzvah reminds us to avoid similar conflicts that can lead to murder.

### RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Plant species are marked by two functions, nutrition and reproduction. (In humans these faculties are sexuality and eating) Animals have these functions but have the addition of the faculties of intelligence and locomotion. Even though animals have these additional gifts, they use them merely to service their "plant" functions and use their intelligence simply to be better "eaters" and "reproducers".

Linen is made of plant material and wool is made of animal material. When we put on clothing, which symbolizes our humanity (because animals don't wear clothing) we are to remember to be different than the rest of the natural world, and not allow the gifts of our animal aspect, our intelligence, to become a slave to our plant aspect—our urge to reproduce and eat. We have to keep our intelligence (symbolized by wool) separate and free (kadosh) from our lower impulses (symbolized by linen). This mitzvah teaches us not to allow our intelligence to be controlled by our lower sensual impulses.

### SFORNO

Before the Jews received the Torah, the Jews wore clothes that were mixtures of wool and linen. After the Jews received the Torah Hashem wanted them to avoid wearing the clothes that were associated with their old pagan way of life.

### BECHOR SHOR (DEVARIM 22:11)

This mitzvah is to show respect to the bigdei kehuna, the clothing of the kohanim. Only kohanim are to wear mixtures of wool and linen. Wearing it would be like a commoner using the king's scepter.

### SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes reveals a remarkable map of human freedom. A person lives within five concentric circles. At the innermost center lives the soul (neshamah), guarded through Torah study and clean speech. Around the soul stands its first garment, the physical body (guf), kept healthy through the mitzvos and sealed by Bris Milah. Over the body rests our clothing (malbush), guarded from the confusion of sha'atnez and crowned with wings of freedom through tzitzis. Surrounding the person stands the home (dirah), protected by the parapet on the roof and sanctified by the mezuzah on the doorpost. Extending outward lie our fields and wealth (sadeh), liberated from greed through charity, gifts for the poor, and the boundaries of kil'ayim (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5659).

• In the second part of his 5655 discourse, the Sfas Emes addresses the famous legal exception: why does the Torah permit kil'ayim in the fringes of tzitzis? If combining wool and linen creates confusion, how does attaching fringes change the spiritual reality? Citing the Zohar, the Sfas Emes explains that following the sin, a coarse outer hide was placed upon the human frame. Man was tasked with refining creation through the very material in which he had stumbled. Yet within that coarse garment of skin, the Creator preserved a radiant point of light for the righteous: the holy covenant of Bris Milah! But when wool and linen are joined in the mitzvah of tzitzis, where the garment connects directly to its Divine source, the mixture loses all power to hide the light: At the source of freedom, all created forces stand united in holiness (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5655).

• In his celebrated discourse on Parshas Ki Seitzei (from 5655), the Sfas Emes proclaims a fundamental truth: "All the commandments of the Torah are given to grant true freedom to the human soul!" He explains the spiritual mechanism in memorable words. Notice the step-by-step logic of the Sfas Emes. First, what is the physical human body? To the soul within, the body is itself an outer garment. It is the vestment through which the soul serves the Creator in this world. Second, because the body is the garment of the soul, the fabric clothing we wear acts directly upon that bodily vessel. When Hashem took us out of Egyptian bondage, He liberated us completely. He commanded us never to perform any action or wear any clothing that locks our body back into material slavery (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5655).

• When our Sages list the classic decrees of the Torah whose reasons are hidden from human logic, they place sha'atnez alongside the Red Heifer. How does calling a mitzvah a royal decree answer our search for meaning? In Parshas Chukas (5632) and Parshas Bereishis (5634), the Sfas Emes explains: Every single decree of the Torah possesses a deep and beautiful reason! Why, then, is it called a decree (chukah)? Because the spiritual taste of a Divine decree cannot be grasped by someone standing outside, demanding rational proof before serving Hashem. Only when a person first accepts the commandment in faithful loyalty, setting aside selfish desires, does his spiritual sensitivity develop. Out of that acceptance, the Sfas Emes opens our eyes to see how guarding our clothes from mixed fibers preserves the freedom of our soul (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Bereishis 5634).

• Five years later, in Parshas Ki Seitzei (from 5660), the Sfas Emes returned to the connection between sha'atnez and tzitzis. The Sfas Emes explains: Hashem first took us out of Egypt to make us free people. Then He gave us the Torah — 613 wise counsels — to teach us how to remain free. Through these commandments, our soul avoids becoming entangled in materialism. To show how this works in daily life, the Sfas Emes maps out the concentric rings of our existence: mixing wool and linen introduces spiritual waste into the fabric of our clothing, while tzitzis brings freedom directly to our attire! Avoiding sha'atnez purges that confusion, while tzitzis lifts our clothing into an instrument of life and liberty (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5660).

**MORAL DILEMMAS:**

Avi owned an upscale suit store that catered to both Jews and non Jews Not all of his suits were checked for shatnez, there was however an area designated for suits that were pre checked for shatnez. This service was done for his Jewish customers. The suits in the "pre checked" section were more expensive. One day a distinguished looking non Jewish man walked into the store. He looked around the store and stopped by the sign that said "Shatnez Free Suits". The suits looked nice. Curious, the man turned to Avi, the proprietor. "Can you explain what shatnez is, and why these suits are more expensive?". Avi decided to answer in a way that he never did before. "Sure", Avi said. "Shatnez means a mixture of wool and linen. According to ancient Jewish wisdom, avoiding wearing materials made from shatnez is very beneficial for your overall well being." The man was curious and said, "I am very passionate about wellness, wellbeing and all sorts of homeopathic and holistic treatments, and I'd like to try out the shatnez free suits". With the intent to buy a suit that was "better for his well being", the non Jewish customer bought a shatnez free suit, which was about 50 dollars more expensive than the regular suits. Later Avi thought about the exchange and wondered if he did the right thing. The man paid fifty dollars extra for a shatnez free suit. But non Jews are not commanded to avoid shatnez. Was there any benefit at all for him? Perhaps telling a non Jew that shatnez is better for his wellbeing is "gneivas daas", tricking him. He wondered if perhaps he should track him down and return the extra money. Is there any benefit at all for a non Jew to avoid wearing shatnez?

**Answer:** Regarding the question about whether a non Jew who avoids shatnez gets a "wellness benefit" Rav Zilberstein gave a fascinating answer. He cites the Netziv (Haamek Davar, Vayikra 19:19) who said that in addition to being a mitzvah, avoiding shatnez also has a practical effect on our body. The Netziv continues that "it is known among scientists that if you take a string of wool mixed with linen, and tie it around a telegraph wire, that it stops the (electrical) flow of the telegraph from going through". In a similar vein shatnez has a physical effect on a person and blocks certain flows of hashpa'ah. Therefore even a non Jew will have wellness benefits from wearing a shatnez free suit.

*— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Bereishis, p. 107*

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ R' Yitzchak Zilber became a leader of Russian Jewry and would travel to Russia from Eretz Yisrael in order to teach Torah. One day he returned to Russia after being away for a while in order to maintain a low profile for the Russian authorities. He was approached by a man who looked very poor, haggard, and was dressed in tattered clothing. The man was very excited to see him. He was holding a nice coat. "Rav Yitzchak, it is so good to see you back here again. I bought this coat seven years ago to wear during the winter. I have not worn it yet because it has not been checked for shaatnez. Can you please check this coat for shatnez for me. It was clear that this man was very poor, and he certainly needed the coat during the winter, but he waited for seven years. Rav Yitzchak was awed at this man's commitment to the mitzvah of shatnez.

*Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology*

## LIVING IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

*The mitzvos in this section ask us to emulate Hashem holiness by living in the holy land of Israel and infusing our lives with a spirit of holiness*

# 59. To live in Eretz Yisrael

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Ramban Hasagos Positive Commandment 4, Sefer Chareidim Chapter 59**

*As the Torah says, You shall henceforth return no more that way. (Devarim 17:16, Parshas Shoftim)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Are there exceptions to allow one to live out of Israel?
- Can you give some examples of the benefits of living in Eretz Yisrael?
- which is preferable, to live in a non-Jewish city in Israel or a Jewish community out of Israel?
- If someone can't live in Israel, where else should they live?

**SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR**

It is forbidden for an individual to depart from Eretz Yisroel to the Diaspora, with the following exceptions:

To travel abroad in order to study Torah;

To find and marry a wife;

To rescue one's life or property from hostile gentiles;

One is likewise permitted to travel abroad temporarily for commercial trade; however, it is strictly forbidden to emigrate permanently to live in the Diaspora unless famine in Eretz Yisroel has become severe.

Whoever resides in Eretz Yisroel has his sins forgiven, as Scripture states: 'The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity' (Yeshayahu 33:24). Even one who merely walks four cubits within Eretz Yisroel merits eternal life in Olam HaBa, and one who is buried in its soil achieves atonement.

A person should always choose to dwell in Eretz Yisroel, even in a city whose majority is gentile, rather than live in the Diaspora, even in a city populated entirely by Jews. For Chazal taught that whoever dwells outside the Holy Land is considered as if he has no God (Kesubos 110b).

Just as it is forbidden to depart from Eretz Yisroel to foreign lands, the Sages similarly prohibited leaving Babylonia — the primary center of Torah scholarship — for other lands in the Diaspora.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

**SEFER CHAREIDIM**

Every Jew is obligated to love Eretz Yisroel and to journey toward it from the four corners of the earth with profound yearning, like a child rushing into the warm embrace of his mother. The root of the tragic sin of the Spies (Meraglim) — which caused Tisha B'Av to become an enduring day of weeping for generations — lay in their disdain for the Holy Land, as Scripture laments: 'They despised the desirable land' (Tehillim 106:24). Conversely, our ultimate redemption is directly catalyzed by our heartfelt devotion to its sacred soil, as the Psalmist declares: 'You will arise and show mercy upon Zion... for Your servants hold her stones dear, and cherish her dust' (Tehillim 102:14–15). It was for this reason that the great Amora'im would kiss the rocks of Eretz Yisroel and roll lovingly in its dust upon arrival (Kesubos 112a).

How sweet and pleasant it is to sing the songs of yearning that Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi composed out of his burning love for Zion! We sing these holy piyutim beside the gravesite of the Tanna Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai on every Erev Rosh Chodesh with intense joy, beseeching the Almighty never to banish us from the Holy Land.

Both those residing near and those dwelling afar in the Diaspora must continuously yearn for her, for just as Hashem chose Klal Yisroel, He simultaneously chose Eretz Yisroel and designated it exclusively for them. We are not fully realized as a unified people unless we dwell upon her soil, as R' Shimon bar Yochai expounded on the verse: 'And who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the land' (Divrei HaYamim I 17:21) — only within the Land are they called 'one nation.'

We find in the Midrash that when the Almighty first instructed our forefather Avraham to journey to Eretz Yisroel, he observed its beauty and returned. For the subsequent five years, Hashem withheld permission for him to go back, during which Avraham longed intensely for the Land, applying to himself the verse: 'Who will give me wings like a dove, that I might fly away and find rest? Behold, I would wander far off and lodge in the desert' (Tehillim 55:7–8) — teaching that it is preferable to dwell in the barren wilderness of Eretz Yisroel than in the grandest palaces of the Diaspora. When divine permission was finally granted, Scripture records: 'And Avram went, as Hashem had spoken to him' (Bereishis 12:4). Before his first visit, he did not grasp its splendor; but once he witnessed with prophetic vision the sublime holiness and glory of the Land, his soul was consumed with yearning. We, his descendants, must emulate Avraham's devotion: to long for Eretz Yisroel with our entire being, embracing any material hardship of living there with genuine joy.

This explains the profound juxtaposition between the commandment to blot out Amalek at the end of Parshas Ki Seitzei and the commandment of entering the Land in Parshas Ki Savo. Chazal taught that the Almighty bestowed three precious gifts upon Klal Yisroel, each acquired exclusively through trials and suffering: the Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and Olam HaBa (Berachos 5a). Just as Amalek assaulted us when we first journeyed toward the Holy Land, so too during the ultimate ingathering of the exiles, when the Jewish people strive to return to Eretz Yisroel, forces of spiritual opposition and adversity will ambush them along the way — as we witness in our own times; may Hashem look down in judgment and deliver His people.

The opening verse of Parshas Ki Savo begins with the word 'Vehayah' ('And it shall be when you come into the land...'), which spells one of the twelve permutations of the Four-Letter Ineffable Name of Hashem. This reveals that one who dwells in Eretz Yisroel is intimately bound to the Shechinah, unlike one living in the Diaspora,

regarding whom Chazal stated that 'whoever lives outside the Land is considered as if he has no God' (Kesubos 110b). Furthermore, this divine permutation is embedded in the word vehayah because Chazal established that wherever vehayah appears, it signifies pure, holy joy (Megillah 10b).

The Ramban establishes in his enumeration of the 613 mitzvos (Positive Commandment 4 in his Hasagos to the Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos) that every single moment a person resides in Eretz Yisroel, he actively fulfills the positive biblical commandment of dwelling in the Land (yishuv Eretz Yisroel). Moreover, the principal heavenly reward for any commandment depends upon the joy with which it is performed, as Scripture rebukes: Because you did not serve Hashem your God with joy and gladness of heart' (Devarim 28:47). Therefore, one privileged to live in Eretz Yisroel must maintain constant simchah out of profound love for this mitzvah. At the same time, this joy must be coupled with awe and trembling, for Rabbi R' Shimon bar Yochai taught in the Zohar that any mitzvah performed without both love and fear is incomplete, and as taught in Avos d'Rabbi Nasan, one must always combine sacred rejoicing with holy trembling in the fulfillment of every divine command.

Thus, the word vehayah at the threshold of entering the Land signifies the essential joy demanded by this mitzvah, while the juxtaposition with Amalek evokes the reverent trembling one must maintain before the heavenly strap of divine judgment. The tribulations of living in Eretz Yisroel — whether arising from hostile surroundings or personal illness — function as altars of spiritual atonement. Through the physical trials endured in the Holy Land, a person's sins are cleansed and forgiven, as Scripture promises: 'And His land will atone for His people' (Devarim 32:43). This spiritual purification applies to transgressions for which one has sincerely repented, allowing these tribulations to cleanse the neshamah so that upon departure from this world, it ascends directly to Gan Eden.

Conversely, those who dwell in Eretz Yisroel without recognizing that they stand within the King's royal palace, indulging in sin and hedonistic banquets, are condemned by the prophet: 'You entered and defiled My land, making My heritage an abomination' (Yirmiyahu 2:7), and Scripture cries out: 'When you come to appear before Me, who requested this of your hand, to trample My courtyards?' (Yeshayahu 1:12). Let such individuals not imagine that resting in the soil of Eretz Yisroel after death will grant them immunity; as taught in Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 34), the souls of the unrepentant wicked buried in the Holy Land are cast outside its sacred borders, fulfilling the verse: 'The soul of your enemies He shall sling away, as from the hollow of a sling' (Shmuel I 25:29). In the future, the Almighty will take hold of the edges of the Land and shake it clean of all defilement, as it is written: 'To seize the corners of the earth, that the wicked be shaken out of it' (Iyov 38:13).

The Ramban explains in his commentary on the Torah (Vayikra 18:25) regarding the laws of forbidden relationships (arayos): 'And the land became defiled; therefore I visited its iniquity upon it.' This reveals that although the prohibitions of arayos are personal obligations of the body (chovos haguf) rather than land-dependent commandments (chovos ha'aretz), the primary spiritual essence and ultimate fulfillment of all mitzvos is realized specifically by those who dwell in the Land of Hashem.

We are likewise taught in the Sifrei on the verse, 'Let not the land vomit you out for defiling it' (Vayikra 18:28), that Eretz Yisroel is unlike any other territory on earth, for its sacred nature cannot tolerate transgressors. This is illustrated by the Samaritans (Kutim), who were not punished for their idolatry in their native lands, but when relocated to the Land of Hashem and continuing their corrupt ways, Hashem unleashed lions upon them

(Melachim II 17:25). Therefore, every Jew must be filled with profound reverence upon setting foot in Eretz Yisroel, doubling his fear of Heaven far beyond what he practiced in the Diaspora, consciously aware that he resides within the royal palace of the King.

**HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:**

There are mitzvos of action that we do that can fill us with kedushah, a spirit that strengthens our resolve to do what Hashem wants, helps us listen to our yetzer tov, helps us control our impulses and thereby emulate Hashem.

There are also times that fill us with kedushah, like the Yamim Tovim.

Finally, the Torah teaches that there are places that can fill us with kedushah. This mitzvah encourages us to reside in a country that elevates us with a surge of kedushah. This kedushah allows us to resemble Hashem and His Kedushah.

**SFAS EMES**

• Our Sages in the Gemara (Berachos 48b) teach that Moshe instituted the first blessing of Birkat HaMazon—"ha-zan"—when the Manna fell from heaven in the desert. Yehoshua instituted the second blessing—"al ha-aretz v'al ha-mazon"—when our ancestors crossed into the Land of Israel and ate its produce. In Parshas Masei in 5643, the Sfas Emes asks a sharp question. Why does our tradition praise the fruits of the Land above the Manna? Surely bread raining down from heaven was a greater miracle than wheat harvested from the dirt! When we live in the Land, farming and working are not distractions from spiritual life. They are the holy tools through which we bring Hashem's blessing into the physical world (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Masei 5643).

• In Parshas Acharei Mos, the Torah delivers a solemn warning regarding ethical and family purity: "V'lo saki ha-aretz eschem b'tame'achem osah, ka'asher ka'ah es ha-goy asher lifneichem" — "So that the land will not spew you out when you defile it, as it spewed out the nation that was before you" (Vayikra 18:28). In 5648, the Sfas Emes reflects on the Toras Kohanim, which teaches that the very presence of Israel on the land made the earth sensitive to moral corruption. Why does the Land of Israel react so strongly to human wrongdoing? The Sfas Emes compares the Holy Land to a living, sensitive body. When a healthy body encounters a toxic substance, it immediately expels it to protect its health. Dwelling in the Land is a constant call to moral vigilance. It challenges us to build a society where honesty, compassion, and modesty govern our communities (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5648).

• Our Sages in the Sifrei teach that dwelling in the Land of Israel equals all the commandments combined. Why, then, did the generation of the Wilderness hesitate to enter the Land? The Zohar teaches that we are created to serve Hashem in two distinct ways: through speech (b'milula) and through physical action (b'uvda). Pure contemplation is beautiful, but the ultimate purpose of creation is to perform the commandments through physical deeds (ner mitzvah). The Sfas Emes writes: "Ha-dor ha-midbar hu bechinat Torah Or, u'va'ei ha-aretz bechinat ner mitzvah — L'meiphlach l'Kudsha Berich Hu b'milula u'v'uvda — U'feiresh milah d'kaima b'uvda." The hidden truth of the Torah can only be realized when brought into the soil and practical work of daily life! In the Land of Israel, every field and stone can become a sanctuary for Hashem. Dwelling in the Land equals all the mitzvos because it takes our faith out of the clouds and proves that ordinary physical life can be sanctified (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5647).

• In Parshas Eikev, the Torah contrasts the agriculture of Egypt with that of the Holy Land: "Ki ha-aretz asher atah va shamah l'rishtah, lo ch'eretz Mitzrayim hi — V'hishkita v'raglecha k'gan ha-yarak." He explains that Egypt represents the illusion of independent nature. Because the Nile flooded regularly, an Egyptian farmer could irrigate his crops through mechanical canals alone, without ever lifting his eyes to Heaven. But the Land of Israel was designed to break that illusion. The Sfas Emes writes: "Eretz Yisrael hi she-lo k'hanhagas ha-teva — Ach l'Bnei Yisrael nasan Hashem Yisborach Eretz Yisrael lihyos kol ha-berachah k'fi ma'asim tovim." In the Land of Israel, abundance is not an accident of nature; it is tied directly to our ethical conduct and prayer. Dwelling in the Land turns our daily bread into an intimate conversation with our Creator. We step out of the numbness of routine nature and experience how Hashem tenderly cares for our physical needs every day (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5646).

• When the Spies returned from scouting the Land, they spread a frightening report: "Eretz ocheles yoshveha hi" — "It is a land that consumes its inhabitants" (Bamidbar 13:32). In 5653, the Sfas Emes asks: why were the Spies so terrified of this description? Citing the Zohar, he explains that the Land of Israel rests upon the attribute of strict divine justice (al dina kayma). In the Holy Land, Hashem's unmediated presence watches over everything. It is like a consuming fire (eish ochlah Hu). When people live with hypocrisy or cruelty in such an environment, the land cannot tolerate their presence. The Spies panicked because they viewed this strict standard through fear. Dwelling in the Land teaches us not to run from Hashem's demanding standards. We embrace His truth, knowing that within His justice lies the warmest love of a caring Father (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5653).

### RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss the kedushah of Eretz Yisrael.
- Discuss the idea of there being greater hashgachah pratis in Eretz Yisrael.
- Discuss why Israel is such a contested area.
- Discuss the importance of living within a strong Jewish community.

### MORAL DILEMMAS:

Chaim and Rachel lived in America and wanted to purchase real estate in Eretz Yisrael in order to fulfill the mitzvah mentioned by the Avnei Nezer (Yoreh De'ah 454), who writes that even for Jews living in the diaspora it is a great mitzvah to purchase land in Eretz Yisrael that will be settled by Jews. They did not plan to live there immediately but hoped one day to settle in Eretz Yisrael when it made sense. In the meantime, the land would be rented by Jews. They narrowed down their choices to two options. One option was to buy land in the holy city of Tsfas. The other option was to buy land in Chevron, not far from the Mearas Hamachpela. Tsfas is a city that is filled entirely with Jews, but, being a relatively “modern” city it does not have any significance in the times of Tanach. Chevron on the other hand, is primarily populated by non-Jews, and would be difficult to ever live there. However Chevron, the city of the Mearas Hamachpela, is one of the holiest cities in the world. Chaim and Rachel wondered where it would be preferable to purchase land. Would it be better to purchase land in a city filled with Jews? Or would it be better to purchase land in a very holy city filled with gentiles? What do you think?

**Answer:** Citing Responsa Yeshuos Malko and the Tashbetz (Vol. 3, Siman 198), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein notes that while purchasing land anywhere in Eretz Yisrael fulfills the mitzvah of yishuv Eretz Yisrael, the territory of Yehudah (which includes Jerusalem and Chevron) possesses an added dimension of sanctity ('l'shichno tidreshu') over the Galil, as the

> Sanhedrin intercalated the calendar specifically in Yehudah.
>
> *— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 279*

**STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:**

❖ It once happened that Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira, Rabbi Matya ben Charash, Rabbi Chanina the nephew of Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Yonatan were forced to depart from the Land of Israel to go abroad. When they reached the border town of Paltos and remembered the Land of Israel, they lifted their eyes, tears streamed down their faces, they tore their garments in grief, and they read the verse (Devarim 11:31–32): '"And you shall possess it and dwell in it, and you shall be careful to perform all these statutes"—dwelling in the Land of Israel is equal in weight to all the mitzvos in the Torah!' And it further happened that Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua and Rabbi Yochanan HaSandlar were traveling abroad to Nisibis to study Torah under Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira. When they reached Sidon on the northern border and remembered the Land of Israel, they lifted their eyes, tears streamed down their faces, they tore their garments, and they read the verse: '"And you shall possess it and dwell in it, and you shall be careful to perform all these statutes"—dwelling in the Land of Israel is equal in weight to all the mitzvos in the Torah!' Immediately they turned right around and came back to their home in the Land of Israel.

*Sifrei Devarim 80 (on Devarim 12:29; Yalkut Shimoni Remez 885:2)*

❖ Many ignorant or simple people in Eretz Yisroel looked down upon the Jews of Babylonia. R' Zera once went to purchase something, and he told the storekeeper to measure it properly. The storekeeper got angry and told him, "Get out of here, Babylonian, for your forefathers destroyed the Holy Temple!" R' Zera was amazed and said, "Aren't my forefathers as his forefathers?" Later R' Zera heard R' Shila teach from a verse in the Song of Songs (8:9): "Had all of Israel gone up from the exile (and not remained in Babylonia), the Holy Temple would not have been destroyed a second time." R' Zera then said, "I have learned well from an ignoramus."

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachos 8:9*

❖ When Rabbi Zeira ascended to the Land of Israel and reached the Jordan River, he could not find a ferryboat to cross. Unable to wait another moment to set foot in the Holy Land, he grasped the rope-bridge and crossed hand-over-hand through the rushing water! A certain Sadducee mocked him: 'Impetuous nation, who put your mouths ahead of your ears at Mount Sinai (saying "We will do and we will hear")—you still persist in your rashness!' Rabbi Zeira answered him: 'A place that Moses and Aaron did not merit to enter—who says I will merit to enter it if I delay even a single moment?!' Rabbi Abba used to kiss the rocky cliffs of Acco upon arriving in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Chanina used to bend down and clear the stumbling stones from its roads so that no one would speak ill of the roads of the Land of Israel. Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Assi used to move their study session from the blazing sun into the shade and from the freezing shade into the warm sun so that their students would never complain about the weather of the Land of Israel. And Rabbi Chiya bar Gamda used to roll in its very dust, fulfilling the verse (Psalms 102:15): 'For Your servants cherish her stones, and hold her dust dear!'

*Talmud Bavli, Kesubos 112a–b*

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:**

❖ Rav Shlomo Mordechai of Boyan visited Eretz Yisrael in 1949. When he arrived, he arranged for a driver to take him from Tel Aviv to Haifa. When the taxi came, four chassidim escorted him along the way, hoping that they would be able to spend some time talking to their Rebbe. They hoped to hear some of his insights and divrei Torah. Perhaps he would share with them some stories about great tzaddikim, instead, the Rebbe stared out the taxi window the entire time. Not a word was spoken. Moreover, when he arrived, he did not get out to visit anybody. Instead, he asked the driver to take him back to his apartment in Tel Aviv. And he did not stop looking at the scenery on the way back, either. The chassidim were

completely befuddled; they could not understand why he would have taken a pointless ride. Finally, they arrived back home. When they did, the chassidim asked their Rebbe why he had wasted over two hours of his day going on a leisure ride. What was he hoping to see? The Rebbe smiled as he answered them. "The pasuk says (Devarim 11:12), 'Tamid Einei Hashem Elokecha bah — The Eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it [Eretz Yisrael].' If the Ribbono Shel Olam is looking at the Land, then there must be something beautiful to see. That is why I was looking at it. To see what He sees."

*Touched By Their Tears, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Few things were more important to Reb Elyah Lopian than sincere motives. Rav Moshe Aaron Stern recounts that he was once walking outside with Reb Elyah when they came across a laborer repairing the street. "See how this Jew is so completely involved in a mitzvah," commented Reb Elyah, "the mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisrael. What is" lacking in his efforts? Only his intention — his intention should be that he is working for the sake of a mitzvah. For if a person's intention when performing such labor is merely to earn a livelihood, he loses the entire value of the mitzvah!"

*Reb Elya, By David J. Schlossberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Even at a young age, Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus, ever attuned to increasing kevod Shamayim, sought opportunities to perform mitzvos and prevent situations that detracted from the honor of Hashem and His mitzvos. His yeshivah friends relate that when he was living in Yerushalayim, he would occasionally daven in the Meah Shearim shteiblach. As customary, the gabbai auctioned off aliyos and mitzvos, yet these rarely sold for substantial sums of money, especially during the week. "Drei shekel far di mitzvos! Tzen shekel... Three shekels for the mitzvos! Ten shekels..." but never more. Sometimes, the gabbai couldn't raise even the starting three shekels per aliyah... Rav Shimshon couldn't bear that mitzvos were being auctioned off for several paltry shekels, without any takers! He was pained by what he perceived as a gross chillul Hashem, and whenever he bore witness to such an instance, he would come to the rescue and purchase all the aliyos himself. Eventually, this became so commonplace that many local Yerushalmim simply looked upon him as a young, wealthy American tourist who could easily afford to throw around his money, although nothing could be farther from the truth. His impassioned desire to increase kevod Shamayim and prevent chillul Hashem in the world simply overrode any financial consideration.

*From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll*

❖ An avreich did not understand the custom that no one receives the aliyah of the Tochachah (the long list of punishments that will befall us if we are not faithful to the Torah). "An aliyah to the Torah is a mitzvah," he asserted. "What do I care what they read from the Torah when they call me up?" The avreich then explicitly requested that they give him the aliyah of the Tochachah! Not long after this incident, the young man received a letter from overseas, telling him that a childless relative of his had died and left him a large inheritance. "Please come to the lawyer's office in person," said the letter, "to sign the forms and attend to all accompanying legal matters." The avreich traveled abroad as the letter required, only to discover that he had to invest a large amount of time and energy to run the business he had inherited. He became an extremely wealthy man. Shaking his head sadly as he told this story, Rav Chaim Kanievsky lamented, "Here we see how careful we must be not to make light of a minhag Yisrael (custom of our nation). Look how this person was punished! He was forced to give up his immersion in Torah and instead became wealthy and immersed in his business!" To Rav Chaim's way of thinking, that's how the words of the Tochachah were fulfilled.

*From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll*

❖ In the 1930s, a tourist visited one of the chachmei Yerushalayim. The discussion turned to the subject of living in Eretz Yisrael. The elderly tzaddik asked the man if he would live in Yerushalayim. The tourist explained that he would never live in Yerushalayim. "just look around," he said, "at how many rachmanus (pity) cases there are here. So many meshuga'im (crazy people). I would never live here!" The tzaddik asked him where he lived. The man told him that he came from Denver. "You know what?" said the tzaddik, "Someone just told me that Denver is full of people who suffer from tuberculosis. Why would

you live there?" The foreigner responded that many of those people contracted the disease elsewhere. "They only come to Denver because of the clean crisp air, in order to recuperate. It is one of the best places in the world to get better. They didn't get sick in Denver." The old sage smiled. "The same is true here in Yerushalayim. It is true that many sad cases live here in Yerushalayim. There are so many people who have so many tzaros. But they developed the tzaros elsewhere. They come to Yerushalayim because this is the best place in the world to get better."

*Touched By Their Tears, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A noted personage in the Zionist movement once came to see Reb Aryeh Levin. When the visit was over, the rabbi went to accompany the man a short distance on his way (as his custom was). As they left the house together, there were religious children of the neighborhood playing near the threshold, engrossed in their games. Reb Aryeh stooped down and patted their faces with fatherly (or grandfatherly) affection; and he murmured, If it is a mitzvah to have a compassionate love for the stones and earth of the land of Israel — as Scripture says, Thy servants hold her stones dear and compassionately treasure her dust (Psalms 102, 15) — how much more do we have to love the children of the land!".

*A Tzadik in Our Times, By Simcha Raz, Published by Feldheim*

❖ Rav Yochanan Twersky, the Rachmistrifka rebbe once visited his brother. His brother had a custom to honor his guests with the finest wine from Eretz Yisrael. He however asked if he can have wine specifically from chutz la'eretz. Afterward he was asked what was wrong with the Israeli wine. He said I really don't enjoy wine. I took it out of respect for my brother. Drink it with great discomfort. But if I would have wine from Eretz Yisrael, I would have negative feelings and thoughts about the fruit of Eretz Yisrael. That is something I have to avoid at all costs.

*Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, by Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 216*

❖ In a few days, Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl would be flying to chutz la'aretz (outside the Land of Israel). His assistants said they would get him a first-class ticket, which is much more comfortable and spacious than economy class. However, Rav Avigdor told them that he wanted to sit in economy class at the back of the plane. On the return trip, though, he would like to sit in first class at the front of the plane. The request left them puzzled -- what was the difference between the two flights? When asked for an explanation, Rav Avigdor said, "I want to be in Eretz Yisrael for as long as possible." On the way out, economy class leaves Eretz Yisrael after first class. On the way back, however, first class enters Eretz Yisrael before economy class. "But it's only a difference of a thousandth of a second!" someone pointed out. Rav Avigdor's response was emphatic: "Do you know how much Moshe Rabbeinu was willing to give just to be in Eretz Yisrael for a thousandth of a second?"

*From At His Table, Published by Israel Bookshop*

❖ When the Gifters returned to Cleveland, they decided to live in an apartment in the Yeshivah dormitory, instead of the house they had left two years earlier. The reason for this is astounding: Rav Gifter said, "I cannot live in a permanent home anymore in chutz la'aretz [out of Israel]! I can't!" He knew that he truly wanted to be in Eretz Yisrael, but was just biding his time until Mashiach arrived. In an extraordinary act of self-sacrifice, the Rebbetzin did as she had always done, and followed the wishes of her husband.

*Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ The Brisker Rav was once asked his impressions of the mountain views of Switzerland. "This," he answered, "is the beauty of Eretz Yisrael in exile in Switzerland.

*The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 425*

❖ Reb Berel Ludmir, was a well-known esrog dealer. He would always come to America for Succos, and we had a yearly tradition to bring daled minim to many local Rebbes. Each year the same thing would happen. Reb Berel Ludmir would earmark five or six esrogim for the Admorim, the nicest ones he had. He would then visit the Rebbes, offering each one their choice. The Rebbes would always study them carefully, deciding between one and the other. "When we arrived at the Kozhnitzer Rebbe, it was always different. When we would enter, his eyes would light up. 'Eretz Yisrael 'dik esrogim?' he would ask. His ahavas Eretz Yisrael knew no bounds, and he could barely contain his excitement. My father-in-law would place the boxes on the table, and the Rebbe would select one of the closed boxes at random. 'They are all from Eretz Yisrael; they are all beautiful,' he would say, 'I don't have to check.' Then he would open it up, and call in his Rebbetzin. 'Look,' he would say, 'Isn't this the most beautiful esrog that you've ever seen?' Though the esrogim were a gift, he always insisted on paying for them." My grandfather is smiling broadly, "I'll tell you something interesting," he says. "We always checked the esrogim first, and we knew which was the nicest one. Every single year, it was inevitable, the Kozhnitzer Rebbe, who just selected a box at random, always ended up with the nicest one.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ A Russian soldier once wrote to the Chofetz Chaim that he has no opportunity to come close to Hashem. There is no Shabbos, no shul, no learning. The Chofetz Chaim wrote back, if you feel that it is impossible to do a mitzvah, and you feel starving for kedushah, whenever you have a free moment, face east and talk to Hashem. When you face east you are channeling your thoughts to Yerushalayim and thereby uniting yourself to the rest of the Jewish people and to Hashem. That will put you in Yerushalayim. Even if a Jew is removed from Yerushalayim, Yerushalayim will never be removed from him.

*Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 168*

❖ At a chasunah, a minyan was formed, but no one knew the direction of Mizrach. "Simply turn until your heart starts to beat faster." commented Rav Hutner.

*Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Kahaneman was originally the rav in Ponevezh, Lithuania. During the war, he wanted to save his family from the impending danger and made arrangements for them to leave the country. Tragically, they were not able to get out in time. He lost everything, but was determined to rebuild. When the naysayers tried to talk him out of buying a plot of land to rebuild the yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael, which was in grave danger itself at the time, the rav answered them, "Klal Yisrael needs a yeshivah. Even if it is only for ten days!" Such was the vision and conviction of the Ponovezher Rav. Nothing would stand in his way. Such great men are sometimes lacking in the social skills that make them approachable to the common man, but that is where the rav was so different and unique. Our story begins in Teaneck, New Jersey. Max Rosenberg, a prominent member of the community and a successful lawyer, suffered a heart attack. His doctors told him that it was time to take it easy, and suggested that he retire and move to Florida. Max refused. He kept on working until a year later, when he was diagnosed with a malignant tumor. This time the doctors prescribed treatment, and, baruch Hashem, Max was healed. Nevertheless, he needed no more convincing; he retired and moved down to Florida even though he was still nearly 15 years away from the time he had originally planned to retire. As a means of supporting himself, he bought an annuity that was to pay him until he was 90 years old. He figured that he would be gone long before the annuity ran out. He could not have been more wrong. The Ponovezher Rav first met Max when he was in his 80's. The rav would come down to Florida for a period of around three months in the winter to raise money for the yeshivah. The first time they met, Max gave him $5,000. The rav was impressed with Max, who was a smart man and a sincere Jew. A year later, the rav went to Max again, and once more Max gave him $5.000. This pattern continued for the next few years. But finally, during one visit, the rav was told by his driver, Reb Berel, that since Max had turned 90, his annuity had ended. He had no more money to give the yeshivah. In fact, Reb Berel said, Max may be short of cash even for his own needs. The rav said that he wanted to visit Max

anyway. Reb Berel was concerned that maybe Max would be embarrassed that he was unable to donate, but the rav prevailed. They arrived at Max's home and rang the doorbell. Max answered the door. The look on his face said it all. He knew he could not give the rav the check for which he had come. They sat down to have some coffee and cake as Max explained the situation: that the annuity he had purchased had now expired, and he did not have enough to give anymore. The rav thanked him for all the support he had given the yeshivah over the past years, and said that now it was time for the yeshivah to pay him back. "From now on, every single month, the yeshivah is going to send you money in the amount of your annuity check!" Max's face lit up. He thanked the Rav, but politely refused. Nevertheless, the Rav did not listen to his refusals. And so it was: every single month for the next seven years, the yeshivah sent Max a check. It may have been the first time a yeshivah supported its supporters, instead of vice versa. This is the way Max was able to live for the rest of his life. And what do you know? A few months after Max passed away, the yeshivah received a letter from the lawyer handling his estate. He had no children and he left his mansion on Pine Tree Drive to the yeshivah. Years later, Reb Berel would discover that, in fact, the rav had given his own money for Max's living needs. This, Reb Berel thought, gave a whole new meaning to fund-raising" — a much deeper and more profound meaning than Reb Berel could ever have imagined.

*A Touch of Warmth, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah*

❖ Rav Yitzchak Epstein traveling up to Rosh HaNikrah to welcome Rav Shach and his family when he first arrived in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Shach was forever grateful to him. His gratitude brought him to give Rav Yitzchak his own burial plot on Har Hamenuchos, next to that of his Rav and uncle, Rav Isser Zalman. Here is the story as told by my father and teacher Rabbi Meir Tzvi Bergman, shlita, in the eulogy he gave for Rav Shach during the shivah: When Rav Isser Zalman departed to the eternal world and was buried on the heights of Har Hamenuchos, that plot of land, in which some of our greatest men are buried today, was still empty. Rav Isser Zalman was one of the first to be buried there, and Rav Shach, the Rosh Yeshivah, whose soul was bound with that of his great Rav, expressed a wish that when the time came, he would like to be buried near him, and he acted upon his Wish, purchasing a burial plot near that of the gaon Rav Isser Zalman. Some years later, Rabbi Yitzchak Epstein, zt"l, who served as a dayan on the beis din of Tel Aviv and was a regular visitor at Rav Isser Zalman's house, passed away at an early age. By that time, there was no longer an available spot in that burial ground, Rav Shach, zt"l, was grateful to him ever since the day he came to Eretz Yisrael, for having come to escort him from Rosh Hanikrah at Rav Isser Zalman's behest. And that being the case, he gave up the plot he had bought; next to Rav Isser Zalman's grave, and gave instructions for Rabbi Yitzchak Epstein to be buried there. On the same occasion, my father and teacher, shlita, spoke of Rav Shach's sincere and devoted concern for Rav Yitzchak's family after his passing. An example he related that every Shabbos Rav Shach would leave his house in Kiryat Ponevezh, Bnei Brak, and climb the hill of Givat Rokach, he would visit Rebbetzin Epstein's house to test her young children on studies.

*Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 433*

❖ It was on August 16, 1939, that Papa and Mama began their voyage to Eretz Yisrael. They were scheduled to dock at Haifa port on Wednesday, August 30. Arrangements were made for Papa and Mama to stay in Haifa for a few days at the home of Rabbi and Mrs. Alfa, where Avremal was boarding. In mid-route, the captain received orders to sail in a circuitous route in case the waters of the Mediterranean Sea had been mined because of the impending war. And so, instead of arriving on Wednesday as scheduled, the boat docked on Friday, September 7, one hour before sunset. A few hours before that, World War II had erupted with the German invasion of Poland. From the loudspeakers came the announcement that passengers were to debark immediately. All the baggage from the hold of the ship would be unloaded onto the pier, and the passengers would be responsible for having it removed as quickly as possible. Pandemonium reigned. Papa and Mama were terribly upset. It would soon be Shabbos! How could they take care of their baggage when they would have to leave the port immediately in order to get to Rabbi Alfa's house in time for Shabbos? Papa grabbed the suitcase that contained his sefer Torah and his tallis and tefillin, and Mama took only her pocketbook. They edged their way through the pier and asked to be shown to the head customs officer. A tall English officer listened as Papa explained to him, "I cannot deal with our

baggage now. I have never desecrated the Shabbos in my life. To arrive in the Holy Land and desecrate it here is impossible!" Tears rolled down Papa's cheeks. The officer answered curtly, "Rabbi, this is war you must make allowances." "Just stamp our passports and let us through.' We'll pick up our baggage after the Shabbos," Papa pleaded. "That will not be possible. We are removing all the baggage from the ship and leaving it on the pier." "I don't care about our baggage! Please, just stamp our passports so we can leave." The officer looked at Papa quizzically: "How much baggage do you have?" "Sixteen crates in the hold and nine suitcases in our cabin." "What?! Do you realize that once you leave here, your baggage will be on the pier with no one responsible for it? By tomorrow night, I assure you, you will not find a shred of your belongings. The Arabs will have stolen them all," the officer said emphatically. "I have no alternative. It's almost time for the Shabbos, and we cannot travel on the Shabbos. Please, please, just clear our passports and let us go," Papa's voice rose in desperation. The officer, incredulous, called to another English officer, "Stamp their passports and let them through. This rabbi is willing to lose all his belongings in order to get to where he's going in time for their Shabbos." The second officer stared at Papa in amazement, as he stamped their passports and cleared their papers. Papa, clutching the suitcase with his sefer Torah, and Mama, holding on to her pocketbook, grabbed a taxi and arrived at Rabbi Alfa's house just in time for Mama to light the Shabbos candles. That entire Shabbos, Papa was spiritually elated. Over and over again he repeated to Mama, "The Boss does everything for me. What could I ever do for Him? Now at last I have the zechus to give all for the Boss for His mitzvah of Shabbos and to be mekaddesh Hashem." For Mama it was difficult to share his elation fully. She was physically exhausted and bereft emotionally. The loneliness for her children weighed heavily on her mind and heart. The additional loss of all her worldly possessions was not an easy pill to swallow. But Mama did not complain, and being with Avremal comforted her. Saturday night, after Papa had waited the seventy-two minutes after sunset to say his evening prayers and then make havdala, Rabbi Alfa suggested to him, "Let's go to the port. Maybe some of your crates are still there." Papa and Mama did not share his optimism, but they went along with him. It was pitch dark at the port. However, they spied a little light at the far end of the pier. As they neared the lighted area, a clipped English voice rang out, "Who goes there?" Papa called out, "Some passengers from the boat that docked late yesterday afternoon." The English guard approached them. "What is your name?" he asked tersely. "Jacob J. Herman," Papa answered. "Well, well, Rabbi, it's about time you put in your appearance. I was assured that you would be here the minute the sun set. You are a little late. I have been responsible for your baggage for more than twenty-four hours. My commanding officer said he would have my head if any of your baggage was missing. Kindly check to see that all is in order and sign these papers. Please remove it all as quickly as possible I am exhausted!"

*All for the Boss, By Ruchoma Shain, Published by Feldheim Publishers*

❖ Rav Meshulam Dovid Soleveitchik told over the following story about when the Brisker Rav escaped from Vilna to go to Eretz Israel: Since we had a lot of luggage, our friend R. Moshe Prager, who had been a shochet in Brisk, offered to take our bags to the train station for us, and we were happy to accept his offer. He left before us so that he would have enough time to load them onto the train. On our way to the train station we were informed by some friends that R. Moshe had been arrested by an N.K.V.D. agent, who had seen the heavily loaded wagon and had become suspicious. He accused him of being a "Schmulker" (black marketeer), and nothing R. Moshe said would convince him otherwise; R. Moshe was therefore duly hauled into the nearby police station. On his way, he was, fortunately, able to send word to the Brisker Rav, informing him of what had happened, and asking him to come personally to the station to verify his story so that he could be released. Only half an hour remained before our train was to leave Vilna for Moscow. If we were to miss the train, all our efforts including the significant traveling expenses, which had been prepaid — would go to waste. We would have to repeat the whole exhausting process involved in preparing for the trip. We were also afraid that our father would not be able to get out of the police station so easily. Getting in was, of course, no problem, but getting out was a different story... On the other hand, a Jew who had done us a favor was in serious trouble, and he might have to pay a heavy price on our account, God forbid. This was the point that decided it in the end, and The Brisker Rav ruled that it was prohibited to leave a Jew in such circumstances, especially when his trouble was due to a favor he had done for them. Therefore, he, The Brisker Rav, would go to the police station, while the rest of the family would leave for the train station, and he would follow

immediately after he would finish testifying in favor of R. Moshe. There was a large crowd waiting at the train station to bid the Brisker Rav farewell, among them the rabbanim of Vilna, including R. Chanoch Henich Eigish, the author of the Marcheshes, who was later murdered by the Nazis. The family waited anxiously, watching the clock as the minutes went by with no sign of their father. The tension was immense... only ten minutes left, now five... The train was about to leave. At the moment the train was about to move, The Brisker Rav appeared, carrying their many bags under his arms, running quickly — something that he normally would not have had the strength to do. He came through the short tunnel in the station, and, as-soon as he had set foot on the train, it began to move. The Brisker Rav said then that it was evident from this incident that when one does his duty, no loss comes of it. He had been obligated to save R. Moshe, and in the end, they did not even lose their luggage. Among the passengers on that train were the Rosh Yeshivah of Mir, R. Eliezer Yehudah Finkel, zt"l, and his family, and other bnei Torah. Their route was Vilna — Moscow — Odessa. From there, they would travel by boat to Istanbul, the capital of Turkey and continue on to the port of Beirut, just north of the Holy Land.

*The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 489*

## A. NOT TO RETURN TO LIVE IN EGYPT

**(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 192**

*As the Torah says, You shall henceforth not return that way. (Devarim 17:16, Parshas Shoftim)*

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can one go to Egypt just to visit?

#### SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

It is permitted, however, to travel to Egypt for temporary commerce and trade, as the biblical prohibition forbids only permanent settlement and dwelling there.

### SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

#### SEFER HACHINUCH

One should not return to Egypt because he will learn from their corrupt worldview and lifestyle.

#### SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Va'etchanan and Parshas Shoftim, the Torah issues an absolute historical boundary: 'You shall not return that way anymore,' which the halachah codifies as an eternal negative commandment forbidding permanent dwelling in the land of Egypt. The Sfas Emes explains that ancient Egypt was far more than a geographical territory; it was the spiritual fortress of natural materialism. Geographically, Egypt was sustained not by rain falling from heaven, but by the predictable, natural flooding of the Nile River. This natural irrigation produced a culture that worshiped nature, denying divine providence and claiming with Pharaoh: 'My river is my own, and I have made it for myself.' Egypt was the ultimate expression of human arrogance, materialism, and closed natural determinism. We were redeemed from Egypt to live as free souls who look to heaven for our sustenance. By refusing to worship material security, we walk in the supernatural blessing and freedom of the Exodus (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5633).

• In the liturgy of Hallel, King David proclaims the universal cry of human redemption: 'From the narrow straits (min hametzar) I called upon Hashem; Hashem answered me with expansive liberation (bamerchav yah).' The holy Chassidic masters dwell upon the etymological connection between the Hebrew word for narrow straits (metzar) and the name of Egypt (Mitzrayim): Egypt is the ultimate archetype of constriction. The Sfas Emes explains that constriction (katnus hamoach) is a psychological state wherein a person's consciousness is trapped inside fear, anxiety, and petty material concerns. In Mitzrayim, human beings were obsessed solely with survival—food, shelter, physical comfort, and escaping the whip. Their minds were narrowed to the immediate present, incapable of contemplating eternity, nobility, or self-transcendence. The Exodus was an expansion of consciousness (gadlus hamoach). Whenever we feel overwhelmed by petty worries and worldly stress, we are slipping back into the narrow straits of Egypt. By lifting our eyes to Hashem, we break free from constriction and step into the expansive peace of divine redemption (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5634).

• In Parshas Vayigash, Scripture describes the aging patriarch Yaakov descending to Egypt with his entire family: 'And he sent Yehudah before him unto Yosef, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen.' Our Sages in Maseches Shabbos make an astonishing observation: 'Yaakov Avinu was worthy of being brought down to Egypt in iron chains, but his merit saved him, and he descended with royal honor.' Why was Yaakov's descent to Egypt considered an unavoidable necessity, yet permanent resettlement there was strictly forbidden for all future generations? The Sfas Emes explains that Yaakov descended to Egypt solely to fulfill a temporary divine mission. We are on a sacred mission to sanctify Hashem's name wherever we live, but our hearts must always remain turned toward Jerusalem. By remembering that we are temporary travelers, we preserve our longing for the ultimate redemption (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayigash 5642).

• In Parshas Re'eh, the Torah commands the release of the Hebrew servant in the sabbatical year, concluding with the powerful reminder: 'And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today.' Throughout the Torah, dozens of commandments—from Shabbos to the festivals, from charity to returning lost objects—are explicitly grounded in the historical memory of the Exodus: zecher litzi'as Mitzrayim. The Sfas Emes reveals how every commandment functions as an ongoing act of emancipation. The Sfas Emes explains that Egyptian slavery was the ultimate manifestation of human beings treating other human beings as mere property, tools, and beasts of burden. In Egypt, a person was valued solely for his economic output—how many bricks he made and how much profit he generated for the state. Every mitzvah we perform breaks an invisible chain and brings light into the world. By living faithfully according to the Torah, we walk as truly emancipated children of the living God (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5641).

• In the Passover Haggadah, we proclaim the foundational narrative of our national origins: 'At first, our ancestors were idolaters, but now the Omnipresent has drawn us close to His service.' Our Sages teach that the Egyptian exile was the iron furnace (kur habarzel) in which the Jewish nation was purified from the ancestral dross of idolatry. The Sfas Emes examines the spiritual danger of re-entering a vacated spiritual grave. The Sfas Emes explains that Egypt was the epicenter of ancient occult idolatry, practicing dark arts that bound human consciousness to the lowest demonic forces of nature. When Hashem redeemed our ancestors from Egypt, He performed an absolute, irreversible spiritual rupture. The Almighty did far more than emancipate slaves; He tore the Jewish soul completely out of the spiritual matrix of paganism. When we break free from destructive habits,

> toxic environments, or past mistakes, we must never look back. By maintaining a clear, irreversible boundary against our past, we protect our hard-won freedom and walk forward with confidence (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5632).