

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARASHAT RE'EH

If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream, and he will produce to you a sign or a wonder. (13:2)

The Torah addresses us concerning the navi sheker, false prophet. Although the Torah refers to him as a prophet, he certainly is not one. As the Ramban explains, this is a term by which he refers to himself. He is a prophet in his own mind. The cholem chalom, the individual who presents a dream--through which he seeks to incite the people against Hashem-- is no different. Anything that serves as a vehicle for turning Jews away from the Almighty is absolutely false. Dreams do, however, have validity. We will see certain episodes whose halachic implications are based upon the support rendered by a dream.

In his Zos HaTorah, Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita cites the following incidents in which a dream played a crucial role. Horav Meir Simcha HaKohen, zl, m'Dvinsk, author of the Ohr Sameach and Meshech Chochmah, writes in his commentary to Parashas Kedoshim, Vayikra 19:9, "This (explanation) is from a dream." This is what gedolei Yisrael dreamed about: a question on Tosfos; a difficulty in the Yerushalmi; understanding a Rambam. Their lives were bound up in the Torah; their entire subconscious minds were suffused in Torah. Is it any wonder that when they "slept" their thoughts gravitated to what was important in their lives? Furthermore, their dreams served as a medium of communication with the Eternal World of Truth.

Horav Nachum Baruch Ginzberg, zl, author of the Mekor Baruch, writes in the preface to his magnum opus that once, upon visiting the Ohr Sameach, he encountered him extremely filled with joy. Since the Ohr Sameach was an individual who was usually serious, this display of joy was idiosyncratic. Noticing the look of surprise on Rav Nachum's face, the Ohr Sameach said, "I was just inspired with an insightful chidush, novel explanation, and shortly thereafter I dozed off. When I slept I noticed in the Heavenly Yeshivah that a group of the greatest Torah leaders of the past generations were sitting deep in discussion. They pointed out that, regrettably, in the contemporary physical world, no one is able to explain the Talmud in accordance with the truth of the matter. Current explanations lack accuracy. Suddenly, the Rashba arose and countered, "In Dvinsk, there is a rav who has been able to zero in on the truth even better than I." This is a reference to the statement made by the Rashba in one of his Responsa in which he is compelled to correct the text of the Talmud, because it otherwise does not make sense. The Ohr Sameach, however, had explained it perfectly!

The Techeles Mordechai, Horav Shalom Mordechai Schwadron, zl, fell asleep on Rosh Hashana night and dreamed that he had been awakened from his sleep by someone who asked him, "Do you want to see the Sifrei Chaim and Sifrei Meisim, the Books of Life and Death?" When he replied in the affirmative, he was told that he would be allowed to look for one minute. He saw the names of a number of Jews with whom he was acquainted that had not been entered in the Book of Life. He later remarked that, unfortunately, what he had seen in his dream had become reality.

Another time, he related that he dreamed on Shabbos night that the Heavenly Tribunal was judging a certain bachur, young man, a student in his yeshivah, concerning chillul Shabbos, desecrating the Shabbos. At first, this seemed ludicrous-- until after Shabbos, the young man approached him that he needed advice concerning the process of teshuvah, penance and repentance. Apparently, he had been smoking his pipe while he was learning on Erev Shabbos, and he had not noticed that it was past shekiah, sunset. He immediately accepted upon himself his rebbe's advice for repentance.

Horav Moshe, zl, m'Kutzi, author of the S'MAG, an acronym for Sefer Mitzvos Gadol, writes in his preface that he was instructed in a dream to "make a Sefer Torah of two parts." Staring at the vision, he "understood" that it was expected of him to author a compendium of mitzvos: Aseih, positive commandments, and Lo Saaseh, prohibitive commandments, which he did. Furthermore, when he failed to include one Lo Saaseh, he once again was corrected in a vision with the words, "Guard yourself, lest you forget Hashem, your G-d." He had never before experienced this as a prohibitive commandment.

In the sefer, Ohr Zarua, Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Vienna, writes that he was unsure if the name of the Tanna Rabbi Akiva should end with an alef or a hay. In a dream, he "saw" the pasuk, Ohr zarua la'tzadik u'lyishrei lev simchah, "Light is sown for the righteous, and for the upright of heart, gladness" (Tehillim 97:11). The last letters of the words of this pasuk spell out the name Akiva - with a hay. This prompted him to entitle his major work Ohr Zarua.

A number of such incidents have been recorded by Rishonim in their commentary or responsa. In fact, Horav Yaakov of the Baalei Tosfos authored an entire sefer entitled Sheilos U'Teshuvos Min HaShomayim, a compendium of eighty-nine questions, which he asked Heaven, receiving answers for all but one: When would Moshiach arrive?

The Chasam Sofer writes in his Derashos: "Surely, there are instances in which the righteous are foretold concerning events that will occur that can have a negative effect on Klal Yisrael. Hashem does this so that the righteous will prepare, remaining firm and resolute in order to prevent the decree from occurring." He adds that a number of times he had dreams that served as such a portent.

The Seder HaDoros writes that the mother of Rav Yechiel, father of the Rosh, was a young widow with three young sons. One Friday night, she dreamed that a woman came to her, instructing her to immediately leave the city. She woke up with a shudder, but soon went back to sleep. The dream repeated itself, as the woman appeared once again with the same warning. This time, the mother grabbed her three sons and fled to the outskirts of the city where she sought refuge in the home of the gentile laundress. At daybreak, a band of robbers attacked the sleeping village, plundering, killing and wreaking havoc. She returned home with her three sons. The entire Torah world are the fortunate beneficiaries of that dream.

You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting. (14:22)

Our parsha teaches us about the laws of tzedakah, charity, and maaser, tithing. The relationship between the two occurs in the third and sixth years when one is commanded to give Maaser Ani, tithe for the poor. Indeed, in the Talmud Shabbos 119A, Chazal teach that Aser bishvil shetisasheir, "Tithe so that you will become wealthy." They are indicating a corollary between opening up our hearts and wallets and the reward of increased wealth. In other words, one does not lose anything by giving charity. On the contrary, he gains.

Tzedakah is a powerful mitzvah, one that generates much merit for the benefactor. After all, it is included with teshuvah, repentance, and tefillah, prayer, as one of the three vehicles for abrogating a Heavenly decree. Hashem listens to the individual who is charitable. Charity plays a compelling role in catalyzing a positive response from Hashem. Why? What about charity -- more so than other mitzvos -- invokes Hashem's "cooperation"?

Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, cites the Talmud Shabbos 151b, where Chazal state: "Whoever has compassion on people, they will have mercy on him in Heaven." This means that by showing compassion for a fellow human being, one arouses the reservoirs of Heavenly Mercy, which catalyzes Hashem to "sit" on the Throne of Mercy, rather than on the Throne of Strict Justice. We pray for this during the closing Neilah prayer on Yom Kippur, when we ask Hashem: "O Attribute of Mercy, overflow upon us; and before Your Creator, cast our supplication, for the sake of Your people, request mercy; for every heart is pained and every head is ill." How do we generate that overflowing of mercy? Tzedakah accomplishes this in the same way that teshuvah and tefillah do.

We have to offer gratitude to those who share their wealth with others, because not only do they help the individual, but they also engender a flow of Heavenly mercy. This idea applies to acts of chesed, lovingkindness, as well. In the Talmud Bava Basra 10A, Chazal relate that Turnus Rufus Caesar asked Rabbi Akiva, "If your G-d loves the poor, why does He not sustain them?" Rabbi Akiva replied that it creates an opportunity for other Jews to be generous and to help their brethren, thereby mitigating their own punishment for the sins that they might have committed. Rabbi Akiva supplements this with an analogy. A king became angry at his son and disciplined him by incarcerating him in a dungeon without food or drink. A man went on his own initiative to bring food to the prince. Did the king appreciate the individual's gesture? Certainly! He could not feed his son, because it would have undermined his own punishment, but he surely did not want his son to perish. Thus, anyone who went behind his back to reach out to his son, would be rewarded. Likewise, we Jews are considered Hashem's children. He will, therefore, compensate anyone who helps His children.

What greater merit can we seek for ourselves than "alleviating" Hashem's burden? He must support His children, but, sometimes, He cannot as part of the discipline He must enforce. He does appreciate, however, anyone who "helps" Him by sustaining His children.

Horav Nossen Wachfogel, zl, the venerable Mashgiach of Beth Medrash Gavohah was wont to relate an incident which he heard as a student in Kelm, Lithuania. One night, during the month of Elul, the month reserved for serious introspection and extreme exactitude in all mitzvos as preparation for the High Holy Days, the Alter of Kelm, Horav Simcha Zissel Braude, zl, had a dream. In the dream, he envisioned that Rabbeinu Yonah, the Rishon who authored the Shaarei Teshuvah, the handbook for repentance, was coming to Kelm to give a shmuess, ethical discourse. Imagine, Rabeinu Yonah himself would speak in the city known for its singular devotion to spiritual integrity, meticulous observance of mitzvos, and character refinement during the month of Elul! This was the opportunity of a lifetime. The time was announced, and word was spread throughout the town.

At the appointed time, every Jew in Kelm had arrived and waited patiently, excitedly and with

great trepidation to enter the bais hamedrash where the sage would hold forth. Understandably, the paragon of mussar, ethics, was waiting to enter. The guard at the entrance to the beis hamedrash asked the Alter to identify himself, which he did. One can only begin to imagine the surprise and eventual shock and dismay when the guard did not permit the Alter to enter. "How could this be?" the Alter asked. "I must enter." He began to beg, relating the many z'chusim, merits, he had. He called forth the multitudes of students he had directly or indirectly influenced, his meticulous observance of mitzvos, his illustrious lineage; none of this seemed to impress the guard. Nothing moved him. Rav Simchah Zissel was not going to gain entrance to the shmuess. Finally, the teacher exclaimed, "You should know that my son is Rav Nochum Velvel!" When the guard heard whose father he was, he immediately allowed him to enter the bais hamedrash. It was at this point that the Alter woke up. Disturbed, he immediately called for his saintly son and related the dream to him: "What merit did you have that superseded every argument that I presented? What did you do that was so unique that only because of your merit was I permitted to enter?" Clearly, the Alter had taken his dream quite seriously.

When Rav Nochum saw that his father was quite agitated, he related the following story. Apparently, for quite some time, Rav Nochum had been wearing a pair of thread bare, worn out and torn shoes. There was limited money, and whatever money they could scrounge, shoes were simply not a priority. Once, he had occasion to be at the shoemaker's shop and he saw an excellent, sturdy pair of shoes for sale. Realizing that the price of the shoes would put him back a bit, he decided to save for them. Every week, he would put away a few pennies which he was able to hoard. Finally, the day came, and with great excitement, Rav Nochum took his savings, proceeded to the shoe store and purchased the long awaited pair of shoes. He could now walk wearing sturdy shoes that would allow him to have the necessary support with a certain degree of comfort.

Shortly thereafter, on a freezing cold wintry night, he heard a feeble knock at his door. He rose from his studies to answer the door, to be greeted by a poor man who was going door to door begging for alms. The man was dressed in tattered clothing with not even a coat to protect him from the inclement weather. Rav Nochum motioned him to come into the house and gave him a warm drink. As the man stood up and was about to leave, Rav Nochum noticed that he was not wearing shoes.

Furthermore, his feet were bloodied and blistered, frostbitten from the cold and snow. "Where are your shoes?" Rav Nochum asked. "They are not my first priority. When one does not have what to eat, he first seeks to calm his hunger pains, then he worries about shoes," the man replied. Rav Nochum did not flinch for a moment. He immediately removed his shoes and gave them to the poor man. "Here, you surely need them more than I," he said.

Rav Nochum turned to his father and said, "Probably it was that act of chesed that earned me the merit, so that you could enter the room to listen to Rabbeinu Yonah's shmuess."

When one performs acts of chesed with no ulterior motive other than to help his fellow Jew, it demonstrates his overwhelming love for Hashem and His children. Such a selfless act of kindness has the capability of catalyzing an incredible spiritual flow of Heavenly mercy for himself and for the world.

You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field, year by year. (14:22)

The Talmud in Shabbos 119A comments: Aseir bishvil shetisasheir, "Tithe, so that you will become wealthy." What is the reason that giving tzedakah increases one's material assets? Horav

Shimon Shkop, zl, explains that all material and spiritual abundance that comes to us from on High is granted for one purpose: to benefit the collective Jewish nation. The individual Jew is nothing more than a caretaker of his personal portion, holding it in place for an opportunity when it can better serve the klal, Jewish community at large. As with any caretaker who shows promise when he performs well in supervising a small cache, he is likely to be rewarded with a larger treasury placed under his guardianship. Likewise, one who provides excellent care and return for the gifts granted him by Hashem will eventually receive greater opportunity to display his devotion and expertise. Of course, one who fails in his initial test will not be granted other opportunities for failure. Thus, one who tithes his money will receive greater material abundance - so that he can share even more with others.

Rav Shimon adds that this idea applies equally to one's talents and abilities. They are also G-d-given gifts, granted to us for a purpose: to serve the collective Jewish people. Thus, one who has been blessed with the ability to inspire, to influence others either by example or by teaching them, should do so. This is also a form of tzedakah. It is a common error to allege that charity is performed only with money. Time and skill, talent and expertise, are likewise valuable assets that one can - and should - share with others.

Horav David Lipshutz, zl, and Horav Leib Malin, zl, both students of Rav Shimon Shkop once stayed after a shiur, lecture, to further discuss the subject. After almost an hour of discussion, the two talmidim apologized to their rebbe for taking up so much of his precious time. It was at this point that he explained that *aseir ta'aseir, aseir bishvil shetis'asheir*, does not apply solely to money. It is relevant to every area of one's possessions: physical, material and spiritual. Therefore, a rosh yeshivah who disseminates Torah to many students, a function that requires much time on his part, whether it is in devoting time to prepare a shiur or spending time talking with a student, guiding and inspiring him, is performing a tithing. He is contributing his gifts, so that others may grow spiritually. He will be rewarded by having his "time" multiply, so that he will be able to be mechadesh, prepare novellae and penetrating shiurim, in much less time than he had previously.

In an addendum to the above, Horav Dov Eliach, master author and biographer, quotes Rav Shimon's grandson that in his later years when Rav Shimon's health was failing, his doctor suggested that he "cut back" and desist from saying his shiurim. Rav Shimon replied that the only reason Hashem grants life is for the purpose of acting on behalf of Torah and its related causes. Otherwise, why should he live? Therefore, on the contrary, the more he teaches, the more he will be blessed. The more time expended, the more time he will be granted. After all, *aseir bishvil shetis'asheir*.

In the event he will say to you, "I will not leave you" ...then you shall take the awl and put it through his ear and the door, and he shall be for you an eternal slave. (15:16,17)

A Jewish bondsman is sold for a period of six years in lieu of his debt incurred by stealing. If he decides to continue his servitude beyond that period, his ear is drilled with an awl against the doorpost. Chazal explain that the ear was selected, rather than any other organ because it "heard" at Har Sinai the admonition of Lo Signov, "Do not steal," yet this man ignored the prohibition and stole. Horav Arye Levine, zl, explains that his first act of stealing which catalyzed his *avdus*, servitude, is something that could be understood. Everyone errs in some manner. This fellow lapsed by stealing. It is a stumbling block. Therefore, when one steals, his ear is not drilled, because his indiscretion is a sign of a frailty within the individual - something which can be acknowledged and even, to some extent, understood, based upon the circumstances that led to his downfall.

His desire to remain a servant, to give up on life in society, to escape reality and responsibility, however, is an indication of a deeper problem. It demonstrates a lack of *bitachon*, trust, in the Almighty.

He loves his master, and places his entire trust in a human, ignoring Hashem. For that, his ear is drilled. There is no place for yiush, hopelessness, among the Jewish people. It is more than a lapse in behavior - it is a sign of faithlessness, an indication that one has given up and broken with his faith. He exclaims, "I love my master," placing his hopes and aspirations in a human being of flesh and blood, while ignoring Hashem. One who rejects the Almighty and instead relies on human intervention deserves to have a reminder imprinted in his ear, so that the folly of his misplaced trust will be something that he never forgets.

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

The word re'eh, see, is written in lashon yachid, the singular form, while the word lifneichem, before you, is written in lashon rabim, the plural form. Why? Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, explains that while the Torah is speaking to the rabim, wider community, at times the yachid, individual, must make a critical decision to act counter to the rabim. Hashem wants each individual to look at the mitzvah, the endeavor, the situation, with a critical eye and act in consonance with that which the Torah dictates - even if the community does not agree. Indeed, sometimes the individual must stand up against the community. A community is comprised of individuals. Thus, each member of the community has his own moral and spiritual imperative to do the right thing - even if it is not a popular or accepted decision. Some individuals are afraid to make waves, to rock the boat, to do his own thing. To him the Torah says: "Re'eh," in the singular, you, individual see, on your own, without the effects of communal pressure. Nothing is wrong with being in the minority - when one is right. The Jewish nation has had this experience throughout the millennia. Avraham Avinu stood up against a world of idol worshippers. Our Torah leadership, throughout the generations, has followed suit, doing what is necessary to uphold the faith against tremendous pressure and overwhelming odds.

One should never belittle the efforts of an individual - even in his own eyes. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, attempts to dissuade the individual from taking action, challenging whether one person can really accomplish anything. Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, comments that one should view the entire world as if it is on a scale with an even balance of virtue versus demerit. One act of virtue, one positive act, can change the balance in favor of z'chus, merit. We will never know the consequences until we make the attempt.

Re'eh, see, does not just mean to glance at something. It means to delve into the matter and take note of what one observes. In this sense, Rav Baruch understands the Torah's admonition to look deeply into the concept of blessing and curse, to understand the reality and true definition of blessing and curse and to choose cautiously. At a simpleú perfunctory glance, one might misconstrue blessing for curse and confuse the two. To all appearances, a life filled with accumulating the various material pleasures that this world has to offer is a life of blessing. Success is to be measured by pleasure and more pleasure. According to this perspective, the life of one who is cloistered, who is sheltered from the moral decay of contemporary society, who lives a lifestyle in which values are measured on a spiritual -- rather than on a physical -- scale, is a life of curse. After all, what kind of enjoyment does he have? Where is his pleasure?

If one delves with a discerning eye, however, he "sees" a completely different vision. He sees what true pleasure is, how to define enjoyment, what is lasting and what is temporary. We can demonstrate the variegated approaches to "seeing" something at face value versus intrinsic worth. Let us take the concept of death, for example. Mortality is a sobering and frightening concept, an idea that

catalyzes two approaches. Some say: "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die." We do not live forever, so we might as well enjoy it while we can, and cram in every type of pleasure that is humanly possible. After all, we only live once. This hedonistic attitude is regrettably prevalent in today's culture and society. Another approach is one that takes into consideration that life truly is not forever. Thus, we must prepare ourselves for the time in which we will have to take our final journey. Are we prepared? Surely, indulging in every form of moral decadence is not the way to pack our bags for that journey. When one thinks about death, he should realize the value of life. People make the mistake of thinking that life is a destination, when, in fact, it is only a journey. It all depends on how one "sees."

You are children to Hashem, your G-d - you shall not cut yourselves...for a dead person. (14:1)

One of the many detestable practices employed by the pagans was to cut themselves as a sign of mourning. This expression of grief is abominable. A Jew should understand that, as children of Hashem, we have a special relationship that does not allow us to act in such a manner. In contrast, our perspective on death is quite different than that of the world around us. Death is the bridge that we must traverse in order to gain access to Olam Habah, the World to Come. Grief is certainly a natural outlet for the loss that we feel, but everything - even grief - has a limit. To lose control to the point that one mutilates his body is carrying grief too far, manifesting a distorted view of death and mourning.

Indubitably, one's faith in Hashem can best be measured during a period of travail. The vicissitudes of life challenge one's true conviction. When life is filled with sunshine, and everyone has a rose garden in his backyard, it is quite easy to declare one's emunah, faith, in Hashem. When the road of life becomes filled with obstacles, one displays his true character. In Sefer Tehillim 92:3, David HaMelech writes, "To relate Your kindness in the dawn and Your faith in the darkness." The true test of faith is to maintain one's belief even during periods of darkness.

The Zohar HaKadosh relates, "All songs are holy; [Shlomo HaMelech's] Shir HaShirim is Kodesh Kodoshim, Holy of Holies." What is the significance of Shir HaShirim such that it towers over all other songs of praise? Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, explains that Klal Yisrael sang their other songs at a time of redemption, success, or freedom. Shlomo HaMelech, however, wrote his famous Song of Songs to express his praise to the Almighty specifically at a time of hikuni; He hit me, pitzuni; He wounded me, periods of exile, pain and travail. This is a true expression of faith.

The Belzer Rebbe, Horav Aharon, zl, lost his entire family during the Holocaust. His chassidus was decimated to the point that he was lucky to put together a minyan, quorum, of followers. Yet, he refused to comment about the tragedy. Many a time, his close followers begged to hear about what had occurred, but he refused to speak. He would relate, however, the many miracles that took place during his personal rescue from Europe. In fact, he decided to celebrate his survival with a seudas hodaah, a festive meal of thanksgiving to Hashem. His chassidim were surprised that he would do such a thing after having sustained the decimating tragedy of the loss of his family and his European chassidim. After pressing him a number of times for an explanation, he finally relented and gave the following response:

The Torah tells us concerning the exodus from Egypt, that Va'chamushim alu Bnei Yisrael me'erezt Mitzrayim, "Bnei Yisrael were armed when they went up from Egypt (Shemos 13:18)." According to the Midrash, the word chamushim, armed, is derived from the word chomesh, a fifth, implying that only one fifth of the Jews left Egypt. The rest were not prepared to begin a new life in a

foreign land. They would rather stay in the spiritual depravity of Egypt. As a result of this attitude, they were punished. They died out in a plague during the three days of darkness that enveloped Egypt. Therefore, only a small portion of the great Jewish nation survived Egypt. Yet, we find that after the splitting of the Red Sea, the people sang Shirah, a song of praise and thanksgiving to Hashem. How could they sing with the full knowledge that so many of their brethren had perished in Egypt?

Chazal teach us that from the Torah's vernacular of Az yashir, which means, "Then (he) will sing," rather than Az shar, "Then (he) sang," we derive that Techias ha'meisim, resurrection of the dead, is min haTorah, alluded to in the Torah. What is the meaning of Chazal's statement? They are teaching us a powerful and valuable lesson about life. When a person knows that this world is nothing more than a preparation for a better, external world, for the world of Olam Habah, then he is able to sing shirah, even under the most extreme, painful situations. The fact that the Jews sang shirah to Hashem after leaving Egypt, knowing that they were just the few survivors of a nation of three million men, is proof positive that they understood with clarity of belief that the others were not really gone. This is why I am able to sing shirah, despite the heavy losses that we as a People and I as an individual have sustained. I believe that they have gone on to a better world and that one day we will all be reunited.

Our sages have been proficient in comforting those who are overcome with grief, because they believe what they say and write. They believe unequivocally that the deceased are in Olam Ha'Ba, in a better place. Thus, when they attempt to give solace and comfort to the bereaved, they speak with conviction. The words which emanate from their hearts, enter into the hearts of the bereaved. I take the liberty of sharing unique words of consolation with the reading audience.

In a letter to his sister-in-law and nephews, upon the sudden passing of their husband and father, Horav Yonasan Eybesch?tz, zl, wrote: "You have lost a father of flesh and blood, but you have gained Hashem as your Father, for He is called 'the Father of orphans and Judge of widows. (Tehillim 8:6)' It is a fact that orphans are among the most successful in Torah study, in wisdom, and in fear of Heaven. This is the result of Hashem's special supervision, for He is compassionate to orphans."

In his commentary to Devarim 14:1, the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes, "One must realize that death is not a loss to the deceased - he has simply departed for a different place, similar to a person who travels abroad for an extended stay, but expects to return to see his loved ones again."

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, writes, "If the cessation of the body was the cessation of the man himself, there would be no consolation in mourning, but it is not so! The body ceases, but the person remains alive. Emunah does not recognize death. The deceased is alive; he is aware and feels and is close to his relatives always. Believe and be faithful and light will then shine upon your ways forever."

Some individuals "claim" that they do not believe in Techiyas Ha'Meisim - or so they say. Horav Reuven Elbaz, Shlita, relates that he once walked by two men who were in a dispute concerning the veracity of Techiyas Ha'Meisim. One was observant, the other was not yet observant. Understandably, the observant Jew posited that there would one day be a resurrection of the dead. The other individual told him that it was impossible, absolutely totally unbelievable. Hearing this statement, Rav Elbaz approached the scoffer and said, "My friend, I promise you that you will not arise during Techiyas Ha'Meisim!"

"Why do you curse me?" the man asked, somewhat frenzied.

"I am not cursing you!" the rav replied. "After all, you do not believe in Techiyas Ha'Meisim. Why would it bother you when I assure your exclusion from an event in which you do not believe?"

Any rational person understands what has taken place. As usual, the skeptics claim not to

believe. Their lack of belief lasts until they are excluded from an experience, or until they have exhausted all other attempts at validating their disbelief. Everybody seems to turn to Hashem when he enters the emergency room.

Last, I relate an episode cited by Horav Yehudah Tzadakah, zl. The venerable Rosh Yeshivah would relate the following story when he visited with aveilim, mourners. Horav Yisrael Abuchatzera, zl, the saintly Baba Sali, had a brother who was referred to as the Baba Yitzchak. He was rav of Ramalah until his untimely, tragic death in a car accident. The Baba Sali was inconsolable. Grief-stricken, he would cry bitter tears during the night. One night, out of sheer exhaustion, he dozed off and his late brother, the Baba Yitzchak, appeared to him, challenging him, "I am in Gan Eden, and you weep?"

You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field, year by year. (14:22)

The Midrash Tanchuma derives from the compound verb, aseir te'aser, that the second word, te'aser, should be read as te'asher, you will become wealthy. Thus, the Torah is teaching us that if one tithes and gives to the poor, he will become a wealthy man. One should not complain that contributing to charity depletes his portfolio. Hashem will not only make up his losses, this loss will ultimately be the foundation of his material success. This is surprising since we rarely find osher, material wealth, equated with anything positive. Wealth is certainly a wonderful gift from Hashem, but it is one that is fraught with challenges, which many are not able to surmount. Shlomo HaMelech reiterates this idea numerous times in both Sefer Mishlei and Sefer Koheles. Why then would the Torah encourage tithing and add that it will be the precursor of wealth?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, takes a novel approach to explaining the reward of osher. In the Talmud Nedarim 38a, Chazal state that Hashem rests His Presence only on one who is strong, wealthy, wise, humble, etc. Apparently, ashirus, wealth, is one of the criteria for achieving the level of nevuah, prophecy. Clearly wealth is not all negative. What are Chazal trying to tell us? We turn to the Rambam in his Shemoneh Perakim, Perek Shevii, seven, where he states, "A prophet will not prophesy until after he has acquired all of the maalos he'sichliyos, intellectual virtues, and most of the maalos ha'middos, ethical virtues. This is implied by Chazal in the Talmud Shabbos 92a, 'The spirit of prophecy will rest solely on a wise man, who is valiant and wealthy.' The term 'wise man' surely includes all the intellectual virtues. The term 'wealthy' includes all the ethical virtues, for it refers to the quality of histapkus, satisfaction. In Pirkei Avos 4:1 Chazal consider a person who is sameach b'chelko, satisfied with his portion, to be wealthy. This means a person who is happy with what fortune presents him and does not grieve over what fortune does not present him.

This is the underlying idea behind Chazal's statement of aseir bishvil shetiasher, "Tithe so that you will become wealthy." They want a person to develop the middah of histapkus, satisfaction. This is perfected through the giving of Maaser. When one sets parameters to how much he keeps for himself, when he places limitations on his material and physical objects of desire, and instead shares with others less fortunate than he, he merits acquiring true ashirus, through the medium of the middah of histapkus. It is not in the money. There are people who are extremely wealthy, but not necessarily happy. Happiness is the result of satisfaction - a virtue not acquired through wealth, but through understanding that what one has is a gift from the Almighty, Who has determined how much he needs. When an individual accepts this mindset, he has acquired enormous wealth - something that money cannot buy.

You are children to your G-d, you shall not cut yourselves...for a dead person. (14:1)

Sforno explains that this prohibition is based on the idea that their cutting oneself is a sign that one does not acknowledge the close relationship that Hashem has with him. While it is understandable for an individual to grieve over the loss of a loved one, overly extensive grief that leads to physical mutilation indicates that the individual does not perceive that Someone is even closer to him; Someone Who is of greater significance. We cannot question the validity of the concept that Hashem has a clear Presence in our lives. This is why we wonder about Yaakov Avinu's reaction to Yosef's disappearance. Why did he refuse to be consoled? How did he plummet to such a nadir of depression? Furthermore, when he met Pharaoh, he remarked that his years were "few and bad" (Bereishis 47:9). How could this defeatist attitude prevail in an individual who had attained such an elevated spiritual relationship with Hashem? How could he complain, knowing full well that "all that Hashem does is for the good"?

Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, explains that Yaakov did not mourn the physical loss of Yosef, but, rather, he mourned his spiritual contribution to the entity known as Klal Yisrael. The Patriarchs were invested with a mission of critical importance: to build Bais Yisrael, the House of Israel, which would serve as the basis l'takein olam b'malchus Shakai, "to perfect the world with the kingdom of Hashem." To achieve this lofty objective, it was necessary to establish a foundation firmly rooted in conviction, characterized by the spiritual qualities that each individual member of this family could contribute. The tree is only as strong as its roots. The family endures on its foundation of values. This is why Yaakov was inconsolable. Klal Yisrael had to be built upon the foundation of twelve shevatim, tribes, each contributing its own unique qualities to the equation. Yosef Hatzadik was irreplaceable. His loss created a spiritual void in the House of Yisrael. The family was blemished. The roots would not be as strong. The tree was weakened. Yaakov had every reason to grieve, to feel that he had failed, that his life was incomplete and unfortunate. He lived with a different set of ideals, measured by a different standard of success. According to his barometer of success, he had failed. This is why he grieved relentlessly. The loss in the spiritual fabric of Klal Yisrael is something from which one does not "recover."

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

Apparently, re'eh, see, is a reference to a certain level of comprehension. Sight, our most reliable and strongest sense, is a term used to describe a level of understanding. When a person is asked, "Do you see what I am saying?" the questioner really means, "Do you understand what I am saying?" In his book, "Forever His Students," Rabbi Boruch Leff cites Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl, who distinguishes between the senses of "hearing" and "seeing" and the level of comprehension to which each alludes.

We find the Torah employing both terms with regard to comprehension. The opening word of the pasuk which describes the stellar dialogue between man and the Almighty, "Shema Yisrael," "Hear O Yisrael," is the enjoinder to "hear." The tone for the entire relationship is "hear." This is, indeed, how a relationship begins and is sustained - by listening. One must want to hear. He must want to listen. On the other hand, if the purpose of the pasuk is to internalize the understanding that, "Hashem

is our G-d, Hashem is "One," should it not have said, See O Yisrael"?

Rav Weinberg explains that shema, hear, implies that we are making a commitment which involves our intellect. To hear means to communicate; to listen is to interface with what one hears. Re'eh, see, is a term which applies to our emotions. To hear demands greater and more penetrating cognition. To see requires a stronger reaction to an idea or fact that one already understands.

The cognitive level of hearing entails a greater sense of understanding, because when we truly hear someone, we are able to communicate with him. It is a level of communication in which every nuance and emotion in expressing oneself is a telling experience for the careful and astute listener. Sight is used to accumulate our emotions, so that they can better react to things that we already understand. Seeing is believing, because sight is a stronger sense. It has greater reliability and, once something is seen, it is undeniable. Thus, once someone "sees" something, he is more apt to believe in and commit to it than when he merely hears about it.

The opening pasuk in this parsha begins with re'eh, see. Based upon the subject matter of the request, "see" is a most appropriate term. Hashem is describing a ceremony that is about to take place. This ceremony, which involves blessings and curses, took place much later, after Klal Yisrael had crossed the Yarden into Eretz Yisrael. Why, then, does Hashem say "hayom," today? Indeed, the blessings and curses were not presented to them on that day.

While the actual ceremony did not take place "today," the announcement of its future advent was conveyed to them. This is an event that demands that one prepare properly for it, so that its impact be maximized. In order to ready themselves for this moment, the People had to be made aware "today," so that they could internalize and commit themselves emotionally in preparation for this event. Thus, the word "see" is used. See-prepare-commit, so that when the time comes you will learn what Hashem has to say.

With this idea in mind, I think we can now understand why some people refuse to listen, why they do not want to be bothered by what they hear. They prefer to live in a sort of twilight zone, in enchanted oblivion, because hearing might be too cumbersome and painful. Regrettably, there are many that refuse to be disturbed, who do not want their comfort level hampered in any way. They do not want to hear. Why is this?

It is because they have not "seen." They have not emotionally prepared themselves to listen. It is only when someone "feels" something for Yiddishkeit that he is willing to listen, to comprehend, to integrate what he hears into an observant lifestyle. One who is numb, who has not sensitized himself to listen, will not hear what is said.

Perhaps this is the lesson of the Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah 39:1, which describes how Avraham Avinu came to believe in Hashem. What made him take that first step? The Midrash cites the pasuk in Tehillim 45:11, "Listen, daughter and see, incline your ear." Avraham listened, a listening that led him to "incline his ear," to develop a penetrating cognitive appreciation of Hashem's existence and His constant guidance of this world. He "inclined his ear" - why? What prompted him to do this?

The pasuk says, "Listen, daughter, and see." It follows with, "Incline your ear." Avraham "listened" by "seeing." He saw a world filled with idolatry, immorality. He saw a world on fire! He saw a world of falsehood, people living a life filled with lies. He saw and understood that there must be more to life than what he had been seeing. This perception, this penetrating introspection, started him onto the road to belief in a Supreme Master Who guides the world. Once he "saw," he was able to internalize his observation and develop an emotional foundation for accepting what he would hear.

It is difficult to seek an understanding for what one does not feel in his heart. The Torah exhorts us to "see," to open our eyes and perceive the truth, to distinguish between what is bogus and what is genuine, so that we acknowledge the blessing that is a direct consequence of adhering to Hashem's commands. Hashem gave us our senses for a purpose: to use them to serve Him.

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

Sforno's commentary to this pasuk gives us a profound insight into the level of commitment that Hashem expects of us. He writes: "Look and perceive that your affairs (as a people) are not of an average nature, as is the case concerning other nations. For today I set before you a blessing and a curse: two extremes. The blessing implies success and good fortune beyond what is sufficient. Curse implies a state of deficiency, whereby attainments of bare necessities are out of reach. Both of these (blessing and curse) are before you to attain, according to your choice."

Klal Yisrael is faced with a pendulum that sways to extremes. It represents their future: one of extremes. Their fate is marked either by complete prosperity or total devastation. Our lot as Hashem's People is destined to be most uncommon, with no middle road. It is either blessing or curse. This is signified by the word re'eh, see - something new, something different. Moshe Rabbeinu cautions the nation that the choice that will catalyze these extremes is lifneichem, before you. They either choose blessings by observing Hashem's mitzvos, or they select curse by rejecting His mitzvos. It is that simple.

According to Sforno there can be no moderate stance for Klal Yisrael. The Torah brooks no compromise. Hashem demands total and unequivocal commitment. The consequences are equally extreme: absolute blessings or unmitigated curse. Our history has been characterized either by ceaseless blessing or by unbearable curse. Why? Should this be so? Why should our lot not mirror that of the other nations of the world, who live a more stable existence?

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, suggests that indeed this question is not novel. It was first asked by Eisav when Yaakov Avinu sought to relieve him of the privileges of the firstborn. Eisav said, "Behold, I am going to die (as a result of it), and so what is the birthright (worth) to me?" (Bereishis 25:32) Rashi explains that Eisav was concerned with the many warnings, punishments and death penalties associated with the position of the firstborn. Eisav felt that this esteemed position would be the cause of his premature demise. So, why should he bother?

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, derives a fundamental principle herein which illuminates our earlier query. The detriment of the loss corresponds to the greatness of the spiritual level. The more elevated and sublime the spiritual level, the greater is the void in its absence. An example is the Kohen, who is obligated to a greater level of Divine service than the common Jew. Consequently, he is subject to harsher punishment should he fail to carry out his mission.

So, the question glares at us: Is it worth it? Is it better to achieve the heights of spirituality with the incredible reward that it brings, or does the fear of reprisal and personal degradation that comes with failure outweigh the benefits? Should one eschew the benefits, so that he not suffer the penalties?

Rav Yeruchem posits that this question has been raised a number of times. When Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, they were overawed by the fantastic Revelation at the Giving of the Torah. They, thus, requested that Moshe convey the commandments to them, rather than their hearing them directly

from Hashem. Why? Because the greater the clarity of truth experienced, the greater lies the responsibility incumbent upon the person. They feared their inability to live up to the overwhelming obligation of hearing the truth directly from Hashem. While their rejection of this opportunity disappointed Moshe, Hashem Himself assured him, saying, "They did well in what they spoke." (Devarim 5:25) Why did Hashem agree with their behavior? Were they not reacting in a manner similar to that of Eisav?

Rav Miller cites the Avnei Nezer, who distinguishes between two forms of fear. The first is fear of punishment, whereby man fears the suffering he will sustain if he does not accept his responsibilities and fulfill his task in the world. The second type of fear is one that stems from love. Man loves Hashem so much that he fears that something might interfere and cause a distance to come between them.

One whose service to Hashem is rooted in fear of punishment is counseled not to adopt extra obligations and practices. This individual, instead of having a sense of privilege and honor in being able to carry out even greater obligations and establish an even closer relationship with the Almighty, will instead constantly fret over the consequences of these added obligations. He will be so overwhelmed with the negative that he will be unable to enjoy and benefit from the positive.

When Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, they achieved an unparalleled spiritual plateau. Indeed, their entire spiritual persona became transformed. Their fear was not of punishment, but a trepidation borne of sublimity, of total holiness, to the point that they feared they could not endure such an unprecedented closeness to the Almighty. Their fear stemmed from love, from total devotion, from ultimate proximity to the Almighty.

Infinite blessings or torturous curse is the choice that is placed before Klal Yisrael. Mediocrity is not something that coincides with our spiritual DNA. We stood at Har Sinai and accepted the Torah through the medium of an experience that elevated us high above the rest of the world. This elevation makes us different, as it simultaneously brings with it greater responsibility which can also lead to our downfall. No one ever said that it was going to be easy.

Yet, there are those who prefer to live an unencumbered life, an existence oblivious to the beauty and richness of a pulsating Torah life, a life that accedes to being content with merely avoiding retribution. One who truly recognizes the inestimable value of Torah joyfully commits himself to it, regardless of the hardships that he may encounter along the way. The Eisavs who have refused to accept a life of spirituality are guided by their base nature and an attachment to materialism. Theirs is a life of fear. Regrettably, their fear is realistic, because that is the choice they have made for themselves.

There shall you bring everything that I command you ...and the choicest of your vow offerings that you will vow to Hashem. (12:11)

The Sifri says that the Torah is implying that when one chooses an animal for an offering, it should be a choice one. This is a new dimension in our avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. Although one may be virtuous, pious, very devoted to Hashem, he still must remember that whatever he offers, be it an animal or even himself or his time, he must give his all, the most that he has. All too often, we dedicate our efforts and talents to everything but avodas Hashem, relegating our service to a

distant second place. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, shlita, notes that this was Kayin's sin. Both Kayin and Hevel sought to serve the Almighty, to find favor in His eyes. Hevel brought his choicest herd for a sacrifice. He gave Hashem his best. Kayin did not. He brought a sacrifice from the fruits of the land, which Rashi interprets to mean from the inferior portions of his crop.

Herein lies the difference between two people, two services, two offerings. Both served Hashem, but only one gave his best. Only one showed that he really cared. He indicated his priorities. Hashem should be our priority, and the manner in which we serve Him should manifest our true commitment.

What happened to Kayin? Certainly he received the same educational experiences as Hevel did. Rav Zilberstein compares this to the two students who arrive together at yeshivah, both with a tremendous desire to study Torah and excel. They each have purchased new Gemaros, volumes of Talmud, they both have set up good chavrusos, study partners. Yet, one succeeds in excelling, while the other one just manages to keep his head above water. The reason: the one who excels never stops working, never refrains from fully exerting himself in every endeavor. The other one does exactly what he must - and no more. Every opportunity can become a wasted opportunity if one does not use it to its fullest potential. Kayin attempted to get by, but when he saw how far ahead of him Hevel was - he killed him. Instead of introspecting and realizing that he was at fault, he blamed Hevel for excelling.

When we compromise in our service to Hashem, our service becomes nothing more than a sterile, dispassionate experience, which will ultimately decrease in its feeling and frequency. This is especially true when we water down our service and commitment in order to favorably impress someone who has had very little to do with religious observance. Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, a legendary rosh yeshivah and rebbe of the previous generation, once had occasion to spend the summer at a camp which served young people from non-observant backgrounds. He was concerned that the camp directors spent too much time providing fun-filled activities for the campers. "Why must you provide them with so much fun?" he asked. "Why do you not get them to do something constructive like picking fruit? Why must it always be fun?"

When the camp was about to take their charges to a country fair, Rav Mendel questioned the necessity of such a trip. The camp director responded, "This is the only way to bring these children to Torah observance. If we do not give them this trip, we will lose them."

Rav Mendel replied, "So you will lose them."

It took some time before the camp director comprehended the depth of Rav Mendel's reply. On the one hand, the camp's message was: Torah study and mitzvah observance is supreme, but through its activities it was undermining its own primary message. They were, instead, indicating that fun and having a great time were to take precedence over Torah. Such a program would produce Jews who would pay lip service to Torah and mitzvos, while enthusiastically embracing any experience that promoted self-gratification. The Torah demands that our choicest offering be brought for Hashem - not for ourselves.

Hashem, your G-d, shall you follow and Him shall you fear; His commandments shall you observe and to His voice shall you hearken; Him shall you serve and to Him shall you cleave. (13:5)

We are enjoined to follow in Hashem's ways and to cleave to Him. Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, suggests that the focus must be on the "Him"/"Hashem" as the only One to follow. In other words, there is no room for any alliance or conglomeration of beliefs. One either believes in Hashem or

he does not believe in Him. There is no option of including any other entity in this belief. It is only to Him that we seek to cleave. This is why the Rambam established the Thirteen Principles of our faith in which the first principle tells us that Hashem alone created and continues to guide and supervise the world. One who believes that Hashem is all of these, but does not accept the levado, that He is alone, is a kofer b'ikar, total apostate. He denies the very foundation of our faith.

The Brisker Rav, zl, related that his father, Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, said the following at a Rabbinic conference in St. Petersburg. "In Melachim I 18:4, it is recorded that Eliyahu HaNavi admonished the Jews who were following the Baal idol, 'How long will you dance between two opinions? If Hashem is the G-d, go after Him! And if the Baal, go after it!' What is Eliyahu saying? We can understand his encouraging the people to choose G-d and follow Him, but what is the meaning of, 'If the Baal, go after it!' Why? For what reason should they follow the Baal completely? Is it wrong for a believer in the Baal to share his god with another entity?"

Rav Chaim explained that it is not the Baal that would "mind," it is Yiddishkeit that has a problem with a believer in the Baal who decides he also wants to perform mitzvos! While it is true that a sinner is obligated to carry out the same mitzvos as any other Jew, this does not apply to an apostate. One who denies any of the Thirteen Principles of faith has no business doing mitzvos. One either believes in Hashem unequivocally or he does not believe in Him at all. There is no gray area with regard to emunah, belief in Hashem.

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

The Torah begins with the word, re'eh, see, written in the singular, and it concludes with the word, lifneichem, before you, written in the plural. Why is this? Horav Chaim, zl, m'Vermiza, brother of the Maharal, derives from here that if one has the opportunity to rebuke a group that will probably not listen to him, he should do so, regardless. This approach acknowledges the unlikely chance that even one person might be inspired, which would validate the effort. Moshe Rabbeinu spoke lifneichem to all of Klal Yisrael, but his words were actually addressed to the re'eh, each individual Jew. Success is measured with each individual. I must add, however, that one's goal should be to reach the masses, but, if he succeeds in reaching only one person, his efforts will have met with success. This reflects the value of each and every Jew.

Rabbi Akiva lost twelve-thousand pairs of students. Twenty-four thousand of the greatest Torah scholars in history were all gone. This would have devastated a lesser individual. Not Rabbi Akiva, the individual who rose from illiteracy to becoming one of the greatest Torah illuminaries that ever lived. He forged on and took five new talmidim, students. Through them, he perpetuated Torah knowledge. He realized the inestimable value of each individual student.

We live in an era in which success is measured by numbers. A successful school is a large school. A good yeshivah is a large yeshivah. This statement cannot be farther from the truth. While numbers might accrue to one's advantage, when he is fund-raising for his institution, his success is measured by each individual that he inspires.

Furthermore, one may not even notice the influence that he has had on the individual for quite some time. If the effect has been rendered, however, it will be recognized. In other words, our function is to do; Hashem will determine the success ratio of our endeavors.

When the Chafetz Chaim, zl, reached an advanced age, he became sickly and weak, and he

hardly ever traveled. Once, Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, the venerable rav of Vilna, asked the Chafetz Chaim to come to Vilna to give words of inspiration to bolster observance of the mitzvah of taharas ha'mishpachah, family purity. The Chafetz Chaim was already past the age of ninety, and his family felt that the trip would be a most difficult one for him to undertake. The Chafetz Chaim's response was unequivocal: "If Rav Chaim Ozer asks, then I must go."

The family did everything possible to prevent the sage from undertaking this major venture, but the Chafetz Chaim was determined and adamant; he was going. A throng of thousands of Jews met the gadol hador when he arrived. Friday night, he spoke to a group of 6,000 women. On Shabbos morning, there were over 6,000 men in the congregation. After the seudah, meal, Shabbos afternoon, many members of the community visited the Chafetz Chaim and asked for his blessings. One elderly Jew approached the Chafetz Chaim, and, after receiving his sage advice, asked for a blessing. The Chafetz Chaim then spent a few moments speaking with the man about emunah, faith, in Hashem. When the man left, the Chafetz Chaim remarked, "I think I reached him." Indeed, when the Chafetz Chaim returned home to Radin, he commented to a member of his family, "The entire trip was worth it, even if the only person that was inspired was the elderly Jew that came to see me in the afternoon." Success is measured with each Jew - one at a time.

You shall not add to it, and you shall not subtract from it. (13:1)

We are admonished neither to add to nor to subtract from the mitzvos that Hashem has given us. It certainly makes sense that subtracting mitzvos is a dangerous practice. In contrast, however, one would think that adding mitzvos is laudatory. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, cites Horav Yosef Zundel, zl, m'Salant, a disciple of Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, who related in the name of his rebbe, the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, that any practice that is initiated "supposedly" for the purpose of increasing Torah observance and ethical/moral living, but does not succeed, is actually counter-productive. This practice, which ultimately usurps Torah authority and denigrates mitzvah observance, is actually coming to us via the guile of the yetzer hora, evil inclination. The yetzer hora makes every attempt to sway us to a life antithetical to Torah dictate, and, at times, even uses a mitzvah as a ploy to induce us to commit an aveirah. It will involve us in all forms of frumkeit, piety/observance, and chesed, acts of loving-kindness - as long as we do not study Torah. We can spend days looking for the perfect Esrog, but what about our seder, study period, for learning?

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai instructed his five greatest students, "Go out and see which is the best derech, approach, to life one should maintain." Why does he say, "Go out" ? Can this discussion not take place "inside" as well? No! Says Rav Chaim Volozhiner. The bais hamedrash is a place for learning - not discussions. When the talmidim, students, find themselves outside the four walls of the bais hamedrash with nothing to do, then, they should initiate this discussion. If it takes place in the hallowed halls of the bais hamedrash, it is the work of the yetzer hora.

In his inimitable manner, the Maggid, zl, m'Dubno uses an analogy to render a rationale for the prohibition against adding mitzvos. There was a man who would often borrow various utensils from his neighbor. One day, he borrowed a pot. The next day he returned two pots to his benefactor, claiming that the original pot, which he had borrowed, conceived and gave birth overnight. This went on for about two weeks. Whenever he borrowed a utensil, he would return two. Apparently, there was a population boom with regard to the man's utensils. We can be certain that the lender was very pleased with this arrangement. One day, the man came over and said, "Tonight, I am having a large dinner

party. Regrettably, my house is not very well lit. Can I borrow your large golden candelabra?" "Certainly," the other man replied. "I will be happy to lend you my menorah." The dollar signs were already shining before his eyes as he conjured up images of another golden candelabra.

A few days passed, and the borrower did not return the candelabra. "Something must be wrong," the lender thought to himself. "The borrower has never been late with a payment. It just does not make sense." He decided to go to the lender's home and ask for his candelabra. The door to the home was opened by the borrower, who seemed to avoid his gaze. "Where is my candelabra? It is almost a week since you borrowed it," the lender asked.

"Oh, I am so sorry to inform you that your candelabra became ill and died," the borrower replied. "What? Why are you teasing me? You know that a candelabra does not die," the lender practically screamed back at him.

"You seemed to have no problem believing that inanimate utensils can give birth. Why do you not believe that they can also die?" the borrower smugly countered.

The lesson to be derived is very clear and simple. One who supplements a mitzvah, thinking foolishly that there is nothing wrong with increasing upon a mitzvah, might also one day, when confronted with a difficult mitzvah, decrease his mitzvah performance. After all, if one can add, why can he not similarly subtract?

If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend, who is like your own soul, will entice you secretly, saying, "Let us go and worship the gods of others. (13:7)

Rashi cites the Sifri that interprets the phrase, "your friend, who is like your own soul," as a reference to one's father. The other commentators do not seem to agree with this exposition. We wonder why the Torah would choose such a roundabout way of referring to one's father. Why not simply say - father? Horav Meir Chodosh, zl, explains that a father is not a meisis, seducer. A father is a mechanech, an educator. This father certainly is a terrible educator, but an educator he is. He educates either by example or by instruction. He either guides his son to continued spiritual growth, or he catalyzes his spiritual downfall. It all depends on how he educates him. The father's role in his son's life does not fall under the category of meisis. His function as the child's primary educator places him in a position in which what he does, or does not do, affects the child from an educational perspective.

A father's actions, his various activities, statements, mannerisms, allusions and innuendo, all leave a lasting impression on his child. His responsibility as a role model is awesome. When we look at the flip side, however, the side of positive instruction, care and sensitivity, we see the incredible reward and nachas one can derive.

You are children to Hashem, Your G-d. (14:1)

Our relationship with the Almighty is unique. His love for us is that of a father to his son. In the Talmud Kiddushin 36a, Rabbi Yehudah says that this relationship is based upon how we act. If we act as children towards a father, then Hashem will treat us as such. If we do not, we are not considered sons. Rabbi Meir disagrees, contending that the relationship of banim, sons, to Hashem, holds true regardless of the way we act. The Teshuvos HaRashba says that the halachic position remains with Rabbi Meir.

The Chida, zl, says that according to Rabbi Meir we must view every Jew as having a distinguished status. Regardless of one's background or position, he is Hashem's son, a position that is unparalleled and to be revered. The Arizal writes that in "recent" generations, the power of the sitra achara, "other" forces, the forces of tumah, spiritual contamination, have taken a greater hold on us. Therefore, the little that we do of a positive nature is valued by Hashem and considered on the level parallel of the Tanaim, sages of the Talmudic era. Thus, every Jew should be revered and treated as a king.

The Midrash Tanchuma attributes this distinction to one action on the part of Avraham Avinu. When he saw the Angels in the guise of Arabs coming towards his tent, he ran to them. Afterwards, when he went to prepare the meal for them, the Torah says that he ran to the cattle. In reward for the Patriarch's running, we, his descendants, maintain an eminent status. This is due to one positive action, one display of enthusiasm to perform Hashem's will.

We have no idea of the value of even one mitzvah and the esteem it holds in the eyes of Hashem. The following story gives us a window of insight into the value of a single mitzvah. In a resort hotel in Eretz Yisrael outside Yerushalayim, the mashgiach, Kosher supervisor, would see to it that there was a daily minyan for Minchah. It happened that one day he had a very difficult time completing the minyan. He decided to go outside in search of that elusive tenth man. He soon met a Jew who neither had a clue about what a minyan was nor about what the mashgiach wanted from him. After the mashgiach explained the significance of minyan and the incredible reward in store for those who participate in a minyan, the stranger acquiesced to be number ten.

He followed the mashgiach into the building and began walking up the stairs to the dining hall, where the minyan took place. Suddenly, the mashgiach was notified that the son of one of the worshippers had arrived, so that they now had a minyan. The mashgiach turned to the Jew who had only walked up the steps, and told him that their minyan problem had already been solved. He thanked him for his good intentions and bid him good day.

Ten years went by. One night when the mashgiach was sleeping, he had a dream. In the dream, the man whom he had called in to be the tenth man appeared before him. His countenance shined brilliantly. The man related to him that he had passed from his earthly abode during the previous month: "I have come to thank you for attempting to include me in your minyan. You have no idea of the incredible spiritual reward I have received because of the three steps I walked up in order to complete the minyan." He added, "I have one favor to ask of you. I have one son who lives in Yerushalayim. He is non-observant. In fact, he is very estranged from a life of Torah and mitzvos. Please go and ask him to recite Kaddish for me. It will mean so much."

The mashgiach, of course, met with the son of the deceased and was successful in convincing him to say Kaddish for his late father. All of this was the result of three steps. Can we even begin to imagine the reward for complete mitzvah observance?

You shall open up your hand to him... and proved whatever is lacking to him. (15:8)

Avraham Avinu is known as the amud hachesed, pillar of kindness, having set the example and standard for his descendants to emulate. Indeed, more than simply being the model of chesed, he ingrained this character trait in the personality of his descendants. Jews are generous, caring and compassionate. Regardless of their religious affiliation and level of observance, this innate quality

defines one's Jewishness and connection to the soul of the Jewish nation. Our people have always sought out opportunities to perform acts of kindness. In his *Ahavas Chesed*, the Chafetz Chaim emphasizes that it is not sufficient to merely help when one is needed. A Jew must go one step further: he must love chesed. This is an acquired trait that he develops. It is characterized by the individual's motivation to search for chesed opportunities, so that he can express his innate Jewish character. What better example than Avraham, who, after having undergone a painful Bris Milah at an advanced age, insisted on sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day, just so that he might be able to serve others?

In his *Atarah L'Melech*, recently translated by Rabbi Sholom Smith, Horav Avraham Pam, zl, insists that chesed be administered on an individual basis and catered specifically to the particular needs of the recipient. This idea is underscored by the Torah when it says, "You shall open up your hand... and provide whatever is lacking to him." The word "him" is used to highlight the importance of dealing with each person as an individual, not as a number.

Rav Pam expounds on the mitzvah of performing chesed. He explains that those who believe that an act of chesed requires one to expend a great deal of time or spend much money are mistaken. Those who think that performing chesed takes great talent are in error. Frequently, all a person needs in order to perform a service for another person is a good set of ears! Listening to an individual's plight, assuring him that he is not alone, that someone does care, can, at times, be more effective and meaningful than a check.

The pasuk in Mishlei 12:25 says, "When there is worry in a man's heart, he should suppress it." In the Talmud Yoma 75a, Chazal offer two distinct approaches toward addressing the challenges and anxieties that are so intrinsic to life. In some situations, one can overcome anxiety by focusing his mind on another matter. Another way is to share one's worry with a friend or anyone who will listen. When one offers a sympathetic ear, he can often perform a great chesed by alleviating someone's emotional burden. Often, this is the only relief one may experience from certain problems. The issues do not go away. The problems remain, but the person feels better just by having talked about it. The seemingly insignificant gesture of simply listening, of being there for someone in need, helps to alleviate the awesome weight that he carries.

We live in times of advanced technology. Phones, cell-phones, electronic mail - everyone is seconds away. Yet, we fail to make that call which can mean so much to someone who is isolated. Lending a sympathetic ear is a great form of chesed. I may add that how we make the call carries great weight. When we call someone and are perceived as impatient, intimating that we have better things to do than to sit on the phone, it probably would have been better had we not called altogether. The way we have acted only adds to the hurt. This idea likewise applies to children that call their parents and are bored with the topics or interests that their parents have chosen to discuss. They quickly have forgotten when just a few years earlier, what was important to them had very little meaning for their parents. Yet, they listened. As we prepare ourselves for the Yemei HaDin, Days of Judgment, it would serve us well to spend a little of our "precious" time listening to others.

And you shall serve Him and cleave to Him. (13:5)

"How does one 'cleave' to Hashem," ask Chazal in the Talmud Sotah 14a, "when He is described

as an eish ochlah, consuming fire?" (Devarim 4:24) Chazal answer that the Torah enjoins us to cleave to Hashem's way. Mah hu - af atah. Just as He supplies clothes for the unclothed, visits the sick, comforts mourners and buries the dead, so should you do the same. I wonder. It should be easy - especially if doing so is considered following in the footsteps of the Almighty. We do not, however, see people lining up to clothe the needy, visit the ill and infirm, bury the dead and comfort those who are left behind? No! It is not easy. It is not geshmak, pleasant. Very little kavod, honor, accompanies these tasks. It is not pleasant going to a nursing home. It is not pleasant going to a hospital. It is surely not pleasant preparing the dead for burial. It is difficult to find the right words to comfort a mourner. There are no plaques given out to acknowledge these acts of kindness. I guess that is why Hashem does it. Those few who do not need their lives to be pleasant at all times follow in His footsteps. The rest of us wait for the plaques.

Having said that, I was thinking about what motivation could prompt those who really want to act kindly to be able to overcome the discomfort. The Jewish community is blessed with a host of well-meaning organizations that perform all sorts of kindness for the unfortunate. The same people are always involved. Can we change this unfortunate reality?

I recently read about a gentleman who, although he was a successful businessman, gave up literally every minute of his spare time to assist in building the Sephardic Bikur Cholim in New York. He wrote in his diary shortly before his untimely passing what it was that inspired him to become so involved: "I went on a Bikur Cholim visit last week. The lady had cancer. Her husband could not handle it and had left her. One of her children was autistic. While I sat with her and talked, she held her autistic son in her loving arms and described her nightmare of a life to me. While she was talking, her healthy three-year-old daughter began to cry. 'Why was she crying?' I asked myself. 'Was it because her mommy was spending so much time with her brother? Was it because she knew that mommy was sick and might one day die? Was it because she missed her daddy who ran off one day - never to return? Or was she simply hungry or tired?' I did not know why she was crying, but I did know one thing for sure - her mother could not help her. She had more than her hands full. I tried to calm down the little girl and tell her, 'It will be all right.' I was lying. That night as I lay down in bed, I could not sleep. The little three-year-old girl's crying kept me awake. My mind just would not let go of her.

"I could not help hearing her cries. I knew then that I had to do something to alleviate those cries. I could not let her cry forever. As I write these sentences, I am crying. I am not sure if I am crying with her or for her, but, I cannot stop hearing the cries."

So wrote Joseph Beyda. We must listen to the cries. Of course, it is not pleasant to go where the cries are overwhelming, where the pain is constant and debilitating. If we allow ourselves to hear the cries, we will eventually become the people we could be - the people Hashem wants us to be. After all, He wants us to cleave to Him, to follow in His ways. He always hears the cries.

It is the great people who are involved in acts of kindness. Perhaps it is the acts of kindness that make them great. Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was exemplary in the application of the principle of mah Hu af atah to his own life. His acts of kindness were legendary. He did not merely delegate others to act; he personally participated in all areas of assistance to others. Already in his younger years he had become a gabbai, official, of the Chevra Kadisha, sacred burial society. Before long, he became the yosheiv rosh, head, of the chevra. In his position, he fought energetically and faithfully to see to it that the burial traditions of the Yerushalayim community were upheld. Although he was the head of the chevra, he did not see this office as a ceremonial position of honor or prestige. He continued to personally participate in the taharah, purification, and burial of the deceased. Mah Hu af atah.

There was one area in which Rav Yosef Chaim exemplified: visiting and giving solace to the terminally ill. In one of the small, vaulted alleyways of the Old City, there was a hospice for the terminally ill. Medicine in those days was not what it is today. The miserable, emaciated patients - who were relegated to a living purgatory on this world - had no reprieve from their unrelenting pain and depression. Even their relatives found visits to this institution too much to bear. To observe a loved one in overwhelming pain and suffering can be a devastating experience. The only ray of sunshine these pitiful souls could look forward to was a visit from Rav Yosef Chaim. He made it his business to frequent the hospice regularly and to sit by the bedside of each patient, providing much-needed words of comfort and encouragement. He found the time; he found the strength; he found the right words, because he was following in Hashem's footsteps.

But this you shall not eat from among those that bring up their cud or have a completely separated hoof... (14:7)

The criteria for identifying the kosher animal is repeated once again in Parashas Re'eh, thus emphasizing the significance of kashrus. Two identifying characteristics of kosher animals are mentioned: they chew their cud; and they have completely split hooves. In the entire creation, just four animals have only one kosher sign. The overwhelming majority have neither sign. Only the One Who created these animals can make such an undisputed statement. As the Alter, zl, m'Kelm notes, this attests to the Divine authorship of the Torah. No human author would publicly make a claim that could be refuted. Yet, there are those who are still foolish enough to claim that Moshe Rabbeinu was not merely the lawgiver - he was the lawmaker.

Interestingly, in citing these animals, the Torah mentions the kosher sign first, then mentions that they lack the second sign. If they are indeed not kosher because they lack the second kosher sign, should that not be emphasized first? The Kli Yakar explains that the presence of their kosher sign adds an insidious element to their non-kosher status. He cites the Midrash that compares Edom/Eisav to a pig which presents its cloven hooves in an attempt to delude people into thinking that it is kosher. In reality, the fact that it does not chew its cud is the reason it is declared not kosher. It puts on a good show, presenting itself as kosher. In truth, it is all a sham - just like those chameleons who attempt to deceive people with their acts of piety while concealing their inner evil. This, in essence, makes them much worse than those who have no shame and publicly manifest their sinful behavior.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, cited in *The Pleasant Way*, explains that a person also needs two kosher signs to declare him an adam kasher, an expression found in the Talmud denoting a righteous and upright person. The two signs are gut tzu Got and gut tzu leit; he performs those mitzvos that are bein adam laMakom, between man and G-d, and those mitzvos that are bein adam lachaveiro, between man and his fellow man.

Regrettably, just like the pig that exhibits his one kosher sign, there are Jews who go to great lengths to fulfill the obligation between themselves and G-d and totally ignore the other side of the coin. They spare no expense when it comes to purchasing the most beautiful Tefillin, the most beautiful Esrog. They make sure that everyone knows this. Otherwise, what value would their "public" display of devotion have? They pray with great intensity and devotion, seeing to it that they are among the last to complete Shemoneh Esrai, all the time making sure that everyone is aware of their devotion to prayer. Yet, when it comes to dealings between themselves and other people, they are sorely lacking. They will destroy anyone who has the nerve to compete with them in commerce or other pursuits. They are never

present when a member of the community is down and out and must be helped. Suddenly, they have other commitments. They mistreat their wives and children and everybody who gets in their way, but they daven a long Shemoneh Esrai and buy a beautiful Esrog. Thus, their kosher sign is of the same significance as that of the pig - worthless!

This deficiency is much worse when it is manifest by a Jew who possesses one kosher sign than by a Jew with none. A Jew who does not act in accordance with the dictates of the Torah is simply not a Torah Jew. Hence, we do not expect as much from him in the way of ethical behavior. When someone expounds the Torah way of life, however, when he arrogantly publicly displays his frumkeit for all to see, we expect him to maintain exemplary ethical conduct with his fellow man. Indeed, such a person undermines and even humiliates the very Torah that he emphatically claims to observe.

Rav Pam asks a noteworthy question. If true ethical behavior is inextricably bound with one's relationship with Hashem, how is it that we meet gentiles that are fine, honest, decent, well-mannered human beings who perform kindness in a manner becoming the most righteous person? They certainly do not observe mitzvos bein adam laMakom, according to the standard demanded of a Jew. Rav Pam explains that their meritorious conduct is manifest only under normal conditions. Under extenuating circumstances, however, when they are under duress or in pain, their personality flaws appear. They become angry and irrational, acting in a cruel and selfish manner. The gentile world has yet to produce anyone who can compare with our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, who exemplify ethical conduct even under the most stressful situations. Such zachus hanefesh, purity of spirit, is possible only by one who exemplifies total commitment to the entire Torah.

Last, a ben Torah who spends his days and nights immersed in the sea of Torah should see to it that he expends the same time and energy in going beyond the letter of the law to fulfill mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro that he does for mitzvos bein adam laMakom.

You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting. (14:22)

Chazal teach us aseir bishvil shetisasheir, "tithe so that you will increase your wealth." There is a distinct corollary between the mitzvah of tzedakah, charity, and wealth. One who gives will be worthy of receiving. One who does not give has no merit for which to receive. When we think about it, what really is wealth? Better yet, how do we estimate one's worth? Usually, the idea of evaluating one's worth is a reference to his financial assets. Actually, that approach identifies a very limited perspective of one's true worth.

We measure one's worth in spiritual terms. It is not what we have that matters. That can all change in an instant. What counts is who we are. One can amass great wealth but still remain a pauper in character, still have little value in terms of what he provides for others. One who assumes his responsibilities in life has worth. A person should ask himself: What am I worth to my community? What am I worth to my family? What am I worth to myself? What am I worth to Hashem? If a person can find a positive value in all these questions, then he has value. If his responses are negative, then of what value is all the wealth he has amassed? He is truly destitute.

One of the great millionaires of the early twentieth century writes in his autobiography that when he was yet a young man he had accumulated his first million dollars. Excited, he went to his father and shared with him his good fortune. His father was a wise man and told his son, "I am not impressed." The son was taken aback. "Father," he said, "I am not yet thirty years old, and already I

have made my first million - and you are not even happy?"

"No, my son," answered his father. "I am not impressed. What I want to know is how you will spend the money you have earned."

Money is intrinsically neither good nor evil. It has potential to be both. It can be used for the greatest good, or it can catalyze the most devastating evil. It all depends upon how it is used. We can act in indifference, with interference, or with intelligence. The manner in which we apply our wealth will define our morality and ethicality, indicating our true net worth.

His requirement whatever is lacking him. (15:8)

While we are not obligated to make the supplicant wealthy, we are enjoined to see to it that he receives his due in accordance with his needs. Everybody's needs are different. One who had previously been wealthy and lost everything cannot subsist on the meager alms that would suffice for one who had always been poor. The Torah is probably the only ethical system that takes the poor man's self-esteem - his present frame of mind - in account when it prescribes the manner in which we are to sustain him. We have to make a person feel good about himself by assessing him according to his self-image. If he was once wealthy, he should not be treated like a beggar. Return him to his previous station in life.

Even if he was used to receiving a certain amount of kavod, honor, because of his previous financial position, he must be accorded the same honor as before. We must feel for him. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, relates that in the shul of Horav Meir Michel Rabinowitz, zl, in Vilna, there was a certain wealthy member who would give large donations to the shul every Shabbos when he received the shishi, sixth, aliyah. Shishi was considered the preeminent aliyah, and he received it weekly because of his large contributions. After awhile, he lost all of his money due to a bad investment. He could no longer contribute in the manner that he did before. The gabbaim who were in charge of giving out the aliyos felt that to continue giving him shishi would be self-defeating, since he could no longer contribute the large sums he had before.

Rav Meir Michel refused to defer to the gabbaim's demand. Instead, he insisted that the individual receive his shishi as before, despite his inability to contribute to the shul in his previous magnanimous manner. He cited the above pasuk to substantiate his ruling. He felt that once a person had become used to a certain lifestyle, to deprive him of what he once had was to divest him of a part of himself.

You shall smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword...And He will give you mercy and be merciful to you. (13:16, 18)

The last thing the Torah wants is for a Jew to be violent and cruel - especially to one of his own. Yet, we find regarding the Ir Ha'nidachas, wayward city that went astray and worshipped idols, that we are emphatically enjoined to destroy with malice every inhabitant, to burn its possessions, and never to rebuild that city. Certainly, just as positive, virtuous deeds enhance a person's character, negative,

vicious behavior turns a person into a savage. The Torah is concerned about the effect some of its commands might have on the Jewish psyche. It, therefore, supplements the mitzvah of destroying the idolatrous city with the assurance that Hashem will have compassion on us. After executing such a difficult command, we need Hashem's compassion. We implore Him to look kindly at us. That is the pshat, simple explanation, of the pasuk. The Ohr HaChaim goes a step further, presenting a penetrating analysis of the human psyche. He explains that the act of killing an entire community can catalyze a natural inclination within a person towards cruelty. Did we not see this with the heartless Nazis, who insisted that they were only "carrying out orders"? The heinous cruelty which they exhibited went far beyond "carrying out orders." The Ohr HaChaim submits that when a person carries out a violent act against another human being, his natural proclivity towards compassion becomes abrogated, his feelings of warmth become cooled. Cruel activity makes a person cruel. Hashem will inspire us with a sense of humaneness and compassion in order to protect us from the effect of carrying out our mission.

By his very nature, the Jew is a rachaman, a benevolent and sympathetic person. It is one of the character traits by which a Jew is recognized and defined. For a Jew, cruelty is an anathema. There are times, however, Hashem demands of us to carry out acts that seem cruel to the external human eye. It is, however, Hashem's command - one that must be executed with commitment and devotion, with the understanding that Hashem does not ask us to do something which is actually cruel or wrong. Yet, it might have a harmful side-effect on our human nature. We are assured that if we act l'shem Shomayim, to fulfill Hashem's Will, He will protect us from any effect that is contradictory to our nature.

The raah. (14:13)

Among the unclean/unkosher fowl is a bird known to us as the raah. Its name, raah, is a derivative of the word, raoh, to see. Chazal indicate this when they ask, "Why is its name raah?" They respond that this bird has incredible powers, in that it can see very far into the distance. It is able to stand in Bavel/Babylon and see neveilos, carcasses, in Eretz Yisrael. This is striking! A bird has the power to see so far, and it is included among the unclean fowl. Why? One would think that a bird which possesses such uncanny eyesight would be venerated - not deemed unkosher. Is there something wrong with being able to see where no one else can see?

The Baalei Mussar, ethicists, say that there is truly something deficient about a bird that has such incredible eyesight, but can only see the dead carcasses. Sure - it can see, but look at what it sees - only the dead, the unclean, the unkosher. This is analogous to one who sees only the bad in a person - never noticing the positive aspects of one's personality and behavior. Let us ask, however, is it such a terrible character trait if one is shortsighted or if one's eyesight is deficient so that he is only able to see the bad and not the good?

Perhaps, if this would be the case, if one's eyesight were defective, then he could not be held responsible for his inability to see the positive. We suggest, however, that he whose eyesight is limited -- indeed, personally limits his eyesight-- cannot see because he does not want to see. He refuses to face the truth; he only seeks the negative, the evil, the unclean. He is a small person who cannot tolerate anything positive about a peer. He feels threatened due to his insecurity. He perceives a positive aspect in his fellow's personality as a negative aspect of his own character. Perhaps he is right.

You shall surely give him. (15:8)

One wonders, after all that has been expounded about the merit of tzedakah, charity, why there are some individuals who will not contribute. They either avoid the opportunity to share with those in need, manipulating people and organizations by using their financial power, or play G-d in determining who deserves a portion of their wealth. Perhaps this opening statement is a bit too strong. After perusing Chazal's statement in the Talmud Bava Basra 10a, however, it might not seem strong enough.

Rabbi Yehudah bar Ilai emphasized the power and significance of tzedakah with the following analogy: Ten strong things have been created in the world. The rock is hard, but the iron can split it. Iron is hard, but fire softens it. Fire is strong, but water quenches it. Water is strong, but clouds bear it.

Clouds are strong, but the wind disperses them. Wind is strong, but the body bears it. The body is strong, but fear crushes it. Fear is strong, but wine banishes it. Wine is strong, but sleep makes one sober. Strongest of all of these is death. Charity, however, saves one from death, as Shlomo haMelech says in Sefer Mishlei 10:2, "Tzedakah tatzil mimaves," "Charity saves one from death."

Let us for a moment analyze Chazal's words: To say that charity is stronger than any of the aforementioned is to submit that it also encompasses and supercedes their individual strengths. This is a powerful statement. The merit of giving charity cannot be splintered. It remains strong and inextinguishable. It cannot be diluted or crushed. It remains with a person beyond the grave. It is his ticket, his entrance to the World to Come. It never leaves us. It is perplexing that people act so irresponsibly and disgracefully when it comes to the mitzvah of tzedakah. We have so much to gain; yet, we literally blow it away with our egos.

I recently read a noteworthy story which I feel has profound meaning, especially in light of the above. The story is about a doctor who had devoted his life to sharing his skills with the poor and under-privileged. He never charged his patients. They paid what they could, which was very little. He lived in a small apartment above a liquor store in the poor section of the city. In front of the liquor store was a sign that read: Dr. Williams is upstairs.

No one lives forever, and Dr. Williams followed the path of all men. When he died, he had no relatives and left no funds for his burial. What were the people of the town to do? Friends and patients gathered together and made an appeal for a gravesite for their dear friend and benefactor. They scraped together enough money for a tombstone. How could they not have a marker for their friend? It appeared that his grave would go unmarked until someone suggested a brilliant idea. They took the sign from in front of the liquor store and nailed it to a post over his grave. It made a fitting epitaph for the good doctor: Dr. Williams is upstairs.

His good deeds, his acts of charity earned him access to "upstairs." No one lives forever, but charity can play a pivotal role in determining where the neshamah, soul, will go. Will it go "upstairs" or not? Perhaps the next time we decide to use our wealth to play games with people's lives or manipulate organizations and schools to fit our needs, we will think of the simple -- but good -- Dr. Williams and his "place" in the scheme of things.

And you will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and refuse to give him - then he may appeal against you to Hashem, and it will be a sin upon you. (15:9)

The Dubno Maggid, zl, explains that this pasuk is based upon the Mishnah in Avos, "He who does not give and repudiates others who give is a rasha, evil." Is this not a bit extreme? It is one thing if one does not personally share with others, but what kind of individual prevents others from giving? We understand that miser refuses to give because he is miserly. When he is questioned about his lack of

participation in charitable drives, his response is simple: he does not want to; he cares too much about his money. He refuses to part with it. He might be cheap, but at least he is truthful. There is another type of miser: one who is truly a disgrace to society. When he is questioned regarding his miserly attitude towards helping others, he quickly responds by defaming the one in need, degrading the organization or its administrators. He is not satisfied with merely being stingy; he must justify his penurious attitude by besmirching those in need. Such a person is contemptible.

While neither miser contributes to the poor man in question, a difference remains between them. The miser who refuses to give because he is simply stingy does not by his selfishness prevent others from giving the poor man his due. Conversely, the one who violates his tightfistedness by maligning the individual who begs for assistance is also causing others to suppress their support of the individual or the institution. This is the meaning of "he should not give and others should not give." He directly influences others not to give.

We now understand the underlying meaning of our pasuk, "If you will look bad upon your brother," meaning that you will make him look bad in your eyes. This includes: saying to others that he is not deserving of their support, that he really is not poor, that he squanders his money, or that he is not "worthy" (a word used to destroy many a Jewish life). If you do so, you will carry an enormous sin. It is noteworthy that stinginess can catalyze a sin that will ultimately destroy another human being. This stingy individual clearly does not care about another person's feelings. His wealth has generated within him a myopia which prevents him from seeing beyond himself.

Three times a year shall all your males appear before Hashem your G-d. (16:16)

In the Talmud Chagiga 2a, Chazal explain that a Jew must travel to the Bais Hamikdash to visit the Shechinah and to appear before it. Just as the Shechinah views a person through a total perspective, (i.e. with "both eyes") so, too, shall the Jew view Hashem with both eyes -- or with a total perspective. This idea is derived from the halachah that the mitzvah of "Reiyah," the pilgrimage a Jew must make to Yerushalayim to be seen and to see, is incumbent only upon one who has complete eyesight. One who is blind even in one eye is exempt from the mitzvah.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, elaborates upon the halachah from a homiletic view. Regrettably, some individuals view Torah and mitzvos from a limited perspective, with only one eye. They maintain their "other eye" to view Torah from a viewpoint that is antithetical -- and certainly not conducive-- to a Torah way of life. These people publicly practice mitzvos, but they have questions in their hearts. They foster a desire to indulge in activities that are not consistent with Torah dictate. Hashem desires and expects total commitment from us, a devotion that is internally synchronized with our external behavior. It is easy to put on a show. Indeed, there are those who feel that religious observance is primarily a "show." They manifest all the trappings of observance, but without the inner commitment.

There are others, conversely, who feel that a strong, heartfelt dedication is all that is demanded of a Jew. Active religious involvement is, in their minds, archaic. They are both wrong. Judaism is proactive - not spectator-oriented. It demands commitment and action - seeing Hashem with both eyes. Just as Hashem views us with both eyes, so too, must we appear before Him with both eyes focused upon a Torah lifestyle - exclusively.

You shall not eat any abomination. (14:3)

When the cemetery in Kovno was emptied, the Chevra Kadisha found two bodies that were untouched by time; the bodies of the Kovno Rav, zl; and that of a Jewish soldier upon whose tombstone was engraved, "Here lies the kosher/proper Jewish soldier." These were the two bodies that had defied the natural process of decomposition. What merit catalyzed this miracle? It is told that this soldier, who was conscripted into the Polish army, absolutely refused to eat non-kosher food. He would not eat the army's rations, sustaining himself on vegetables alone. One day a group of anti-semitic soldiers decided to force the Jewish soldier to eat non-kosher food. They grabbed him and poured hot soup down his throat. The Jewish soldier absolutely refused to swallow the soup and choked. This exceptional act of self-sacrifice for kashrus, to maintain the purity of his soul, earned him that his body, his soul's earthly receptacle, was not affected by nature.

And you shall eat before Hashem, your G-d,... the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil... so that you will learn to fear Hashem... (14:23)

Daas Zekeinim emphasize the "your" part of the grain, wine and oil. They explain that the pasuk conveys a profound message: If you give Maaser, if you tithe your grain, oil, and wine, then it is yours. In other words, Hashem grants us these possessions because we listen to His command and either share it with the Levi or the poor man, or we eat it in Yerushalayim. Giving Maaser does more than fulfill a mitzvah, it creates our ownership, it grants us license to claim these possessions as our own. Whatever Hashem created is for a purpose - to serve Him. To that end, when we realize the purpose of our material possessions, that they exist for us to serve Hashem with them, then they become ours. What we own is in our possession as a deposit from the Almighty. Indeed, whatever gifts we receive from Hashem, all our material abundance, is all a gesture of Hashem's beneficence, so that we may carry out His will.

Nachlas Tzvi cites a number of "tzedakah stories," episodes in the lives of great people, in which their devotion to share their own material possessions with others less fortunate than they, earned them remarkable reward from the Almighty. Horav Moshe Ravkash, zl, the author of the Be'er HaGolah would weep when he would see his wife's candlesticks. A very poignant story informs us of the reason for this expression of emotion. It was during the fury of the Cossacks that the Jews of Vilna were bracing themselves for the vicious onslaught of these sub-humans. Whoever could gather his few possessions loaded them on a wagon and ran. The majority of the community, regrettably, did not believe that the danger was imminent, so they did not escape. A few of the great Torah scholars of that generation did, in fact, escape to freedom. Among them were the Shach, the Shaar Efraim and the Beer HaGolah. Rav Moshe Ravkash, being an extremely wealthy man, tarried as long as he could, to enable himself to bury his money and gold and silver utensils. Luckily, he succeeded in hiding his material possessions and his wife's jewelry. A displaced person, Rav Ravkash trekked from community to community in search of a place where he could go on with his life. His wandering led him to Amsterdam. At that time, the city of Amsterdam had a thriving Sephardic Jewish community. These Jews of Middle-Eastern descent embraced the Ashkenazi gaon, scholar, with open arms. This wealthy community saw to it that he was financially remunerated in accordance with his distinguished scholarship. He remained there until the Cossacks were driven back, and it was safe to return home.

He located his hidden treasures, but he was unable to make personal use of them, since the community was in dire need. The Jews who had survived, and those who had returned, were left

virtually penniless. Rav Moshe disbursed all of his money and even sold his jewelry to sustain the Jewish community. His wife, observing that he was selling all of their material possessions, even her jewelry, hid her silver candlesticks out of concern for their own financial predicament, so that her "giving" husband would not also give these away. After awhile, when the financial situation seemed to improve, she divulged to her husband that she had hidden their candlesticks. When Rav Moshe saw the candlesticks, understanding that his wife had concealed them so that they would have some funds with which to sustain themselves, he sighed heavily. He exclaimed, "How many poor people could have been supported by these candlesticks!" This is why he cried. Indeed, it is tears such as those that Hashem scoops up and saves.

One never loses when he gives charity. "Aser Teasar" "you shall tithe." Chazal add, "Aser bishul shetisasher" "Tithe so that you shall become wealthy." This is more than a reward or a blessing. It is, rather, a consequence of one's giving. In an anecdotal remark to a community that was not sufficiently giving, the Maggid m'Kelm once said, "Hashem assures us that "Ki'lo yechdal evyon mikerev haaretz", "For destitute people will not cease to exist within the land" (Devorim, 15:11) In other words, there will always be poor people. If we do not see to the needs of the poor, they will unfortunately not survive. Someone will have to replace them. It quite possibly might be you.

Indeed, we never know the far-reaching effect of that act of charity, as evidenced by the following story. It occurred with the Ramah, zl, the rav of Crakow. There was a simple, but interesting, man in the community who went by a number of pseudonyms. He was called Moshe Trager/carrier, because he would carry packages for people. He was commonly called, Moshe Shikur, the drunk, or Moshe Shabbosnick, because he would save up the small amounts of money he would earn during the week, go to the liquor store on erev Shabbos, and purchase a cup of mead wine. He would proceed to drink this wine with great relish. While he drank this wine, he would joyfully sing "Shabbos, Shabbos, Shabbos." He would then go to the mikveh and prepare for Shabbos.

One week, on his way to perform his ritual, he overheard a poor woman saying, "Moshe is going to buy wine for himself, and I do not even have money to purchase two candles for Shabbos." Moshe was in a quandary. Should he give the woman the money, or should he get his glass of wine? He decided not to listen to his yetzer hora, evil inclination, and he gave the woman money to buy candles.

Regrettably, this was to be Moshe's last trip to the mikveh, as he passed away shortly thereafter. Since it was almost Shabbos, the chevra kaddisha, burial society, decided to delay his burial until after Shabbos. That night, Moshe appeared before the Ramah and said, "There is a critique against you in Heaven." "Moshe, you are a shikur; go home," the Ramah answered. It was then that Moshe revealed to the Ramah that he had died. The Ramah did not believe him until he went to shul and discovered that, indeed, Moshe had died right before Shabbos and that his body lay in the chevra kaddisha's room, awaiting burial. Realizing now that Moshe's appearance was a special occurrence, the Ramah immediately went to the room and questioned Moshe regarding his message from Heaven. "In Heaven they are upset that you do not avail the poor people the opportunity to also give charity. Since they have limited funds, people do not ask them for anything," answered Moshe. "What should I do?" asked the Ramah. "From now on, whenever the community is in need of funds, the collectors should also go to the poor and ask them to participate," was Moshe's answer.

The Ramah continued, asking Moshe what warranted his selection to deliver this message from Heaven, even before his body had been buried. Moshe then related how he had overcome his evil-inclination and gave his "drinking" money to the woman, so that she could purchase candles for Shabbos. "That woman was none other than Esther HaMalkah. As a result of her exemplary deeds, her

neshamah had consistently entered higher and higher levels of paradise, until she arrived at a very sublime level where she was not granted entry. She was told that this level is only for the poor who, despite their poverty, give charity and perform kindness with others. She then asked, 'Is it my fault that I was wealthy? I am certain that had I been poor, I would have been as charitable and as kind as when I was rich'."

The Heavenly Tribunal decided to allow her neshamah to return to this world as a poor woman, so that she could have the opportunity to give tzedakah, even in this difficult circumstance. When the Ramah heard this story, he accepted upon himself to see to it that all people, regardless of their financial situation, would be given the opportunity to join in the mitzvah of tzedakah. Indeed, as Nachlas Tzvi cites the Chafetz Chaim who once said, "There is a wealthy Jew in Lublin who has the where-with-all to sustain all the yeshivos in Europe. What about the mitzvah of tzedakah imposed on all the other Jews? Why should they be deprived of this mitzvah? This is why Heaven has arranged it that this wealthy Jew does not give, so that others will be able to give."

Rather, opening, you shall open your hand to him...you shall grant enough for his lack which is lacking for him. (15:8)

When a poor man comes to the door requesting assistance, he certainly needs a comforting word, some sound advice, even a nice Torah thought. We often forget, however, that he is there for one purpose: to raise sorely needed funds for himself and his family. His time is limited, and his needs are great. The Dubno Maggid once went on a fundraising mission. He came to the home of a distinguished scholar who was also quite wealthy. The wealthy man was honored to have someone of the Maggid's stature visit him, and he reciprocated this honor. Prior to asking for a contribution, the Maggid began with a scholarly discourse on the laws of tzedakah, charity. The man was reasonably impressed, adding his own erudite exegesis. This went on for awhile. Every time the Maggid gave a Torah thought, the man reciprocated. The Maggid noted that while they were having a lively scholarly discussion, the purpose of his visit had not been fulfilled. He still had no money.

The Maggid looked at his wealthy host and said, " Let me share a story with you. In one of the far-off countries, there is a community where the people had never seen an onion. One day a traveler came to this community and brought with him an onion. The people were very excited with this wonderful find and thanked him profusely. They showered him with gifts and money when he left to continue his travels. They took the onion and planted it. Soon, they were able to harvest many onions. Word spread that this community had handsomely rewarded the wanderer that had introduced them to onions. Soon, afterwards, another traveler looking to secure some sorely needed funds arrived in this community with poppy seeds. The people were overjoyed with this new gift. They realized that they must offer remuneration for the poppy seeds. What would be the most worthy gift to give the traveler? Nothing less than their most valued commodity: onions! They decided to pay their new supplier with onions. We can only imagine what he told them. "I did not come here for onions; I came for money."

"Likewise, my dear host, while I greatly appreciate the brilliant Torah thoughts that you have shared with me, I have come here, however, for something else: money. Does not the Torah say that one must give the poor man 'that which is lacking for him'? I lack money."

Giving, you shall give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for because of this matter, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you. (15:10)

The Torah is teaching us a significant lesson: Tzedakah is our insurance policy. It protects us, as it circumvents any evil from coming close to us. The following story is one of countless episodes that recount the remarkable consequence of giving tzedakah. We must add that, as in all instances, there are many variables which play a role in a given situation. We do see, however, in the following episode, how giving tzedakah with mesiras nefesh, utter devotion and self-sacrifice, saved a life.

A poor woman once knocked on the door of the home of a very special Torah scholar, a kollel-fellow who devoted himself to Torah study to the full extent of the word. It was a very special home - but, alas, a very poor one. The couple had been blessed with fourteen children. Obviously, money - and even food - was at a premium at this house. Answering the woman's knock was the kollel fellow himself. "I need a piece of chicken," cried the woman. "I am terribly sorry, my dear woman, but I cannot help you. I have two chickens in the refrigerator which I have put away for the upcoming Yom Tov, so that my family can enjoy the festival with a small piece of meat as prescribed by halachah. This is all we have for the entire family." "Please, I am begging you, I have not had a piece of meat in such a long time. I crave a small piece of chicken," she implored. A few moments passed and the young man decided this woman's health was certainly more important than his children's simchas Yom Tov, celebrating the festival amid joy. If she was so obsessed with eating a piece of chicken that she would beg him so profusely, then she should get it. "Ok, I am going to give you a piece of chicken," he said as he left her to go to the refrigerator for a piece of chicken.

Suddenly, there came forth a heart-rending shriek from the kitchen, as the young man opened the refrigerator door and beheld the most bone-chilling, shocking sight. His three-year old son had somehow gotten into the refrigerator and was trapped inside. His lips were already blue; his skin the pallor of death; his breathing shallow and labored - but, he was still alive! A miracle! Hatzalah, the emergency rescue team, was immediately summoned. They began to resuscitate the child, as they hurriedly transported him to the hospital. With the help of the Almighty, they succeeded in saving his life. All because of a piece of chicken. The gesture of giving tzedakah, going out of his way to help a woman in need, saved the life of his child. We do not need proof to substantiate Chazal's dictum, "Tzadakah tatzil mimaves, charity saves (one) from death," but such an incident is encouraging and gives one hope. We also derive from here another important lesson: One never loses by performing a mitzvah. To paraphrase Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, "You gave away a quarter of a chicken; you received a child as a gift."

Each individual has his singular vision of his personal message, his personal goal, his particular lesson to be derived from the Torah.

This idea applies similarly in other areas as well. A rebbe/Torah teacher, speaks to a group of students; a rabbi lectures to his congregation. In both situations, the general idea applies to all equally, but each individual receives his own personalized message. He just has to listen. Hashem speaks to each one of us through the medium of the Torah. It is unfortunate that some individuals listen only to what they want to hear.

You shall seek out His resting place and come there. (12:5)

The Gerrer Rebbe, Rav Avraham Mordechai, zl, questions the distinction between the word "sidreshu," "you shall seek," which is written in the plural, and the word "u'vaasa," "and come there," which is written in the singular form. He cites the Talmud Rosh Hashanah, 30A, where Chazal derive

from the pasuk, "Tzion hi v'doresh ein lah," "She is Tzion, there is none that inquires about her (Yirmiyah 30)", that it is necessary to "inquire" about Yerushalayim. What is the nature of this inquiry? Every person should investigate into the reason for the churban, destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. It is the hope that research and reflection will lead to repentance and action, so that the Sanctuary will be rebuilt speedily in our days. This is consistent with Chazal's statement, "Any generation in which the Bais Hamikdash was not rebuilt – it is as if it was destroyed during its days."

The factor considered most responsible for the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash was sinaas chinam, unwarranted hatred. Thus, the tikun, correction, for this sin is ahavah v'achdus, love and unity, among our people. The Torah conveys this message: "L'shichno sidreshu," when you seek/inquire regarding the Sanctuary's extinction, you will come to realize that it was the lack of unity which continues to plague us that caused its destruction. You will then see the sin of sinaas chinam in its tragic proportions. If you will correct this infraction; if you will rid yourselves of the disease of divisiveness and dispute; if you will unify yourselves as one People, and "u'vaasa shamah," "come there," you will merit to have come to the "menuchah v'nachalah," resting place and heritage, that Hashem has given us.

A striking Aggadah relates a beautiful story of two brothers who lived together on one piece of property. One brother never married, while the other, younger brother, had a wife and three children. They were both poor farmers who shared in the produce of a field they had inherited from their father. It happened one night after the harvest, that the older brother could not sleep due to his growing concern for his brother. His younger brother had a family to support and, with the smaller yield which they had harvested, it seemed unlikely that he would succeed in feeding them all during the coming year. He decided to get up and take a portion of his share and covertly add it to his brother's portion.

The younger brother also had a difficult time falling asleep. He, too, was concerned. He felt a sense of compassion for his older brother's circumstances. After all, he was alone with no family with whom to share his "good" fortune, no family to ease the trial and travail of his everyday challenges. He figured that if he at least had some extra produce, it would cheer him up somewhat. He proceeded to take from his share and add to his brother's.

Imagine the next morning when both brothers arose to discover that their portion had not changed at all. Each had what he had originally received as his share of the produce. Each was perturbed and consequently continued his clandestine act of charity, the next night and the next night, until they "met" each other in the act of brotherly love. They now realized why their respective portions had continued to retain their original quantity. They immediately embraced each other lovingly.

Hashem Yisborach took note of this exemplary display of love and concern for a fellow Jew and blessed the area in which they lived. After awhile, this became the site where Shlomo Ha'Melech built the Bais Hamikdash. What a wonderful place to build Hashem's Sanctuary: a place where one brother demonstrated sensitivity towards his brother's physical needs, while the other brother showed an overwhelming interest in his brother's emotional well-being. A place in which concern for the emotional and physical well-being of another Jew is to be found exemplifies holiness. This is a place in which Heaven "kissed" the earth, and the spirit connects with the material. This place is the most appropriate place to build the Bais Hamikdash.

If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream. (13:2)

For the most part a dream is an expression of one's subconscious. There are, however, dreams that convey a message. It does take some wisdom to interpret a dream and to glean the message. Horav Nachman M'Breslov, zl, tells of an Austrian Jew who had a dream. He dreamed that there lay a hidden treasure in Vienna beneath a bridge. He figured that he could not search for the treasure during the day for fear that people would see him and discover the treasure themselves. He decided, therefore, to go there at night. During this time, a soldier came by and waited on the bridge. The soldier asked the Jew, "Why are you here? What are you looking for?" The Jew could not contain himself any longer, and he related the entire story to the soldier "Will you help me search for the treasure? I will share equally with you," said the Jew to the soldier. The soldier responded saying, "I, too, had a dream. I dreamed that in the cellar of the house of a certain Jew who lives in an Austrian city, a valuable treasure is hidden. What do you think? Should I go there and seek out the treasure?" When the Jew heard the name of the Jew in the other city, he was shocked. The soldier was referring to him! He immediately turned around and sped to his home to search for the hidden treasure. He went down to the cellar and, as was foretold, he found a treasure. The Jew realized that actually the treasure for which he had been looking was in his house the whole time. He had to travel far away from home to realize that the treasure he was seeking was in his own home.

A remarkable lesson can be derived from this story. People are rarely satisfied with what they have. They spend a lifetime searching for a treasure that always seems to elude them. They search everywhere – except their own backyard. This applies to so many areas of human endeavor, be it communal, organizational or personal. Frequently, the solution to our problems, the key to our success, is staring us in the face. Indeed, at times we travel far and wide searching for the treasure that has always been with us. Our problem was that we had refused to look in the right place. Furthermore, we see that at times the Almighty causes us to travel elsewhere, because the searching is in itself an integral part of the process of finding the treasure which has always been with us. Had we not often searched for it in the distance, we would not have found it at home. We cannot appreciate something which has always been with us until it is searched for far and wide.

You shall not harden your heart nor shall you close your hand against your destitute brother. (15:7)

The simple explanation of "closing one's eyes to the poor" is to refrain from giving them tzedakah when they turn to us for assistance. The Rambam in Hilchos Matnos Aniyim 10:3 says that one who "conceals his eye" from charity is evil. If a poor man is coming to seek alms and the would be donor dodges him by hiding or going on a different path to avoid meeting him, he transgresses the above commandment. One is to be G-d like. As Hashem listens to the pleas and cries of the destitute, so should we. In other words, there are two forms of spurning the mitzvah of tzedakah: A direct no, referring to help the poor; or shirking our duty by avoiding an encounter with the poor.

In the Talmud Bava Basra 7b, Chazal relate that there was a certain pious man with whom Eliyahu HaNavi would frequently converse until he made a porter's lodge. Rashi explains that once he added a door to his property, he was preventing himself from hearing the cries of the poor. Thus, he no longer deserved to be visited by Eliyahu. Chazal here do not criticize this individual for shirking his duty, for making it more difficult for the poor man to reach him. He simply no longer warranted Eliyahu's visit. This, however, does not render him evil. Horav Moshe Yavrov, zl, cites an incident in the Talmud Shabbos 55A in which Rav Yehudah was sitting before Shmuel, when a woman entered and began to cry about a wrong that had been done to her. Shmuel ignored her. Rav Yehudah questioned his behavior, quoting the pasuk in Mishlei 21, "He who stops his ears at cries of the poor, he shall also cry,

but shall not be heard." In other words, Rav Yehudah implied that ignoring the pleas of this woman was improper. Shmuel retorted that Mar Ukva, the head of the Rabbinical Court, was present, and he should have listened to them, as he was the one who had the power to help her. It seems implied from Chazal that Shmuel and Rav Yehudah were disputing the obligation to listen to a poor man's plea if one is not in the position to help.

We derive from here that there are two distinct obligations in the area of helping the poor: There is a mitzvah to assist him in every way, to feed, clothe and sustain him; and a mitzvah to listen to his pleas, to lend an ear to his cry, to open up one's heart and sense his plight. Shmuel was punished because he did not listen. True, he could not help anyway, but he should have listened. Part of being nosei b'ol im chaveiro, bearing the yoke with a fellow Jew, is to feel his pain and to listen to his cry. The pious man who built a porter's cottage surely continued his noble tradition.

See, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

Life presents us with one of two extreme situations: We either evoke blessing, so that everyone looks up to us, respects our word, and reveres our religion; or, we symbolize curse, dust of the earth, to be stepped upon and trampled. The Vilna Gaon, zl, notes that the word "Re'eh" is written in the singular. He explains that the Torah speaks to each individual. Man is not judged by the deeds of society as a whole. Rather, Hashem judges each individual according to his own actions. Do not see yourself reflected in the world. Avraham preached to an entire world. He represented one world view, while the rest of the world had another perspective. Hashem says, "While you seem to think that you are alone, it is not true." "Anochi" - I - Hashem is with you when you make the decision. Moreover, it is presented to us "hayom," today. It is never too late to choose between right and wrong, between blessing and curse. It is presented, "lifneicham," before you. We have the choice to do good - or bad. The choice stands in front of us. We have to decide on which path to travel.

In an alternative exposition, Horav Moshe Swift, zl, notes that the pasuk begins by admonishing the individual and concludes by speaking to the whole Jewish community. A Jew should realize that the success or failure of a community is determined by the individual. It is like a factory in which each individual is but a single component in the success or failure of a product. If one link is broken, the entire chain will fall apart. The Jewish community is similar, it all depends upon the individual's perspective and involvement.

Last, we suggest that the Torah emphasizes Re'eh, see, look around you at those people who raised their children in the way of blessing and triumphed, and those who either thought they knew better, or knew they knew better, or simply did not care. If you really look, the answer will be quite apparent.

Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, questions the use of the word, Re'eh, See. The Torah could simply have stated, "I am placing before you a blessing and a curse." Furthermore, why does the Torah speak to individuals in the singular? The Torah intends the message for everyone! He explains that each person has developed his own idea of what constitutes a blessing and a curse. One might view a sickness to be spiritually therapeutic, since it catalyzes the individual to examine his life. Others might consider good health to be a blessing, while others might feel that children or wealth is the blessing.

Hashem says, "Re'eh" - See! - in the singular, to tell us that each individual will receive his own individual blessing. Sometimes, however, what one wants does not necessarily comprise blessing.

Wealth can expose the individual to undue trial and temptation, or he may become a target for criminals. Furthermore, what one thinks constitutes a curse may not turn out that way.

Hashem says "Re'eh" - each individual will be able to see clearly the curse and the blessing. It will be apparent to everyone. Not only will we be given blessings, but we will understand that they are blessings, even though others may disagree. The individual will see the blessing and the curse, so that his decision will be an informed one.

*Safeguard and hearken to all these words... In order that it will be well with you and your children...
When you do what is good and right in the eyes of Hashem, your G-d. (12:28)*

Gemillas chesed, performing acts of loving kindness, is unquestionably the most rewarding type of deed one can perform. They are rewarding in both a material and spiritual sense. Classic Rabbinic material is replete with references to the merit one engenders for himself when he helps others. Each different category of chesed is demanding in its own unique manner. Visiting the sick and infirm means more than getting into a car or sending flowers. It means empathizing with the sick person, feeling his pain and easing his burden. Probably the most important message we can convey to a sick individual that we are there with them; - they are not alone in their pain. The Chofetz Chaim, zl, says that performing acts of chesed is a zechus, merit, for long life and for blessing in family matters. Visiting the sick is a special zechus for shidduchim, marriage. We see this from Chazal in the Mishnah in Peah, 1:1, that says: These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world but whose principal remains intact for him in the world to come. They are: the honor due to a father and mother;... visiting the sick; providing for a bride; escorting the dead, etc..."

Interestingly, Chazal place hachnasas kallah, addressing the needs of marriage-- whether it means finding a shidduch for a young woman or man, raising the money so that the wedding can take place, or to outfitting the chassan/kallah in a manner appropriate for a Jewish child -- prior to halvoyas ha'meis, caring for the deceased. Moreover, they place hachnosas kallah between bikur cholim, visiting the sick, and halvoyas ha'meis. Certainly, the Torah is conveying a message to us via the positioning of the acts of chesed in this Mishnah. The commentators suggest that the mitzvah of chassan/kallah has the ability to serve as a distinction between visiting the sick and attending to the deceased. In other words, caring for the needs of a chassan/kallah is a merit that the sick will not succumb to their illness. Do we need another reason for performing this special and vital act of kindness?

The Torah lists the widow and the orphan among the people who are in distress that one should go out of his way to help. Their situation warrants that they have primacy over everyone else. They are alone; they feel dejected. They must be given chizuk, strengthened and encouraged. A Jew should never feel alone. It is our responsibility to make sure that every Jew is provided for in every way. The story is told that in the neighborhood of the Steipler Rav, zl, an old widow lived all alone. One day, she fell down and broke her leg. She was now alone and incapacitated. One of her neighbors, whose husband happened to be a close student of the Steipler, took her into her home and cared for her physical and emotional needs. When the Steipler heard of this woman's selfless act of giving, he remarked, "Now we can send people to her to ask her for a brachah, blessing. Her brachos will certainly be mekuyam, fulfilled, because of the chesed she performed with this widow." If we keep this in mind, we might find people in our own individual communities who are worthy of sharing their blessing with us.

As a postscript to the above, I would like to address a problem that exists among some of us. We

have just concluded writing about the importance of performing acts of chesed, reaching out to others in need, and increasing our sensitivity to others who are less fortunate than we are. There are people who devote themselves wholeheartedly to gemilas chesed. Regrettably, not all of them are motivated by the same sense of commitment. Some individuals seek to help their fellow-man. They feel his hurt, they sense his pain, they empathize with his loneliness. Other people act similarly, but for different reasons. They either enjoy the glory, crave the attention, or love to talk about all the wonderful things they do. Some members of the community cannot tolerate this insincerity, denigrating these pseudo do-gooders at every opportunity. To them, I ask: Who cares? Who cares why someone helps another Jew? Who cares if their motivation is suspect, if their sensitivity is not what it seems? As long as they help - as long as they are always there - who cares? Even though they talk about their wonderful endeavors - constantly, they do visit the ill, support the infirm, and console the bereaved. If they are performing these good deeds, then yeyasher kochem, all power to them.

An intriguing Midrash supports this idea. Chazal tell us that after the wicked Izevel -- wife of king Achav -- died, the people in charge came to collect her body to prepare it for burial. All they could find was her skull, feet and hands. Everything else had been devoured. Chazal explain that Hashem spared these body parts because of Izevel's custom to dance at weddings, clapping her hands and shaking her head back and forth. Her devotion to the simchas chassan v'kallah was rewarded in that these limbs were spared for burial. We can assume that Izevel's motivation was certainly not because of her sensitivity to the feelings of the bride and groom. This was a woman who proliferated idol-worship and who had Neviim, prophets, mercilessly killed. This cruel, evil woman cared only about one person - herself, yet she was rewarded for her act of chesed. Indeed, only the actual limbs that "performed" were spared. Hashem does not seem to critique one's motivation. Why should we?

Therefore, I am commanding you, saying, open your hand to the needy and poor brethren in your land. (15:11)

Generally, the word "leimor," saying, is used when the speaker wishes to have his words conveyed to others. This approach creates a problem in regard to this pasuk's translation. It would seem that Hashem is saying, "I command you to say - you shall open your hand to the needy and poor." This does not translate smoothly. Why would Hashem instruct us to say, "You should open your hand to the needy and poor"? To whom should we say this? The Vorker Rebbe, zl, explains that the mitzvah of tzedakah consists of two aspects. First and foremost is the actual "giving" of material support to the person in need. There is another facet to tzedakah that is often overlooked. It is important to realize what the poor man must experience before he approaches us for assistance. It is humiliating and devastating to ask for help. Thus, giving is not sufficient. We must make every attempt to appreciate his shame and try to lift his spirits as we provide him with material support. How does one make a poor man feel good? How do we encourage one who is in distress and give him hope?

We do this by explaining that he, too, might one day have the ability to support himself and others. Many people have been blessed with good fortune. He might become one of the fortunate ones. By giving him words of encouragement, we give him hope - a commodity that is more important than the money he receives. This is the meaning of the pasuk: When a poor man comes to you for assistance, say to him, you too will one day have the opportunity to open your hand to the poor. One day your fortune will change and you will be able to help others.

Three times a year all your males should appear before Hashem, your G-d, in the place that He will choose. (16:16)

The Shalosh Regalim are spiritually uplifting times, when we celebrate with Hashem. The Torah enjoins us to come to the Bais Hamikdosh during each of the festivals to experience the holiness and joy of the moment, in the city and edifice where the Shechinah reposes. The Torah mentions the mitzvah of Aliyah l'Regel, going up to Yerushalayim on Yom Tov, three times. There is an inconsistency in the text concerning the manner in which the Torah refers to Hashem in each of these three presentations. In our parsha, He is referred to as "Hashem, your G-d". In Parshas Mishpatim (Shemos, 23:17), the Torah calls Him "the Master Hashem". In Parshas Ki Sisa (Shemos, 34:23), the Torah alludes to Him as "the Master Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael." Why is there a significant change in the manner in which the Torah refers to Hashem?

Horav Meier Shapiro, zl, explains that each mention in the Torah is a reference to Hashem's revelation in this world. Hashem revealed Himself three times. He first revealed Himself to Avraham Avinu, when the Patriarch was but three years old. Avraham understood from this revelation that there is a "manhig l'birah," "master to the house," that Hashem Yisborach guides the world. This concept was Avraham's primary lesson to a world filled with paganism and immorality. Hashem's appearance was an introduction, "I am the Master, Hashem." This coincides with the first time the Torah mentions the mitzvah of Aliyah l'Regel.

Hashem's second revelation was to Yaakov Avinu, when Yaakov dreamt of the ladder upon which angels were ascending and descending, and Hashem was in the Heaven above. Hashem told Yaakov, "I am the G-d of Avraham and Yitzchak; the land upon which you are now resting will be given to you and your descendants." Hashem appeared now, not just as the Master of the world, but as the G-d of Klal Yisrael. He promised to give Eretz Yisrael to Yaakov's children. This revelation coincides with the mitzvah of Aliyah L'Regel which is written in Parshas Ki Sisa where Hashem is called "the Master Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael."

The third time Hashem revealed Himself to Klal Yisrael was during Matan Torah, when He gave the Torah to us. He proclaimed, "I am the Hashem, your G-d, who took you out of Egypt, from the house of servitude." In what is the first of the Aseres Hadibros, Ten commandments, Hashem goes beyond being the Master of the world and the G-d of Yisrael. He now appears as the personal G-d of each Jew, Who guides our lives through Hashgacha Pratis, Divine Providence. This coincides with the mitzvah in our parsha in which the Torah refers to Hashem as "Elokecha," your G-d, the personal G-d of each and every Jew. The three festivals imbued these three concepts of emunah in every Jew. Faith in Hashem as Master of the world, G-d of Yisrael, and personal G-d of each Jew, sustains our faith in the Almighty throughout the year.

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

The Torah's use of the word "re'eh", see, is significant. It is important that we clearly understand the relative effects of mitzvah and aveirah. We should actually see this distinction. We should be able to comprehend blessing as the direct result of a life of mitzvah-performance and curse as the product of a sinful lifestyle. All too often we attribute our good fortune to just that - good fortune. On the other hand, we perceive external factors to be the cause of our misfortune. We should open our eyes to

perceive the accurate distinction between blessing and curse. Regretably, the Torah oriented definitions do not necessarily coincide with currently accepted values. An individual who does not necessarily enjoy material abundance, but rather is blessed with a wonderful family, nachas, peace, and happiness, is truly blessed. Conversely, not everyone who society considers to be blessed is really fortunate. Indeed, he might be a prisoner to society's value system -- and actually not blessed at all. The Torah instructs us to "re'eh", open our eyes and mind in order to see the effect of living a Torah life, as well as the effects of contrary lifestyles.

We may also note that Torah uses the words "blessing" and "curse," as opposed to good and bad. By definition, "blessing" means that one's entire life will be blessed. He will be lacking nothing. He will be happy in every aspect of his existence. He who is cursed will find that life is missing something. He is always feeling shortchanged. One added note: In order to see this blessing, it is necessary to live a life of Torah and mitzvos. Nothing is as convincing as the experience itself. One must live the spiritual life -- and experience the joy and serenity that accompanies it -- to sense fully the blessing of Torah living.

You shall not do this to Hashem your G-d. Rather, only at the place that Hashem, your G-d chose...to place His Name shall you seek out His Presence and come there. And there shall you bring your elevation offerings. (12:4,5,6)

The commentators, each in his own inimitable style, explain what it is that we "shall not do" to Hashem. Horav Itzile M'Volozhin, zl, offers a practical interpretation of this pasuk. We find that in order to facilitate the unintentional murderer's "escape" to the Arei Miklat, Cities of Refuge, the people erected signs at various crossroads to indicate the most efficient way to reach his destination. They did this in order to ensure that the rotzeach b'shogeg, unintentional murderer, would not have to ask people for directions as he sought his destination. We may wonder why this helpful idea was not also a provision for those that went up to Yerushalayim for their annual pilgrimages or to offer korbanos on the Mizbayach.

Horav Itzile comments that if we had made it "easy" for the individual to reach Yerushalayim without construing a situation in which he would be obliged to speak to people, to share with them his lofty and noble plans, to tell them about the exciting occurrences that were taking place in Yerushalayim, he would probably be one of the few who would consider making the trip. Now that he was required to seek out the Bais Hamikdash, to interact with people, to inspire them through his attitude and intentions, others would also join him on his journey to Yerushalayim. Indeed, did not Elkanah make his annual trip to Yerushalayim using a different route, precisely so that he could influence more people to join his pilgrimage?

In sum, Hashem wants people to strive, to search, to seek out the Holy Place where they will perform the rituals and offer korbanos. By doing so, they will encourage others to join in their endeavor. The pagans, on the other hand, placed their idols on mountains, so that everyone was able to notice their presence -- and easily arrive there to worship. The Torah admonishes us, "You shall not do this to Hashem". Chazal interpret this to mean not to place G-d on mountains and hills, to build the Bais Hamikdash on high land. Rather, the Torah commands us "to place His Name shall you seek out His Presence." The Torah emphasizes "sidreshu," "you shall seek", to teach us that one ascends to the Bais Hamikdash only through derishah, seeking, searching, including and inspiring others in this course of his quest. Only then will we fulfill the enjoinder of "and then shall you bring your elevation

offering." When everyone perceives how the individual diligently searches for the Divine, they will follow suit. The serious individual whose commitment to Hashem is sincere will inspire others, with by his genuineness and candor, to serve Hashem alongside him.

We may add that Hashem wants us to seek Him out, to search diligently, to reach out to Him. The actual search is the key to obtaining the sanctity that one strives to achieve. He who sits back waiting for spirituality to come to him might discover its elusiveness. Perhaps this is why the pasuk begins in the plural, "l'shichno sidreshu," and ends in the singular, "u'baasa shamah." Everyone asserts that he wants to ascend, to attain a higher level of kedushah, to build Hashem's Mikdash, but for how many people are these merely empty words? Only the yachid, the individual who is discriminating and determined, who leaves no stone unturned in his quest for kedushah, will attain the ultimate goal. Everyone has the opportunity, but only a few achieve the supreme gift: closeness to Hashem.

You are children to Hashem...you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. (14:1)

Being Hashem's Chosen People, His treasure in this world, carries with it immense responsibilities. Being banim la'Makom, children to the Almighty, is not an attribute one can ignore. We are, therefore, adjured to exert constraint when we are confronted with the passing of a loved one. The pagans mutilated their bodies in an expression of grief. Such manifestations of the depraved behavior that reigned in antiquity are strictly forbidden. In the Talmud Sanhedrin, Chazal relate that when Rabbi Akiva came upon the coffin of Rabbi Eliezer, he beat his flesh until he broke the skin and began to bleed profusely. He began to wail, "My father! My father! I have much money, but I have no money changer." Rashi explains Rabbi Akiva's analogy. He was implying that he had many halachic questions to ask, but he no longer had an individual who could elucidate the law and respond to his questions. Tosfos questions Rabbi Akiva's overwhelming display of grief. He was wounding himself, which is apparently prohibited by the Torah. They respond that for the sake of Torah, it is permitted. In other words, since Rabbi Akiva was grieving over loss of a source of Torah knowledge, he was permitted to exhibit excessive grieving.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains the logic behind Tosfos' statement. He cites Sforno and Daas Zekeinim, who explain that we should not be overwhelmed by the feeling of loss which we experience upon the passing of a loved one. This is because we still have our Father in Heaven who is our closest and most distinguished relative. This realization should provide us with comfort and support, as we encounter the challenge of our bereavement. This idea, however, applies only in regard to the loss of a relative. Knowing that our Father in Heaven is always present is the greatest source of comfort. When Rabbi Eliezer passed away, however, Rabbi Akiva became bereft of his rebbe. Who was he to turn to with his questions in Torah? Who would provide his spiritual sustenance? Who would help him grow in Torah? Suddenly, he felt distanced from the true Father - Hashem.

Our relationship to Hashem is manifest through the medium of Torah and mitzvos. We become closer, clinging to Hashem, as we perform His mitzvos and study His Torah. We merit eternal life through this process. When Rabbi Akiva's rebbe passed away, his growth in Torah-study became stunted. It was an eternal loss! For such a loss, there are no parameters of grief. Indeed, the Ramban, in his lament for his rebbe, Rabbeinu Yona, writes that nothing in this world could comfort him. His only consolation was that one day he would also pass on and once again meet his rebbe in Olam Habah. This is how great teachers grieved for their rebbeim. In those times, they understood the true role of a rebbe

and accepted his all-encompassing influence on us.

*You shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person.
(14:1)*

Our relationship with Hashem demands that we adhere to a strict code of discipline, as expressed in the Torah and interpreted and expounded by our Torah leadership. The discipline of Torah governs our entire life. The Torah addresses every aspect of life's endeavor. We are called banim la'Makom, children of the Almighty. Can there be a greater appellation, a more honored relationship? Such closeness, however, also carries with it an inherent responsibility. When one mourns a loved one, thus confronting his own mortality, a Jew manifests great discipline. Halachah designates time limits during which one may and should express his grief. Halachah dictates for whom one mourns, as well as the duration of this mourning.

For a father and mother, r"l, one mourns an entire year, while for other close relatives the specified period is thirty days. It would seem that the allotted times are somewhat confused. After all, while the loss of a parent is certainly a tragedy, it is, however, the way of the world. Generations come, and generations go. Young people grow into adulthood, have families, and eventually pass on to a better world. While one should mourn and feel the terrible loss of a parent, it is truly different than the loss of a contemporary such as a sibling, mate or a child r"l. Should not the prescribed mourning period be even greater than for a parent? This is not a natural occurrence. Thus, the time frame for expressing one's grief should be commensurately extended.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, z"l, makes a profound observation in response to this question. When a parent passes away, another link in the chain that stretches to Har Sinai is severed. The son or daughter suddenly becomes one more generation removed from that unparalleled experience, from Matan Torah. For that loss, one grieves an entire year.

We derive from this remarkable statement that the underlying motif behind mourning is totally different from what we might have in mind. One does not grieve only because of his personal loss. He mourns his spiritual distancing from the Torah. This is a concept that is foreign to most people. We understand a parent's presence in a different light. Parents provide the bridge to a previous generation - one that brings us closer to the Almighty. Our relationship with our parents is no longer just a mundane flesh and blood affiliation, it is a spiritual experience. Honoring one's parents takes on a new meaning. We give respect to an institution, not just to an individual. Indeed, we honor our parents because of what and who they are, not merely as a consequence of their relationship to us.

For in the month of the springtime, Hashem your G-d, took you out of Egypt at night...for you departed from the land of Egypt in haste - so that you will remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt. (16:1,3)

The Torah states clearly that the Egyptian exodus took place in the evening. This is reiterated in

pasuk 6, when the Torah says to slaughter the Korban Pesach after the sun descends, "the appointed time of your departure from Egypt." If this is the case, why does the Torah in pasuk 3 declare that we should "remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt"? There seems to be an apparent contradiction between the pesukim concerning exactly when Klal Yisrael left Egypt. The Talmud in Berachos 9A identifies the "shaas chipazon" of Klal Yisrael, which occurred the following day at midnight when the Egyptian firstborn died. After this occurrence, the Egyptians proceeded to the Jews and told them to leave. The Jews did not leave, however, until morning. From the Egyptian point of view, the Exodus took place at night, although the Jews did not actually leave until the next day. In other words, there were two yetzios, departures: one from Mitzrayim, Egypt, at night, and one from Eretz Mitzrayim, the land of Egypt, which took place by day.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, gives insight into these two departures and explains the corresponding text which seems to distinguish between Egypt and the land of Egypt. When Hashem commanded Klal Yisrael to slaughter the Korban Pesach, the lamb which served as the Egyptian godhead, to smear its blood on the doorpost and lintel, their homes became Batei Yisrael, Jewish homes - islands of spirituality and morality amidst a sea of pagan hedonism. They were instructed not to leave their homes that night. They had already departed from the Egyptian culture and lifestyle. They were no longer assimilated into Egyptian culture.

This metamorphosis took place while Klal Yisrael was still in the land of Egypt. Consequently, the Torah emphasizes that they had left Egypt while they were still in the land. They were not out of Egypt, but Egypt was no longer a part of them. During the next day, Klal Yisrael completed the Exodus -- by actually leaving the land.

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